

Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt

When the Commodore came to Canada

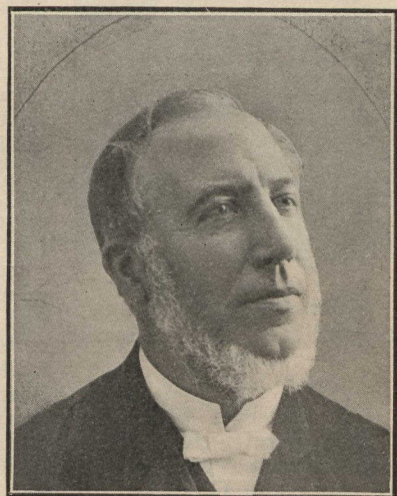
A BIT OF HISTORY

the bride was a Southern belle. So, who can blame the Commodore?

The "Daily Globe" of August 24th, 1869, contains on one of the four pages that then made up that excellent journal an article on "Vanderbilt's Wedding":—

"The arrival at London of Commodore Vanderbilt, the celebrated New York railway magnate and party on Friday morning was the occasion (says the 'Free Press') of quite a flutter of conjecture amongst the 'quid nuncs' and gossips of the Forest City. His every movement naturally attracted observation and excited the most wide and extravagant surmises. Every conceivable purpose, from that of buying up the Great Western, body and breeches, to taking a dip in the modern Pool of Bethesda, the Sulphur Baths here, was discussed with painful gravity. What did he come here for and what did he want? Had it anything to do with Sir Francis Hincks? Doubtful! Was it in any way connected with the great corn question or the inspection of the London volunteers? Not probable; and indeed every other conjecture seemed at fault, especially that of a local contemporary in regard to his pursuit of the water cure. The Commodore preserved the most vexatious reticence, even his name did not appear in the hotel register and he kept in religious seclusion, as if under strict medical injunctions to avoid pernicious drafts and the still more afflicting effects of vulgar curiosity. But our little world went to sleep, fatigued by the heat of the weather, and forgetful that so great a personage as an eighty-million dollar capitalist, with his stocks and his steamers, railroads and river palaces, had even paid us a visit and still more oblivious of its purpose.

"Early on Saturday morning, however, the great question was answered. And the answer was that the Commodore had merely taken a temporary refuge in the respectability and quietude of the most flourishing city of the Dominion to consummate a marriage with a young, beautiful and estimable young lady, and thus escape all the glare and heat, the fuss and feathers, the lace, vanity and oppressive stare of the New York fashionable world. And so it came about that at seven o'clock on Saturday, in a private parlour of the Tecumseh Hotel, Commodore Vanderbilt was married to Miss Crawford, daughter of the late Mr. Robert Crawford, cotton broker of Mobile, Alabama, the Rev. William Briggs of this city officiating at the ceremony.



The Rev. Dr. Briggs

"The gallant bridegroom, whose summers are seventy-six, was dressed in plain black, wearing in his shirt diamond studs of intense brilliancy and great value. He is a noble-looking gentleman, erect in figure, active in movement, intelligent in expression and almost courtly in bearing. As may be supposed from the fact of his years, his hair and whiskers are white; but he is so well preserved, even amid all the cares and responsibilities of his position that he looked to be not more than sixty-one years old. His bride is comparatively young, being

THE month of August, 1869, was marked by much social diversion in Canada, as Prince Arthur, now the Duke of Connaught, was visiting Halifax, and being royally entertained by that garrison city. But on Friday, the twenty-first of the month, the city of London, Ontario, became slightly disturbed when it became known that "Commodore" Vanderbilt and Sir Francis Hincks were both visiting that picturesque town. There was a young Methodist minister then in the Dundas Street Church and the presence of this young clergyman, Rev. William Briggs, was requested by a party of Americans at the Tecumseh House, where was revealed to him the secret of the Commodore's visit. Mr. Briggs went forth with two bewhiskered and elderly gentlemen in search of a certain office.

The office was found but it was a warm day and the gentleman in charge was just about to leave the premises. However, Mr. Briggs, with that persuasive power which has since made him a leader in his church, soothed the heated official and induced him to attend to business.

"Name?" said the latter brusquely, as he prepared to fill in a certain document.

"Vanderbilt," was the reply of one of the elderly visitors.

The official moved uneasily. "Christian name?" he continued.

"Cornelius."

The official turned pale. "Residence?" he faltered.

"New York City."

A multi-millionaire was something to be marvelled at in those days, ere trusts and combines had made a few of us rich, and the London license-monger arose in trembling awe. "Gentlemen," he stammered in apology: "Take chairs, I beg of you."

In the registry office at the Parliament Buildings, Toronto, on page 367 of a ponderous book, there is a record to the effect that Cornelius Vanderbilt, aged seventy-six, widower and gentleman, was united in marriage on August 21st, 1869, by Rev. William Briggs at London, Ontario, to Miss Frank A. Crawford, spinster, aged thirty, daughter of the late Robert L. Crawford of Mobile, Alabama. But why did he and his bride forsake their native land to be married on foreign soil? Let it be remembered that the bridegroom was a widower with a family of eleven grown-up children who were not disposed to look too kindly on Papa's Autumn love. And