

A Montmorenci Adventure.

BY GEORGE STEWART, JR.

The Trent affair brought to Canada a goodly number of soldiers, representing almost every arm of the Imperial service. There were Guardsmen, who had fought in the Crimea, resplendent in gay uniforms and sparkling with medals, Highlanders who had won their insignia of bravery on the hills of India, and Artillerymen who had sustained British prowess and valour in many a sharp engagement. Of soldiers of the line, there were two crack regiments whose drums and standards told of valiant deeds, and perhaps, more famous than they all, was a smart *corps* of Rifles, whose pleasant lot was cast in the ancient and picturesque capital town of Quebec. The brilliant scarlet uniforms of the Fusiliers and Guards caught always the eye, but somehow or other it was the sombre rifleman who captured the most hearts. In that regiment of Rifles there were some splendid fellows, and it was not long before they began to play sad havoc with the affections of fair young Canadian maidenhood. Lieutenant Jack Bellson and Charlie Black, who had lately joined, were inseparable companions. They were up to everything, and seemed ready always for the day and its events. Thought of the morrow never entered their heads. They were soldiers, and attention to orders was their only care. To them the world was very fascinating, and as they hadn't a responsibility to bother them, they made the most of what some of their comrades were wont to describe as their exile. Life in Quebec, however, was no torture or trial to Bellson and Black. When off duty they played a pretty stiff game of racquets, danced, flirted, skated, and shot down steep, glittering slides in fleet toboggans with the best of their fellows. No two men were more in request in the ball-room, and their cards were always full before the first dance was called. The Rifles, at the time of our story, were commanded by Colonel Hall, a bluff veteran of sixty, to whom, however, promotion had come slowly. All under him loved him, and to the younger officers he behaved like a father. If he had a favorite, it was Black. If he had two favorites they were, undoubtedly, Black and Bellson.

Quebec, always gay in the winter-time, has never been as gay as it was during the period of its occupancy by the troops. The soldiers mingled freely with the citizens, and many were the interchanges of civilities between both. Picnics to Montmorency, drives to Lorette, and sleighing parties in all directions, were the order of the day and night. They afforded an agreeable change to the festivities of the city, which for the most part took the form of a dinner or a dance.

It was on the occasion of one of these drives to Montmorency that Jack Bellson lost his heart. He had often been to the Falls, which in winter are even more strikingly beautiful than in summer, and his was ever the first toboggan to essay the feat of riding down the hazardous cone. On this crisp, frosty day, a party of twenty sleighs wended their way through the lovely village of Beauport. The roads were in capital condition. The spirits of the young people were high, and the merry shout and musical jingle of the sleigh-bells brought to the door of every French cottage the amused face of Marie or Josephine, who, after seeing the last cariole shoot swiftly by, returned to her indoor avocations with just the slightest little sigh in her heart. Bellson's sleigh led the party. He usually drove a spanking tandem team, but this time he contented himself with a pair of greys. With him sat the daughter of a retired town major, whose sparkling black eyes and almost olive complexion told the story of her Canadian origin. Many thought that Jack had serious intentions towards Maud Drayson. He liked the girl well enough, though to be sure she was a sad flirt, and during the last three or four years she had regularly transferred her allegiance from the line to the Guards, and when the Rifles came she, nothing loth, took up promptly with them. Maud Drayson was just the woman to turn the head of any young fellow. She was always full of life, bright in her sayings, and the admirable evenness of her temper made her a favorite in the lively circle which she adorned. Men said she was difficult to please, but those who knew her well were sure to say that when the right man came along it would be all up with Miss Maud, who would surrender without a moment's hesitation. Not that she held herself cheaply. On the contrary, she rather prided herself, did this charming young person of twenty-three, that in the matrimonial market the most valuable prize which could be drawn would be her own dear, delightful self. Everybody envied Jack when he and Maud Drayson danced together, or drove together, or skated together. They made a handsome pair, and it was the idea in everyone's mind that one day, not very far off either, Jack would lead the great prize to the altar. Jack himself, however, declared that he was not a marrying man, and that while he found the society of Miss Drayson very delicious indeed, she was really—and this he said to his intimates only—not quite his particular style. But, notwithstanding all this, she was ever his first choice when a dance or a drive was proposed. The young people seemed to be understanding each other pretty well. In the same sleigh sat Wilkins, of the Artillery, and his *fiancée*, the beautiful La Tulippe girl, with whose conversation, however, there is little need to concern ourselves. All told, this particular sleighing and toboggan party consisted of between fifty and sixty persons, the greater number, of course, belonging to the gentler sex. This party was the second of a series, and, after nine miles of sleighing, it was

the intention of the company to devote a couple of hours to the exhilarating pastime of sliding. Then, after a hot supper, the drive home would be made by the soft light of the silver moon; fitting time, indeed, for the pledging of the faiths of men and women.

Jack Bellson blew a blast from his tin trumpet as he drove briskly into the court-yard of the Montmorenci Arms, and tossing the reins to his servant, gaily sprang down and helped his fair charge to alight. One after the other the carioles and cutters flew into the yard, and in the course of ten or fifteen minutes the whole party were indoors. A blazing log, resting on andirons which crossed the ocean with the Duke of Kent, illuminated the quaint old hearthstone and sent a rich glow through the room. The ladies enjoyed a biscuit with their mulled port, while the gentlemen partook of something stronger in the cosy coffee-room on the ground-floor. Meanwhile, all was activity in the yard on the right of the inn, where a steep toboggan slide stood in readiness for the afternoon's pleasure. The structure was in splendid condition, ice and snow being well packed, and seeming to invite all to make the swift descent. Little time was lost in preparation, and the tobogganers were soon observed climbing the narrow pathway to the summit of the slide, and dragging behind them their fleet toboggans. Bellson, with three ladies, led, and shouting joyously, he madly plunged down the long and glittering incline. He was followed in quick succession by the others. Those who steered wildly got a bath in the snow for their pains, but the skilful conductors brought their precious burdens safely to the end of the journey without a mishap. The time passed so pleasantly away that it was not until young Wilkins looked at his watch that it was found that in less than three-quarters of an hour more supper would be ready. Bellson proposed that the party should cross the road in the meantime, and try a slide from the top of the cone at the foot of Montmorenci Falls. The suggestion was no sooner made than it was acted upon, for the true tobogganer scorns danger, and is never so happy as when his sport is extra hazardous. The falls on this day bore out well the truthfulness of their ancient title, *la vache*, and as the cone, formed by the spray, reared its head, the sight presented was a very pretty one, indeed. All of the party had not come to the falls, for the wooden slide had fascinations of its own which some could not withstand. Nor would all those who had come attempt the dashing feat. Miss Drayson decided to look on, and her decision had its effect on the other ladies. Six of the gentlemen climbed the cone with their toboggans and sleds. Black offered to steer, but Bellson would not hear of it. There was some excitement as the toboggans were adjusted, and when the three coursers clattered down the side of the miniature mountain, the spectators below held their breaths. And well they might, for the height was full seventy feet. Bellson and Black were the first to leave the top. They were over-confident perhaps of their skill. Certainly they did not notice the hollow in the cone, about half-way down the steep. They came with a rush, and when the indentation was reached the frail bark gave a great spring in the air, and came down with a crash, smitten in twain, on the other side. Black rolled down the cone, and save a bruise or two, was unharmed. Bellson, on the contrary, fell with such force that his arm was broken, and his left foot, bending under his body, sustained a severe and painful wrench. He dropped over on his side, and lay in a state of unconsciousness for several minutes. Gentle hands lifted him up and conveyed him to a friendly farm-house hard by, where the matron and her husband received him with sorrow on their faces. The best room was given him, and by the time that he was placed in bed the surgeon of the Rifles, who had been sent for by one of the party, arrived, and in a very few moments pronounced his patient seriously injured. On no account could he be removed to town. He must stay where he was for at least two or three weeks, arm and foot requiring care and nursing. He dressed his young friend's wounds, gave him a stimulant, and ordered him to go to sleep. Then the old doctor took Pierre Lemieux aside, and told him who his guest was, and asked him to take care of him, and suitable remuneration would follow. The wounded man was not long in adopting the advice of the surgeon. He was very tired, his injuries pained him, and the stimulant he had taken made him drowsy. Almost instantly he fell asleep, and dreamed of all sorts of things. The sleighing party partook of supper with very bad heart, and soon afterwards the drive home was undertaken. Black sat by the side of Miss Drayson, but neither felt like talking. Even the sleigh-bells tinkled sadly on the way, and Charlie made the drive home in quicker time than it had ever been made before.

Meanwhile, matters went along very well with the patient. After a somewhat restless night, he awoke with the sun, and the first sight which met his eyes as he looked towards the open door-way was the figure of a young girl of about eighteen years of age. She was tall and erect, graceful in form, though rather slender, and while her face was dark, she had the loveliest pair of blue eyes in her head that Bellson, in all his travels, had ever seen. Her features were clean cut and regular. Her hair, which hung in ringlets down her back, was coal black. When the lovely vision spoke, her voice sounded like sweet music to the entranced ears of Bellson. In purest French, she asked him if he had rested well, and if he would partake of coffee and hot rolls. Coffee, Bellson said, he would drink, but he did not care, just then, to eat anything. The doctor arrived soon, and when he and his patient were alone, the first words he uttered were, "I say Jack, old man, that's a

deuced pretty girl, that eldest daughter of old Lemieux, Josephine, I think."

"Was that Josephine who has just left us?"

"Yes."

"Well, I do think she is pretty, and, by Jove, she's good too, so thoughtful, so considerate."

"You would hardly take her for the child of a wood-cutter, would you Jack?"

"No, but in this country you do not have to probe very deep before you find blood as gentle as any that flows. I'll wager a sovereign now that that girl has Normandy blood in her veins, aye and blood of the purest too. But, say, Doctor, when are you going to get me out of this? I am anxious to get back to quarters."

"Oh you will have to be patient; injuries like yours cannot be healed in a day. It takes time. Besides, here you won't be bothered with visitors. Some of our fellows will be out to see you every day, but none of them will stay long. I have advised them on that score. I have brought you out some books, a bundle of newspapers, an invitation to a dance at the widow's to-morrow night,—of course you will cut that,—a card to Madame Granger's beauty show on Friday, and a note to meet the Dashwoods at dinner at the Chief Justice's. Your letters—three or four of them—are tied up with the invitations. Now, good bye, old fellow. Porridge for breakfast, no whiskey beyond the allowance I make you, and eat a light dinner, and we will have you with us again in a fortnight, or I resign my position in the corps."

And then, the old surgeon, wrapping his great coat tightly about him, bade adieu to his friend, and to Josephine, who opened the door for him, and jumping into his cariole, dashed rapidly away in the direction of the town.

Bellson, after all, was not sorry to be alone. He lay back in the bed, and wondered if he really would be all right again in a couple of weeks. Was the doctor chaffing him? His arm pained him a good deal, and fractures do not heal quickly always. It was just like the old surgeon to make light of the accident, and to say a cheerful thing or two about it. But, in his own mind, he felt that when a fortnight passed away he would still be with the Lemieux's. As matters turned out, he was not wrong. Instead of two weeks, he spent half a dozen weeks, and during all that time Josephine nursed and consoled him. He soon learned to watch for her coming. She was very patient, and never tired doing comforting things for him. She cooked his food, mixed his drinks, and talked to him in that winsome way which went straight to his heart. Often his eyes kindled with pleasure at her animation, and he soon found that she had more than good looks to commend her. Gentle in manner, she had one of those voices which instantly soothe, and Bellson was not long in discovering that her presence gave him a peculiar joy. He began, at last, to realize that he was not insensible to her charms, and though he had visitors enough from town,—Miss Drayson had called three times—somehow, he was always glad when they left. He was in the mood to be easily bored, but all trace of irritation passed from him, when the threshold of the door was crossed by the daughter of the house. He fancied that she might care for him, but he felt sure that it was not yet time to speak; and so the days slipped by, and the hour of his going away was drawing near, before he ventured on the word which might mean so much to both of them. But all this time, if Bellson and Josephine had been careful to conceal their love, there were keen eyes looking at the scenes in the little drama which was being so unconsciously played. The doctor soon noticed the marked way in which the young people regarded each other, and once or twice he thought he noticed the beam of love dancing in their eyes. Bellson said nothing to him on the subject, and he said nothing to Bellson, but he kept his own counsel for a while. After a visit to the farm house, however, on one particularly stormy afternoon, he resolved on confiding his suspicions to the colonel. Hall listened with great attention, for he was, in a measure, responsible for the young fellow, and he knew how Bellson's uncle, Sir Geoffrey, would view the projected alliance. Marriage with the daughter of a Canadian wood-cutter was decidedly out of the question. He would go out and see how matters stood, and if they had gone far, he was determined to write home to the old baronet, tell him to get his nephew recalled on one pretext or another, and exchanged into another regiment. Accordingly, he drove out the next day, and had a long and not very comforting interview with the young man. He found, for Bellson confessed it, that he really did love the girl, though as yet he had not spoken a word to her on the subject. "Would he abandon the idea?" asked the colonel, with feeling in his voice. Well, no; Bellson thought that if he could get the girl's consent he would marry her—for he had been hit badly—and risk the consequences. In vain the colonel spoke of Sir Geoffrey. In vain he stamped his foot, and characterized the act as that of a madman. Bellson was firm in his stand, and told the colonel plainly that he would speak to Josephine that very night. The colonel was a wise man, and he thought a moment, and then withdrew. On his way out he encountered the girl, and calling her to him, he said:

"Lieutenant Bellson will have to leave here to-morrow. He says that to-night he intends speaking to you on a subject which is always interesting to young women. I hope you will behave sensibly and honestly in this matter. Of course you know you can never become his wife. He is an officer and heir to a baronetcy. He must marry a lady of his own class."

A quick, hot flush, crimson red, mantled the cheek of