

The Bombshell

By VICTORIEN SARDOU

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New Year's Day and its customary gifts always remind me of an incident during the Siege of Paris, which I recall with a distinct feeling of pleasurable pride.

Let my readers be reassured, however, I am not about to lead them to the beleaguered ramparts of the city, nor to the outposts, but simply to the Rue de Trevis, to the home of my old friend Dutailly, a rich merchant, husband of a most excellent wife, father of a charming daughter, a clever business man, a good patriot, somewhat of a crank as regards politics, but one of the best men in the world and a good friend always.

Surprised by the investment of Paris just as he was packing his trunks to depart, the worthy man consoled himself with the belief that the city would not be held a week. Mme. Dutailly, better advised, hastened to lay in such a stock of provisions that even had the siege lasted three months longer the Dutaillys would never have known what famine meant. She concluded her wise work by turning her garden into a cow pasture, a hen farm and a residence for pigs, which, three months later, were worth their weight in gold.

When the autumn came and the siege still continued, her family rose up and called her blessed, and so did I, for I dined twice a week with the Dutaillys and on Thursdays and Sundays I made up for the privations of the rest of the week. There are no words worthy to express my emotion at the sight of a real omelet, one which was not the mere fiction of a dream, and my Sunday dinners became like enchanted feasts to me.

I was not the only guest at the hospitable table. There was another seat placed beside mine. This was for young Anatole Brichaut, head clerk in the big store and Dutailly's future partner and son-in-law.

He was an honest lad, a trifle melancholy and rather timid, but deeply and sincerely in love with his chief's daughter Mlle. Gertrude, who did not appear insensible to his affection. Altogether it was not as yet an acknowledged fact, the Dutaillys thought sufficiently well of the probable marriage to receive the young man constantly at their house. Unfortunately, the war proved the obstacle in the course of true love. Brichaut, a corporal in the corps of the Seine, did his duty as a soldier methodically and conscientiously, but without enthusiasm and consequently without glory.

This indifference exasperated the honest merchant. He was constantly predicting decisive victories for the French troops. Brichaut, incredulous, timidly offered various objections, and, later, when the victories unhappily proved grave defeats, Dutailly felt that it was all the work of his chief clerk.

The presence of a new guest at the table complicated matters still further. One evening, arriving rather late, I was surprised to find my seat already occupied by a stranger, with red cheeks and very broad shoulders and an air of great bravado. He wore a captain's stars sewed on a uniform that must have been looted from some theatre and enormous boots which proclaimed to all the world that a hero had trod in them.

"M. Robillard," said Dutailly, introducing us, "the captain of the famous Lost Children of Courbevoie."

I had heard of the captain. His exploits consisted of removing from deserted houses in the outskirts of the city furniture and valuables which might otherwise have awakened the curiosity of the enemy and storing them in safe places quite without the knowledge of their owners.

I wondered how this brute with his bristling moustaches had ever succeeded in forming part of our family party, when Mme. Dutailly explained, with much emotion, what had occurred. Just at dusk she had fallen quite heavily on one of the icy boulevards and Robillard, who was passing, ran to her assistance and helped her home. Grateful for his prompt aid, the lady felt that she could do no less than invite him to dinner, an invitation which the captain was very ready to accept.

M. Robillard was clearly no fool. He knew how to make himself agreeable, although his conceit was colossal.

According to his stories, his prowess at the head of the Lost Children had been unequalled. With a few other leaders like himself the war would have been ended long before.

Mme. Dutailly listened eagerly to his blatant stories, her husband applauded them enviously, Mlle. Gertrude alone proved indifferent. As for the poor little corporal, paler and more timid-looking than ever, in his coat which was three sizes too large and, moreover, suffering from a bad cold in the head, which always makes a man ridiculous, he seemed completely crushed by his overpowering neighbor.

As soon as dinner was over I invented an excuse to leave the house, bored by the graceless lies of the vulgar captain, to whom I fervently hoped I had said farewell forever. But this hope was doomed to a bitter disappointment. The following Sunday I found him in the same place, again on Thursday. Finally, his place was regularly spread.

The Dutaillys were completely fascinated, madame because the tender gallantry shown her by Robillard never fails to affect ladies of her age, and Papa Dutailly because of the interest

the dashing captain took in his warlike predictions. Anatole, his cold worse than ever, lost ground visibly.

One day the corporal was wounded and was obliged to keep to his bed, and for several weeks he was absent from our repeat. During this time the captain boldly made known his aspirations for the hand of Mlle. Gertrude, and his advances were not repulsed by her parents.

The day Anatole, convalescent and thin as a pipe stem, returned to our weekly dinners it seemed to me that the young lady's pretty eyes were red, and that there must have been some dispute during the day between her and her mother, now completely infatuated with her Robillard. I felt that the time had come to interfere in the interest of these poor children. It happened to be the last Sunday in the year, and naturally we fell to talking of New Year's Day, which we were to spend together.

"Upon my word, dear madame," cried the captain, "I must prepare some surprise with which to offer you my good wishes for the New Year."

It was this remark that gave me the idea of my own.

On Jan. 1. Dutailly received us with open arms. A glorious victory had been foretold by his favorite paper, and the obstinate patriot was delighted.

Anatole brought with him a rabbit, which he had trapped himself. As for the captain, he presented to Mme. Dutailly a large bag of maroons, encased in a German helmet.

"What!" she exclaimed, almost speechless with admiration. "Did you kill him?"

"Expressly for your fair sake," replied Robillard, striking an attitude; "expressly and entirely that his helmet might serve as a box for your bonbons!"

"Dear me," said I. "I am not so bold as to try to rival such a man as the captain, but I, too, have prepared a little surprise."

"I wonder what it can be?" cried Mme. Dutailly, as the servant brought in a large package.

"It is a bombshell, dear madame," I replied. "Dutailly has told me several times that he would like to have one, a real one, and, at my request, Robillard, commanding the battery, sent me one!"

As I spoke I removed the paper and the shell appeared, black, sinister and menacing.

"Gracious," objected my hostess, "what if it should explode!"

"Do not be uneasy," I hastened to say. "Of course, Robillard would not have sent me any but an empty shell! Besides, here is his letter."

I opened a note which lay beside the bomb, but as I read it my face must have expressed surprise and then consternation, for my friends exclaimed anxiously:

"Is there anything the matter?" "Gracious powers! why—but listen, and I read:

"Dear Friend: Here is the bombshell you asked for. It has been impossible for me just now to get hold of an armorer to empty it, but if you will take it to the Avenue de l'Opera the man there can do it. Let me warn you to use the greatest precaution, the slightest shock or jar will cause the shell to explode—*four*."

A shriek of fright filled the room. "Take it away!" screamed Mme. Dutailly. "It is frightful! A bombshell in my parlor! Horrible!"

"The man who brought it has gone," said the servant, his red cheeks white.

"Then," said I, "I will take it."

"I forbid you," exclaimed Dutailly, quickly. "You are not strong enough to carry that heavy thing all the way from here to the Avenue de l'Opera. You might drop it anywhere—in the stairs—in the vestibule!"

Mme. Dutailly clutched hold of my coat-tails.

"Not you," she implored; "it is too dangerous!"

"Besides," added her husband, "this is the deed of a soldier of a brave soldier! Fortunately, the captain is here."

"It," stammered the heroic leader of the Lost Children, turning pale. "A bombshell! The devil! Can't you wait and have it taken away to-morrow?"

"What?" shrieked Mme. Dutailly. "I could not close my eyes all night with that thing here!"

Then Anatole said quietly: "Do not be uneasy, dear madame, I will take the shell."

But Dutailly stopped him.

"Impossible, my dear fellow—your arm, you know!"

"Yes, indeed," I added; "it is not a thing for a man with a wounded arm to attempt."

"I have perfect confidence in the captain, however," said Dutailly. "Come, sir; take away this monster and rid us of such a terrible nightmare. We all know your prowess!"

The captain looked unhappy, but he was not to be disconcerted for so little.

"Delighted to be of service," he said, "but I could not think of carrying it over these icy streets. I will go and get my friend's carriage where he is dining just around the corner, at Brebant's, and will return in ten minutes."

"Do hurry," begged Mme. Dutailly. "I shall be in agony until it is out of the house."

The captain hastened out of the room. Judging from the noise on the stairs it was evident that he was literally hurrying.

Without appearing to have any special purpose in mind, I walked over to the window.

"It would have been so simple to have let me take it," murmured Anatole.

"Don't say such a thing," cried Dutailly, surprised at the young man's quiet courage. "It is much better for the captain to see to it."

"If he only will not be long," groaned

his wife. "There is no use to wait for him," I remarked from my position by the window. "He will never come back."

"Never come back?" they all cried. "No," I said. "Had he gone to Brebant's he would have turned to the left. Instead, he went to the right, and he seemed to be walking very quickly, too."

"What can it mean?" they cried again.

"It means, my dear friends," I said quietly, "that the captain is a mere impostor, whom I rejoice to have exposed by this contrivance on the table."

And seizing a photograph album, I struck a violent blow upon the bombshell, which exploded in a thousand fragments—of chocolate! The candies inside were scattered in all directions. A burst of laughter followed this explosion, and, I may say, this denouement!

Three months later, Anatole married Mlle. Gertrude.

And of the captain, nothing more!

HUDSON BAY \$50 SHARES RISE \$100 IN MONTH ONLY

One of the Most Romantic Chapters in Development of the Dominion.

London, March 21.—"The \$10 shares in the Hudson Bay Company have risen nearly £20 in less than a month, and now stand at over £70."

To the financier the above statement means a stock exchange "boom" to which a profit of over £2,000,000 is attached. But to the student of colonial history it means much more. For him it contains one of the most romantic chapters in the story of the development of our richest colony—the Dominion of Canada.

Within the next month work will begin in earnest on a new railway which is to join the Atlantic and Pacific shores of the Dominion. Half of this railway—from Moncton, a New Brunswick port, to Winnipeg—is to be built by the government; the other half—from Winnipeg to Port Simpson, on the Pacific—by the Grand Trunk Railway. The second half of this gigantic engineering enterprise will pass thru vast tracts of almost unexplored virgin country.

Some 2000 miles of prairie land, interspersed with lakes and ponds, and heavily timbered in places with spruce and pine, will be made accessible to settlers. The few settlers who have already penetrated into the mighty solitudes of Assiniboia, Saskatchewan and Alberta, describe the region as abounding in mineral and agricultural wealth. The story of Manitoba, with its mammoth wheat fields, its thousands of prosperous farmers, its hundreds of towns and villages, which now cover what was once wild forest and prairie land, the home of the buffalo and the Indian, is likely to be repeated.

The vast possibilities which the railway thus opens up have already been recognized. American land speculators are securing large blocks of land as fast as the government surveys, made in preparation for settlers, are completed. The railway will not be finished for five or six years, but it will bring with it thousands of settlers, and land "booms" like these, which marked the progress of the railway system of the United States are sure to follow. Then will the speculators who are now sowing their seed reap their harvest.

The Hudson Bay Company has an extensive interest in all this, for, owing to a bargain it made with the Canadian government thirty-five years ago, its proprietary rights in the region being brought into touch with civilization are second only to those of the government itself.

The company was founded in 1670, a charter being granted to Prince Rupert and seventeen noblemen and gentlemen for importing into Great Britain furs and skins obtained by barter from the Indians of North America. The corporation was invested with the absolute proprietorship of all land discovered or to be discovered within the entrance of the Hudson Strait.

For more than a century the holders of the charter confined themselves to the coast traffic. Their troubles were many, the chief being an almost continual warfare with the French, who destroyed their forts, ruined their goods and captured their ships.

With the wresting of Canada by the British from the French, the exploring spirit broke out among the Hudson Bay pioneers. Parties penetrated far up the Saskatchewan River, toward the Rocky Mountains. In 1783 the Northwest Fur Company of Montreal was formed, and, after nearly forty years' competition in inland trading with the Hudson Bay Company, was merged into the latter in 1821.

Result of a Bargain.

The Hudson Bay Company now ruled practically the whole of North America. In 1870, however, it made a bargain with the Canadian government, and to this bargain is due the fact that its shares to-day stand at 700 per cent. premium.

The company's territorial rights were sold to the government for £300,000 in cash, the right to select a block of land adjoining each of its stations, and the right for fifty years from 1870 to "claim in any township or district within the fertile belt in which land is set out for settlement grants of land not exceeding

one-twentieth part of the land so set out."

The "fertile belt" is the stretch of country thru the northern portion of which, stretching from Winnipeg to the west, stretching from Winnipeg to the Rocky Mountains, is bounded on the south by the United States boundary. Up to March 1904, about 3,977,000 acres of the total land laid out for settlement, which reaches from Winnipeg to Edmonton, a town in Alberta, had been allotted to the company.

With the passing of the railway scheme the laying out of the land is proceeding apace, and well before the fifty years have expired the entire district will be mapped out into settlements, and the company will have received over 7,000,000 acres of land.

Up to March last year the company had sold 1,234,000 acres of its land. Some idea of the price it received may be gained from the fact that in the year 1903-4 the company sold 180,114 acres for nearly a quarter of a million pounds.

Values Steadily Rising.

Within the last year the company has adopted the policy of reducing the number of its land sales, and its present position is that it has over two and a half million acres in hand, with the certainty of a further allotment of over three million acres in the next few years. Already values are steadily rising thruout the "fertile belt," and the possibilities of further appreciation as the northern portion becomes colonized are boundless.

Since its bargain with the government in 1870 the company has prospered exceedingly. It has returned £1,000,000 to its shareholders of their capital, which is now divided into 100,000 shares of £10 each. During the last ten years alone it has paid £955,000 in dividends, or nearly an average of 10 per cent. Last year its dividend rose to £17 10s per cent.

The present "boom" in its shares is largely owing to American purchases. Possibly the same speculators, who, for months past, have been purchasing land in Northwest Canada, are seeking to secure control of the company which possesses so large an interest in the sphere of their operations. Optimists say that, altho there may be small setbacks, due to profit-taking, the company's shares are bound to reach £100 in value before the boom ends.

If Australia Pays.

Sydney, N.S.W., Bulletin.

To put the matter shortly, if Australia is to pay according to its population for the upkeep of the British navy, then there are many other things which should also be adjusted according to population. There should be a proportionate voice in the control of the navy and in the guidance of the foreign policy which brings about naval wars, and probably naval disasters. There should be a proportionate opportunity of annexing good naval billets. There should also be something dimly resembling proportionate protection, and Australia isn't guaranteed the aid of a single cruiser or gunboat or scow in time of war, if Britain wants that gunboat or scow. At present, the situation is that the fleet, in a time of real and awful trouble, would rally to the last ship to prevent London being burned. Afterwards, but not till afterwards, it would sail forth to the last ship to avenge the burning of Sydney—which is not exactly the same kind of defence. Further, if things are to be put on a business basis, there must be some regard for the fact that the commerce to be defended in Australian waters is, to a very large extent, British commerce. Also, if things are to be placed on an honest business basis, Britain must give up free trade, kill off its big landlords, bring every inch of its available soil under cultivation again, and become as far as possible, again self-supporting. For Britain re-

quires under its present conditions—conditions which, to a great extent, it has deliberately created—two or three times as much protection, in proportion to its population as any other important section of the empire. Other sections only require defence against invasion, and torpedo boats, shore fortifications, and land forces can do a good deal of that work. Britain requires defence against the hungry people of the St. Lawrence, New York harbor, the Baltic and the Danubius. Britain has deliberately created that necessity. A sane-minded Britain, which hadn't sacrificed its agriculture to the ghost of a dead Cobden, would only need to guard one of these seaways at the most to secure such of its supplies as it couldn't produce for itself. The sea-defence which is required to save Britain from famine should be borne by Britain exclusively, and a huge proportion of the empire's naval necessities arise out of the need to save free trade and landlอร์ด-cursed Britain from famine. And all over the world there is a need to defend isolated rocks, islets and scraps, the only value of which is that they afford naval bases for the ships that are guarding free trade Britain from famine. The fact must be taken into account in making up the joint and several invoice, that this British free trade policy is likely, in a really great naval emergency, to prove the— at least temporary—ruin of the rest of the empire, which will be abandoned for the time in order that Britain's wheat ships may be saved. When the stomach of the community which has sole control of the navy comes into the question, it is likely to be a very poor outlook for the other communities of the empire. If things are to be put on a population basis, the British stomach should first give some guarantee that it won't upset all equitable arrangements.

Leading Man Forget Lines.

From The Baltimore Sun.

Recently in a Virginia town the social leaders decided to produce a play that would bring out the dramatic ability of each and every one of the cast, and so one of the old English dramas was selected. The little theatre was packed on the momentous evening and everything went well until the leading man was left alone with his thoughts beside the electric log fire in the "best room" of his country house.

Suddenly in rushed one of his business friends and exclaimed as tragically as he could: "Your father has died and left you all his fortune!"

At this unfortunate second the leading man forgot his lines, and instead of being stunned with grief or expressing great sorrow, he slowly arose, and with his knees beating a tattoo against each other said calmly, "Indeed!"

The audience roared, and the curtain was rung down. The rest of the first act was cut out, and the leading man, altho he did pretty well thru the rest of the performance, was greeted with smiles whenever he appeared.

Disraeli's Courtship.

From The New York Times.

Disraeli was in love with a widow, Mrs. Wyndham Lewis. One day, when he went to call, the lady, sitting by the window, saw him approaching, and ordered the servant to say that she was not at home. When the maid reached the hall the statesman was hanging up his overcoat.

"Mrs. Lewis, sir, is not at home," said the hurried maid.

"I did not ask for Mrs. Lewis," said the calm, statesmanlike reply.

"But I don't know when she will be back," urged the maid.

"Neither do I," philosophically replied Disraeli, "but I am going to wait till she comes back, so please make me a cup of tea."

He did wait, he got his tea, and he married the widow.

Hidden Treasures.

Hidden treasures with the Snow Girl Co. at the Grand Opera House this week.



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en's Flats" at the Majestic this week.