

## MISCELLANEOUS.

## A CHAT WITH JAMES A. GARY.

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 28th, 1897.



F all President McKinley's advisers, the man least known to the public is the Postmaster General. Still he is one of the ablest of the cabinet ministers, and he has for years stood high among the business men of the United States. Through his wonderful business ability he has made, I am told, a fortune

of between five and six million dollars. He has cotton factories near Baltimore, in which he employs over 1,500 hands, and the oceans and rivers of the world are spotted with the snow-white sails made from the cloth turned out in his mills. General Gary has other large interests, and he has been made the trustee and manager of other matters even greater than his own. He is connected with banking institutions and other corporations. He is the executor of the Enoch Pratt estate, and, as such, has a large part in controlling the millions which that philanthropist left to the people of Baltimore. His duties of this kind, in fact, have in late years so increased that he has practically retired from the conduct of his private business, giving it over to his son, a young man of thirty-seven, who is his junior partner, and who shows, it is said, quite as much business ability as his father. Postmaster General Gary has always been a republican. I have seen it stated that he said not long ago, that he had given on the average of \$5,000 a year for the last thirty years toward the support of the republican party in Maryland. He has never been an office seeker; but he has always been one of the counselors of the party and has for years been a strong friend of President McKinley. When McKinley offered him the place in the cabinet he took it, as he thought he would be able to do something there as postmaster general. I am told at the department that he has already the business of the office well in hand, and from the talk which I had with him last night, I judge that he will accomplish something before he is through.

I met Postmaster General Gary in his rooms at the Portland Flats, and for two hours we chatted together about himself, business questions and his plans as to the department. General Gary is a man of ideas. He has convictions and is not afraid to say what he thinks. He is a good talker, using good language, and now and then illustrating a point by a story. He is well read, and I could see that he keeps abreast with the times. He is not at all snobbish, and he looks more like a practical business man than a statesman. He has himself well in hand, and although he is now sixty-three years of age, there are but few wrinkles in his face. His skin is as fair as that of a girl's, his eyes are a bright blue and the only sign of his threescore years is his hair and beard of frosted silver. He is well dressed and well groomed. His

suit is a business one, with the vest cut low, showing a large "V" of white, in which there are white studs and above which there is a white necktie, which fits close up under his white turn-over collar.

Our conversation covered a wide range. Some of the most interesting parts of it were those which related to his business matters, and especially that in which the paymaster general told me how his father made him a good business man. I had asked General Gary as to his business education, when he replied:

"My father had curious ideas regarding the education of boys. At the time I was born he was already well to do. He was in fact what was then considered rich. I was his only son, and he was anxious that I should not be spoiled, so he made me spend a part of each year in the factory. I began my school life at eight, going to an academy near by and remained there until I was thirteen. After that time I was sent to school only six months of each year, being kept out the remaining six months to work."

"What did you do in the factory, General Gary?" I asked.

"I did everything," replied the postmaster general. "I went in at the bottom and worked my way up through the various grades of labor until I got to the top. Father paid me just the same wages as the other boys. At first I received only \$5 a month. I had to work as hard as the others, and at times it seemed to me as though my lines had not been cast in pleasant places. I remember one day when I was about fifteen—it is funny how you remember some things—I remember coming home that night very tired. As I entered the house father asked me how I felt, throwing his arms about me as he did so. I replied:

"Father, I am dead tired. I really feel too tired to eat."

"Upon this father's eyes filled with tears. He sat down and pulled me down upon his knee and said: 'My boy, I am sorry for you. But I am doing what I believe to be right. It would be a good deal easier for me to let you do as you please, to give you what money you need and to keep you from work. But the chances are that you would in that case turn out to be a blank fool. The work you are now doing will be of immense value to you later on. It will make a man of you, and I know that the day will come when you will bless me for these hard times.'

"I can see my father now, in my mind's eye," concluded General Gary, "as he looked when he said that. I now realize that he was right; and I have many times blessed him for training me as he did. As the result of that work I know as much today about any branch of my business as any of my employes. My men have learned that they cannot fool me; and they know that if there is anything out of the way I am sure to notice it as soon as I come into the factory. Successful business, and especially successful manufacturing, is largely the result of the careful watching of details of the little things. In order to do this, you must understand all parts of the business. The chief thing that I learned, however, was how to work and

what work meant. I learned the value of a dollar. I learned how to sympathize with my men; and today I have some of the best men in my employ that you can find in the world. My working people are contented. Nearly every family has its own well-furnished home, and we have never had a strike."

"Did you get your whole business education in your father's factories?" I asked.

"No," replied General Gary. "For nearly a year I was in the employ of Tom Wilson, who was a Baltimore importer and merchant. He died, leaving several millions of dollars, and was, during his life, noted for his shrewd business sense. Father arranged with Mr. Wilson that I should work for a time in his counting house. When I went there the old man told me that father had given me to him for a year, that he might teach me business. I replied that I was anxious to learn all I could. Well, I got my first business lesson the second day. I was set to copying letters. At that time Mr. Wilson did a big business with South America and other countries, shipping his cargoes in sailing vessels. In our correspondence we always sent a number of duplicate letters by different ships to avoid the danger of loss. My first work was the copying of such letters. At the close of the day I found that I had made several mistakes in my copy, so when I came back the next morning I brought a steel ink eraser with me to scratch them out. This eraser was on my desk when Mr. Wilson came in. He asked me what it was for. I told him. Whereupon he took it up and put it away, saying that there should be no mistakes to scratch out. That taught me one lesson.

"I remember another lesson which the millionaire gave me a few days later," continued the postmaster general. "In addition to other things we did a large discounting business. Those were the days of high interest rates. Eight, ten and twelve per cent. were not uncommon, and Mr. Wilson sometimes discounted from \$50,000 to \$60,000 of paper in a day. He would get a discount of two per cent. or more, and by indorsing the notes could turn them into the banks and at six per cent. get all the money he wanted. Upon the day referred to, an old broker came into the office with a large bundle of notes which he wanted discounted. Just at that time, however, Mr. Wilson did not have the money, and he had to refuse. As the man came in he called me to him and asked me to sit down and listen while he talked. He then chatted to the man about a number of things outside of the business in hand, showing an interest in him and his affairs, and though he did not take the broker's notes, I could see that the man departed happy, though it must have been a great disappointment to him to have failed in making the sale. As soon as the man left, Mr. Wilson said: 'My boy, I suppose it surprised you that I called you here to listen to what must have seemed trifling talk. I did so to show you that there is more than one way of saying 'no.' If you are careful, you can do so without losing your friends, and that is what I have done with that man today.'

"Do you believe in boys being sent to college as a preparatory training for business, General Gary?" I asked.

"No, I think it takes too much time," replied General Gary, "and that a great