

MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper.

HOW BONNER MADE MILLIONS.

NEW YORK, July 21, 1897.

WRITE this letter for young men. It is intended for young business men who want to succeed. It is penned for poor boys who desire to get rich, and, in short, for every one who cares to study others, in the hope that he may thereby get suggestions which may help himself. It is the story of a poor Irish boy who landed in New York with five dollars in his pocket, and who ten years ago retired from business worth his millions. It is the story of a young man who started an enterprise out of his savings, and by his brain and industry increased his capital a thousand fold. It is the story of a business man who spent more than a million dollars in newspaper advertising, and who, when the world laughed and wondered at his extravagance, went on to spend more. It is the story of a man who never owed a dollar, who never asked credit, but who throughout his life has benefited thousands and given away tens of thousands. It is, in short, the story of Robert Bonner, the millionaire founder of the New York Ledger. I give it to you as nearly as I can remember, in the words in which, in response to my questions, he told it to me.

But first let me tell you how Mr. Bonner looked the other night as we chatted together in his home on 58th street, New York. He has a face and form much like that of ex-President Harrison, but he seems to be ten years younger. The fact is that he is ten years older than Mr. Harrison. Mr. Bonner's complexion is rosy, Harrison's is dead and doughy. Bonner's hair and beard have but few gray strands, while those of the ex-president are as white as snow. Still Mr. Bonner is now seventy-three. He does not appear to be sixty, and he moves about with the energy of a man in his prime. He had spent the whole day upon his farm at Tarrytown, inspecting the training of some of the fastest trotting horses in the world, but he did not seem to be tired. During our chat he went several times to rooms in the upper part of his house to verify matters to which he referred. As I was about to leave I asked for his photograph. He went up again to get it, and when I offered him my pencil to write his name upon it, he said he preferred to use a pen, and that he would run upstairs to write it. I found Mr. Bonner's soul as young as his body. He is in sympathy with young men who wish to succeed, and when I asked him as to his life and those elements in it which had contributed to his success, he answered freely.

"I have had one principle in my life," said Mr. Bonner, "which I think has largely contributed to my success. I don't know how I got the idea, but it is

well expressed in a quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson, which reads:

"O, discontented man! Whatever you want, pay the price and take it."

"I saw those words when I was a boy, and they took fast hold of my mind. I early learned that whatever I got had to be paid for either in work or money, and I have been willing to pay the price."

"But you are naturally energetic, Mr. Bonner?"

"No, I am not," was the reply.

"When I was a little boy I was the laziest mortal about the house. I hated to move, though naturally I was not deficient. I remember one story they tell about me. My family were Scotch Irish Presbyterians, and I was brought up upon the Bible and the Shorter Catechism. I had to learn much of the Bible and was rather apt at quoting from it. One day, when I was about eleven years of age, they tell me I was lying in front of the fire enjoying my laziness, when my father asked me to get some wood. I arose slowly and stretched myself, and looking at the fire, exclaimed:

"Job, vi: 7: 'Man is born to trouble, as the sparks fly upwards!'"

"This laziness of mine continued until I came to this country about a year later, and until I went into a printing office at Hartford, Conn. Then I shook it off. I saw that if I wanted to succeed I had to work and I did work. My hours were from six in the morning until six at night, and my wages were, for the first year, \$25; for the second, \$15, and for the third, \$45. Of course I got my board and clothes in addition. The paper on which I was employed was the Hartford Courant, the paper which General Hawley now owns. It then had a circulation of 500 copies. I know, for I had to wet down the paper every morning.

"I soon saw that if I wanted to succeed as a printer I must learn all about printing," Mr. Bonner continued. "Now, the daily paper away back in the forties, was different from what it is now. The most of the type for the Courant was set up during the day, a quarter of a column of space being left for the latest news. This was set up early in the morning just before the paper went to press. I wanted to learn all about press work, so I got up at four o'clock every morning and watched the printers run off the paper. I was anxious to help, but for some time they did not ask for my services. At last I was told to get some water. I replied that I would do so if they would teach me to lock up the form. The next day something else was wanted, and I made them teach me how to feed the press before I would do it. So I went on from day to day always learning something new until I had mastered the science of press work. I was at this time only twelve years old, and it seems to me now that it took some nerve for a boy of that age to get up before daylight those cold winter mornings just for the sake of learning.

"I was soon rewarded for my work, however," continued Mr. Bonner. "One day one of the printers who put the paper to press suddenly announced his intention of leaving. He was told by the proprietor that he could not go until

someone else could be taught to do his work. 'Why don't you take Robert,' said the printer. 'He understands how to manage a press as well as I do.' So they gave me the job, and I was paid 12½ cents an hour for my early morning work and I got therefrom about \$3 a week."

It was later on in our conversation that Mr. Bonner again referred to this period of his life. I had asked him how he had managed to keep so young and whether he allowed things to worry him. He replied:

"I never worry about business matters as a rule. I do what is before me and then let it go. There are only two days of my life which I can remember as having been full of worry about business matters, and these were when I was a boy, doing that extra work on the Hartford Courant. One day the proprietor told me that he thought some of the other apprentices ought to have a chance to make some extra money, and that I must let one of them try the press work. The result was that I lost my job and my money for two days. I can remember now how black life seemed to me then. The boy who took my place, however, was careless and I soon got back again. The boy, during his second day's work in setting up an article written by the editor, made an item of \$1,500,000 read \$15,000, leaving out two ciphers. This disgusted the editor and I was reinstated. One trouble with the boy who took my place was that his father owned three or four houses in the town worth a few thousand dollars apiece. The boy thought his father was rich and there was no necessity of his being careful, as the day would come when he would not have to work."

"When did you begin to save money, Mr. Bonner?"

"Just as soon as I could," was the reply. "You see, I got very little at the start. It took all I made to pay my expenses, and I was almost of age before I began depositing in the savings bank. My first deposit was here in New York. I had come to New York, you know, to practice my trade as a printer. Well, about fifty-two years ago I found that I had \$70 ahead, and with that I opened a deposit in the Chambers Street Savings bank. When I took the money to the bank there was one bad bill in it which the teller threw back to me. I can remember tonight how badly I felt when that dollar came back, and how I concluded to soon save another to put in its place. I did save it, and saved more right along. I kept my deposits in that bank until they amounted to a thousand dollars a week. One day I noted that the cashier had put in red ink an item of three dollars and some cents below my last deposit. This was my first interest. 'Why,' said I, 'I did not have to work for that,' and I then realized that money would make money. It seemed wonderful to me."

"How did you come to found the Ledger, Mr. Bonner?"

"The New York Ledger," said Mr. Bonner, "was in 1850 a little financial sheet known as the Merchants' Ledger. At this time I was working in the printing office. We had an advertising solicitor, who liked the way in which I displayed his advertisements. He left the paper a little later on and became connected with the Merchants' Ledger. He told his proprietor that he could get a great many more advertisements if I