

were to set them up, and it was in this way that I got an offer of a better salary from the Merchants' Ledger. I took it. It was a small sheet, devoted to mercantile affairs, and it had less than three thousand circulation. Soon after I became employed upon it the proprietor wanted to sell, and I bought him out. I ran the paper for a short time as a mercantile paper and gradually turned it into a family one. One day I decided that if it had the best reading matter a paper of that class could have, it would get a very large circulation, and I concluded to get it. I began at once to get the best of contributors, and, among others, secured Miss Fanny Fern. Miss Fanny Fern was the most popular woman writer of that time, but she had never written for the newspapers. A book of hers had just had a circulation of something like 5,000 copies, and I think she rather looked down upon newspaper work. I first offered her \$25 a column for a story. She refused it. I wrote her again and made the offer of \$50 a column. This she also declined, when the return mail brought her another offer from me of \$75 a column. Upon this she said to a friend: 'I like the spirit of that man Bonner, and I wish you would go down and see him.' Her friend came and we eventually got together.

"I then proposed to give her \$100 a column, but said I did not want the story to run over ten columns. She replied that she would write the story for \$1,000, provided I would take it whether it ran nine columns or eleven columns, as she could not tell just how much it would run out. I agreed to this, and the story was published. The circumstances of the engagement were told, and nearly every newspaper in the country published by extravagance in paying \$100 a column for a story. I got \$50,000 worth of advertising out of the arrangement, and the people began to ask for the Ledger. Before this I had had trouble in getting the news stands to take the Ledger. After this they were glad to get it."

"Did Fanny Fern write more for you after that?" I asked.

"Yes; she wrote for me more or less up to the time of her death, both she and her husband, James Parton. Fanny Fern was a genius. She had ability somewhat like that of Henry Ward Beecher. Her matter was always interesting and valuable."

"Speaking of Beecher, Mr. Bonner, he also wrote for the Ledger, did he not?"

"Yes," replied the veteran editor. "He wrote a great deal for me, and among other things his novel 'Norwood,' for which I paid him \$30,000."

"How did you become acquainted with Mr. Beecher?" I asked.

"It was through a poem of one of his lady friends. He sent me the manuscript, stating that if I used it a check would be very acceptable to the lady. I wrote back at once that I had plenty of poetry, but that I wanted himself. I told him that if he would give me from a half to three-quarters of a column a week that I would pay him \$2,000 a year. I sent a check for \$2,000 with the letter as the advance salary for the first year. He accepted it, and from that time until his death he wrote for the Ledger."

"What was the nature of his writings?"

"They were to a large extent editorials," replied Mr. Bonner. "Many of them were published under the heading, 'Thoughts as They Occur by One Who Keeps His Eyes Open.' The first article, I remember, was entitled 'A Cannon Ball in a Hat.' It gave the experiences of a man who attempted to carry away a cannon ball in his hat. It described how the cannon ball grew heavier and heavier, and how the fear of detection ate into the soul of the thief. A personal moral was brought out from this which struck home to every reader. A great deal of the matter written by Mr. Beecher was not published over his own signature, and this was also the case with the articles of Harriet Beecher Stowe. It was during the years just preceding the war. We had then a large circulation in the south, and the name of Mr. Beecher as one of the contributors would have lost us thousands of subscribers."

"Was not \$30,000 a great deal to pay for a novel?"

"Yes," replied Mr. Bonner, "it was. But I think the venture was a good business investment. The way I came to pay just this amount was rather curious. I had made an arrangement with Edward Everett to write a series of articles for the Ledger. Mr. Everett was at that time the leading statesman of the country along certain lines. He was anxious that Mount Vernon should be bought and preserved, and he was giving lectures over the country for the purpose of raising money for what was called the Mount Vernon fund. I proposed to him that I would give \$10,000 to the fund if he would write a series of articles for the Ledger. He accepted it. His articles were widely read, and the Ledger again was the most talked of paper in the country. I afterward paid him \$14,000 additional for other articles. This was some time before I asked Mr. Beecher to write a novel. When I did write I first offered to pay him \$24,000 for the story, or as much as I had paid Mr. Everett for his writings. Later on I increased the amount to \$30,000."

"Here is what he answered in reply to my first proposition:

"Plymouth Rock at a Council.

"Dear Mr. Bonner:

"I am almost dumb after reading your proposition and must clear my head before I say a word.

"(Signed) HENRY WARD BEECHER."

"When it was announced that Mr. Beecher was to write the story there was a decided sensation in literary and religious circles. Some preachers, and especially a Rev. Mr. Seeley, criticised Mr. Beecher's actions in making money in that way. I wrote an editorial on the subject, which was rather facetious, and sent the proof of it to Mr. Beecher, suggesting that if he thought well of it that he might give me a recommendation whereby I could get a place on the London Punch. Within an hour after my boy had left the office he came back with the following note:

"My Dear Bonner:

"I think you like to gobble up a minister or two every year to aid digestion just as hens swallow gravel stones. You have swallowed me in one way and Mr. Seeley in another. I like my way best.

"(Signed) HENRY WARD BEECHER."

"Then on the other side of the sheet he had written this recommendation:

"To the London Punch:

"Robert Bonner desires an engage-

ment on your paper. It gives me pleasure to testify to his good character. No other one man has made me laugh so much. Just to look at him would make one feel good natured, and therefore I suggest that his picture be published. Should he begin contributing to the Punch he would in less than two years own and edit it, but otherwise he may be trusted.

"(Signed) HENRY WARD BEECHER."

"That letter gives you some idea of how quick Beecher was. The most of the two hours was taken up in the boys going from my office to Mr. Beecher's house and back, and Mr. Beecher must have dashed the letter off within five minutes. He was very quick and was always full of ideas."

"What kind of a man was Edward Everett?" I asked.

"He was a much misunderstood man," replied Mr. Bonner. "You remember what Wendell Phillips once said of him. It was when Mr. Everett was in the Senate. Said Mr. Phillips: 'I am speaking of the Senator from Massachusetts, not that polished icicle Edward Everett, but that human gentleman Charles Sumner.' When Everett was our minister to England Queen Victoria is said to have remarked that he was the only American gentleman she had ever met. Mr. Everett was more than a polished icicle. He was not a mere intellectuality, but he was a man of great soul. His letters to me were full of feeling. He seldom slighted any one. He was a high minded, conscientious, patriotic Christian gentleman."

"Was he a good writer?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Mr. Bonner. "He was the first scholar of the land, and still he was very careful of his work. He made no mistakes in punctuation and some of his articles he wrote and rewrote before he sent them to me. He was glad to get suggestions and sometimes asked my advice as to the publication of certain paragraphs."

The conversation here drifted to advertising matters, and I asked Mr. Bonner to tell me the secret of his success in advertising. He replied:

"I can hardly remember when I was not studying the advantages of different advertising features. When I was a boy the New York Herald was very much criticised by the other newspapers of the country. I saw that the more the Herald was talked about the more the people bought it, and when I took the Ledger I saw that I must get the paper talked about. I must not only have a good paper, but the people must know it. I would not borrow, but I spent all my surplus in advertising. One time I spent \$2,000 for a single advertisement in the New York Herald; at another I offered the Tribune \$3,000 for one insertion in the daily, weekly and tri-weekly. I paid during one week \$27,000 for advertising, and in one year \$150,000. These sums in those days were as big as ten times the same amounts now, and many of my friends thought I was going crazy. At one time I paid \$25,000 to the papers for publishing installments of a certain story which ended with the words, 'continued next week in the New York Ledger.' I did this once in the Herald, publishing two installments, so that the readers thought they were going to get the whole story in the Herald, and then at the close of the second installment stated that they must look for its continuation in the Ledger. All of this