

ROBERT BONNER IS DEAD

Never Recovered from the Shock of His Son's Death.

DR. HALL'S END AFFECTED HIM

His Career as Publisher of The Ledger—Authors Like Tennyson and Dickens His Contributors.

Robert Bonner, the well-known horseman and one-time owner and publisher of The New York Ledger, now published by Robert Bonner's Sons as a monthly magazine, died at 7:30 o'clock last night of general debility at his residence, 8 West Fifty-sixth Street. Since the death of his son, Andrew Allen Bonner, in December last, following close upon the death of the Rev. Dr. John Hall, who had been Mr. Bonner's pastor since 1869 and with whom he had maintained close personal relations, Mr. Bonner had been complaining of feeling poorly, a fact which his family attribute to the shock caused by these two deaths. Gradually his strength left him, and even his interest in his horses, of which he had some fifty or more, began to wane.

Three weeks ago Mr. Bonner was confined to his bed for a time, but later rallied and was able to go out again. On Tuesday of last week he went out behind Praytell, accounted the fastest road horse in the country, and speeded him for some distance. That, however, was Mr. Bonner's last day out. The following day he was obliged to take to his bed again, and since then he had been gradually failing. On Monday last he was seized with a sinking spell, and the physicians fearing the worst, his family was summoned. From this spell, however, he rallied, but yesterday he again lapsed into unconsciousness, and died a few hours later. At his bedside were his three surviving children, Robert Edwin Bonner, Frederic Bonner, and Mrs. Francis Forbes, together with Mrs. Frederic Bonner and Francis Forbes.

The funeral of Mr. Bonner will be held Saturday morning at 11 o'clock from the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. The Rev. Dr. John S. McIntosh of Philadelphia, a lifelong friend of Mr. Bonner, and Vice President General of the Scotch Irish Society of America, of which Mr. Bonner was President, will officiate. The interment will be in Greenwood.

Robert Bonner was born at Ramelton, a village near Londonderry, Ireland, on April 28, 1824, and came to this country fifteen years later, at the suggestion of his mother's brother, who was a prosperous farmer living near Hartford, Conn. At that time young Bonner was almost penniless, and his uncle saw to it that none of his time was wasted. Within a few weeks after his arrival he was entered as an apprentice in the office of The Hartford Courant, where he remained for five years learning his trade, that of a printer, and devoting his leisure time to study. At the end of his apprenticeship, Mr. Bonner left Hartford and came to this city, where he became assistant foreman in the office of The New York Evening Mirror, of which Nathaniel Parker Willis, the poet, was then editor, and at the same time acted as correspondent for The Hartford Courant and for newspapers in Boston, Albany, and Washington.

After several years' service on The Mirror, Mr. Bonner, who had accumulated some money, bought The Merchants' Ledger, a weekly financial journal. Almost from the start of his new venture Mr. Bonner began the introduction of fresh features. The publication of a financial newspaper was not exactly to his liking and gradually he changed its character so that the journal which had been of use only to business men became a welcome visitor to the home. Many of the old features were retained, however, and it was not until 1855 that Mr. Bonner found that the time had arrived when he could take a decisive step in the direction in which his shrewd judgment told him lay the way to a fortune. In that year he dropped the name "Merchants'" from the title of the publication and substituted for it "New York," and from that day to the present the paper has been known as The New York Ledger.

At the same time he announced that he had engaged Fanny Fern, the most popular author of the day, to write a story for his paper at \$100 a column. This was regarded as a fabulous price in those days, and or itself it attracted a great deal of attention to The Ledger, but Mr. Bonner was not disposed to allow the success of the venture to depend on that sort of advertising.

HIS GREAT ADVERTISEMENT.

Instead, he decided to take advantage of the daily newspapers, and he sent a short sentence to the publisher of The New York Tribune, with directions to repeat it in the usual type of the paper to fill the space of one page.

The Tribune's publisher refused to open the columns of the paper to such a form of advertising. In some way James Gordon Bennett, the elder, heard of the incident, and he offered to accept the advertisement and print it in The Herald in any way that Mr. Bonner desired. Without hesitation Mr. Bonner contracted for eight pages of The Herald, and, as the paper was then an eight-page publication, it became necessary to double its size for that issue. As a result of this novel advertisement, The Ledger fairly leaped into popularity. And, as Mr. Bonner afterward remarked, he never again found any difficulty in getting his advertisements printed. The first chapter of Fanny Fern's novel appeared on June 9, 1856, and on that date The Ledger had a sale of 50,000 copies.

The success which rewarded Mr. Bonner's ingenuity and energy spurred him on to fresh efforts, and he determined to push the circulation of his paper until it numbered 100,000. This determination was carried out at the expense of large sums paid for articles, novels, and poems, and thousands of dollars spent for advertising. Sylvanus Cobb, Mrs. E. D. E. N. Southworth, who died a few days ago, and Emerson Bennett were engaged to write for The Ledger, and their stories still further increased the popularity of the paper. Then Edward Everett, who had been lecturing in behalf of the Mount Vernon Association, was induced to contribute a letter each week for a year in return for a gift of \$10,000 which Mr. Bonner made to the association.

This Mr. Bonner regarded as the greatest card that had ever been played by his or any other paper. William Cullen Bryant was the next notable author who was engaged to write for The Ledger, and then Mr. Bonner secured the services of Henry Ward Beecher, for whose novel, "Norwood," The Ledger's editor paid \$30,000. Charles Dickens contributed "Hunted Down," the only thing he ever wrote for an American publication, and Horace Greeley's "Recollections of a Busy Life" soon followed.

WHAT HE PAID GREAT AUTHORS.

In speaking some years ago of the features he had introduced into The Ledger, Mr. Bonner said:

"I paid Dickens \$5,000 for 'Hunted Down,' and for one poem I gave Tennyson an equal amount. Longfellow also wrote a poem for me, for which I paid him \$3,000."

John G. Saxe, Leon Lewis, James Parton, and Harriet Lewis, all popular writers of their day, were regular contributors, and, besides, special features, such as articles by noted editors, educators, and statesmen, were published at frequent intervals.

After conducting The Ledger for thirty-seven years, in which time he had seen it grow from a struggling commercial sheet into an immensely popular and money-making journal, Mr. Bonner, in November, 1887, gave the paper to his three sons, who have conducted it ever since.

Next to his fame as the publisher of a marvelously successful family paper, Mr. Bonner was best known probably as a lover of horseflesh and an owner of fast horses. His love of horses was innate, but it was not until he had nearly reached middle age that he became a horse-owner. At that time he was suffering from overwork, and his physician recommended that he try driving—advice which was cheerfully followed.

Mr. Bonner soon found that the possession of fleet animals was a necessity for

the absolute enjoyment of a trip on the road, and he began a search for roadsters which could keep pace with those driven by Commodore Vanderbilt and Col. John Harper, two men who disliked nothing more than the dust raised by another's trotters.

Through the efforts of a friend he purchased a fast team, with which he was able to hold his own on the road. Later, in 1859, he bought the famous pair, Lantern and Light, and from that time almost down to the time of his death, he was a frequent purchaser of thoroughbred roadsters.

Among the noteworthy horses which he owned at one time or another were Pocahontas, Dexter, Startle, Edward Everett, John Taylor, Rarus, Pickard, Maud S., and Sunol. The two latter, among the fastest trotters that the world has ever seen, cost, respectively, \$40,000 and \$41,000.

At the time of his death Mr. Bonner owned fifty or more horses, some of them kept in his stables on Fifty-fifth Street and some at his farm in Tarrytown. Among them are: Stallions—Ansel, record 2:20; Eldridge, record 2:14½; Worthier, Bright Star, Hazeldean, Newbold, Prince Ansel, Tony V.; Geldings—Alfred S., record 2:16½; Don L., record 2:12½; Stranger, Uncle Dave, Over; Mares—Daybreak, Elfrida, record 2:13½; Frill, Gem, Halcyon, Hazard, Lady Boone, Laura F., Mamie, Maud C., record 2:10½; Maud S., record 2:08½; Reverie, Russell, Sunol, record 2:08½, and Melba.

DESCRIPTION OF HIS STOCK.

In an introductory statement to the catalogue of his racing stock, issued in May, 1898, Mr. Bonner said:

"It is generally known that since I began purchasing trotting horses I have owned many of the great record breakers, including such celebrities as Dexter, Rarus, Maud S., Sunol, and other great horses too numerous to mention. I have expended about six hundred thousand dollars in this way. To those friends who have criticised me for having paid so much money for horses I may be pardoned for saying that I have given away a much larger sum than that for religious and benevolent purposes.

"While, as I have stated, it is generally known that I have owned many famous horses, it is not so well known that I have met with considerable success in breeding on my small farm at Tarrytown. For instance, I bred Macy's Hambletonian, the sire of Bosque Bonita, the first American trotter to beat all the records that had ever been made in Europe. There were also bred at my farm Cartridge, 2:14½; Majolica, 2:15; Cheyenne, 2:09½; Instant, 2:14½, and others still faster, but with no public records, as every one knows that I do not trot horses for money, although I have given many free exhibitions of speed in Prospect Park, Union track, Fleetwood, Fashion track, and on our roads, where the public have had an opportunity of seeing the horses driven.

"The dam of Lightning, 2:11, the fastest trotter that the great Alcantara has sired, was bred by me; the dam of Edith H., 2:10½, the best one that Ducalion ever sired, was bred by me; the sire of the dam of Emma Offutt, 2:11½, the fastest one that Gambetta Wilkes ever sired, was bred by me, as was the dam of Protein, 2:11½. I could go on and give the names of about one hundred horses with public records whose pedigrees can be traced to animals bred on my farm.

"But the thing of all others in connection with horses, if I except the great benefit to my health derived from driving them, which necessarily keeps one out of doors, that has offered me the most gratification is the improvement I have been able to make in the speed of those I have purchased, and the consequent relief from suffering and lameness the poor animals experienced after coming into my possession and having their feet treated under my direction."

When asked last night what disposition would be made of Mr. Bonner's stock, one of his sons said that he could not say—that the matter had not been given any thought.

One of Mr. Bonner's chief characteristics was his remarkable fidelity to his friends through good and evil report. This quality was exemplified in 1869, when the public believed that President Grant, through the members of his family, was implicated in the "gold ring," which caused a scandal that shook the country. Mr. Bonner believed the President to be guiltless, and it was he who induced Gen. Grant to deny, over his own signature, all foreknowledge of the combination. This denial, which was printed in The Ledger and copied all over the country, convinced the public that it had misjudged the President.

For many years Mr. Bonner was a member of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, and it was largely through his efforts that the late Rev. Dr. John Hall was engaged as pastor. He was also deeply interested in Princeton University, to which he made many gifts, including half of the cost of the new gymnasium. A beautiful marble monument in Mount Auburn Cemetery, Boston, marking the place of burial of Fanny Fern, the authoress, stands as a token of the gratitude Mr. Bonner felt toward the authoress who had contributed so largely to his success in life.

Mr. Bonner leaves two sons, Robert Edwin and Frederick, and one daughter, Mrs. Francis Forbes. His eldest son, Andrew Allen Bonner, died in December last, as stated above.

Mr. Bonner was President of the Scotch Irish Society of America from its foundation, and was a member of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.