

# MEN OF INVENTION AND INDUSTRY

SAMUEL SMILES\*

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”Men there have been, ignorant of letters; without art, without eloquence; who yet had the wisdom to devise and the courage to perform that which they lacked language to explain. Such men have worked the deliverance of nations and their own greatness. Their hearts are their books; events are their tutors; great actions are their eloquence.”—MACAULAY.

## CHARLES BIANCONI: A LESSON OF SELF-HELP IN IRELAND.

"I beg you to occupy yourself in collecting biographical notices respecting the Italians who have honestly enriched themselves in other regions, particularly referring to the obstacles of their previous life, and to the efforts and the means which they employed for vanquishing them, as well as to the advantages which they secured for themselves, for the countries in which they settled, and for the country to which they owed their birth."  
—GENERAL MENABREA, Circular to Italian Consuls.

When Count Menabrea was Prime Minister of Italy, he caused a

despatch to be prepared and issued to Italian Consuls in all parts of the world, inviting them to collect and forward to him "biographical notices respecting the Italians who have honourably advanced themselves in foreign countries."

His object, in issuing the despatch, was to collect information as to the lives of his compatriots living abroad, in order to bring out a book similar to 'Self-help,' the examples cited in which were to be drawn exclusively from the lives of Italian citizens. Such a work, he intimated, "if it were once circulated among the masses, could not fail to excite their emulation and encourage them to follow the examples therein set forth," while "in the course of time it might exercise a powerful influence on the increased greatness of our country."

We are informed by Count Menabrea that, although no special work has been published from the biographical notices collected in answer to his despatch, yet that the *Volere e Potere* ('Will is Power') of Professor Lessona, issued a few years ago, sufficiently answers the purpose which he contemplated, and furnishes many examples of the patient industry and untiring perseverance of Italians in all parts of the world. Many important illustrations of life and character are necessarily omitted from Professor Lessona's interesting work. Among these may be mentioned the subject of the following pages,—a distinguished Italian who entirely corresponds to Count Menabrea's description—one who, in the face of the greatest difficulties, raised himself to an eminent public position, at the same time that he conferred the greatest benefits upon the country in which he settled and carried on his industrial operations. We mean Charles Bianconi, and his establishment of the great system of car communication through out Ireland.[1]

Charles Bianconi was born in 1786, at the village of Tregolo, situated in the Lombard Highlands of La Brianza, about ten miles from Como. The last elevations of the Alps disappear in the district; and the great plain of Lombardy extends towards the south. The region is known for its richness and beauty; the inhabitants being celebrated for the cultivation of the mulberry and the rearing of the silkworm, the finest silk in Lombardy being produced in the neighbourhood. Indeed, Bianconi's family, like most of the villagers, maintained themselves by the silk culture.

Charles had three brothers and one sister. When of a sufficient age, he was sent to school. The Abbe Radicali had turned out some good scholars; but with Charles Bianconi his failure was complete. The new pupil proved a tremendous dunce. He was very wild, very bold, and very plucky; but he learned next to nothing.

Learning took as little effect upon him as pouring water upon a duck's back. Accordingly, when he left school at the age of sixteen, he was almost as ignorant as when he had entered it; and a great deal more wilful.

Young Bianconi had now arrived at the age at which he was expected to do something for his own maintenance. His father wished to throw him upon his own resources; and as he would soon be subject to the conscription, he thought of sending him to some foreign country in order to avoid the forced service. Young fellows, who had any love of labour or promptings of independence in them, were then accustomed to leave home and carry on their occupations abroad. It was a common practice for workmen in the neighbourhood of Como to emigrate to England and carry on various trades; more particularly the manufacture and sale of barometers, looking-glasses, images, prints, pictures, and other articles.

Accordingly, Bianconi's father arranged with one Andrea Faroni to take the young man to England and instruct him in the trade of print-selling. Bianconi was to be Faroni's apprentice for eighteen months; and in the event of his not liking the occupation, he was to be placed under the care of Colnaghi, a friend of his father's, who was then making considerable progress as a print-seller in London; and who afterwards succeeded in achieving a considerable fortune and reputation.

Bianconi made his preparations for leaving home. A little festive entertainment was given at a little inn in Como, at which the whole family were present. It was a sad thing for Bianconi's mother to take leave of her boy, wild though he was. On the occasion of this parting ceremony, she fainted outright, at which the young fellow thought that things were assuming a rather serious aspect. As he finally left the family home at Tregolo, the last words his mother said to him were these – words which he never forgot: "When you remember me, think of me as waiting at this window, watching for your return."

Besides Charles Bianconi, Faroni took three other boys under his charge. One was the son of a small village innkeeper, another the son of a tailor, and the third the son of a flax-dealer. This party, under charge of the Padre, ascended the Alps by the Val San Giacomo road. From the summit of the pass they saw the plains of Lombardy stretching away in the blue distance. They soon crossed the Swiss frontier, and then Bianconi found himself finally separated from home. He now felt, that without further help from friends or relatives, he had his own way to make in the world.

The party of travellers duly reached England; but Faroni, without stopping in London, took them over to Ireland at once. They

reached Dublin in the summer of 1802, and lodged in Temple Bar, near Essex Bridge. It was some little time before Faroni could send out the boys to sell pictures. First he had the leaden frames to cast; then they had to be trimmed and coloured; and then the pictures—mostly of sacred subjects, or of public characters—had to be mounted. The flowers; which were of wax, had also to be prepared and finished, ready for sale to the passers-by.

When Bianconi went into the streets of Dublin to sell his mounted prints, he could not speak a word of English. He could only say, "Buy, buy!" Everybody spoke to him an unknown tongue. When asked the price, he could only indicate by his fingers the number of pence he wanted for his goods. At length he learned a little English,—at least sufficient "for the road;" and then he was sent into the country to sell his merchandize. He was despatched every Monday morning with about forty shillings' worth of stock, and ordered to return home on Saturdays, or as much sooner as he liked, if he had sold all the pictures. The only money his master allowed him at starting was fourpence. When Bianconi remonstrated at the smallness of the amount, Faroni answered, "While you have goods you have money; make haste to sell your goods!"

During his apprenticeship, Bianconi learnt much of the country through which he travelled. He was constantly making acquaintances with new people, and visiting new places. At Waterford he did a good trade in small prints. Besides the Scripture pieces, he sold portraits of the Royal Family, as well as of Bonaparte and his most distinguished generals. "Bony" was the dread of all magistrates, especially in Ireland. At Passage, near Waterford, Bianconi was arrested for having sold a leaden framed picture of the famous French Emperor. He was thrown into a cold guard-room, and spent the night there without bed, or fire, or food. Next morning he was discharged by the magistrate, but cautioned that he must not sell any more of such pictures.

Many things struck Bianconi in making his first journeys through Ireland. He was astonished at the dram-drinking of the men, and the pipe-smoking of the women. The violent faction-fights which took place at the fairs which he frequented, were of a kind which he had never before observed among the pacific people of North Italy. These faction-fights were the result, partly of dram-drinking, and partly of the fighting mania which then prevailed in Ireland. There were also numbers of crippled and deformed beggars in every town,—quarrelling and fighting in the streets,—rows and drinkings at wakes,—gambling, duelling, and riotous living amongst all classes of the people,—things which could not but strike any ordinary observer at the time, but which have now, for the most part, happily passed away.

At the end of eighteen months, Bianconi's apprenticeship was out; and Faroni then offered to take him back to his father, in compliance with the original understanding. But Bianconi had no wish to return to Italy. Faroni then made over to him the money he had retained on his account, and Bianconi set up business for himself. He was now about eighteen years old; he was strong and healthy, and able to walk with a heavy load on his back from twenty to thirty miles a day. He bought a large case, filled it with coloured prints and other articles, and started from Dublin on a tour through the south of Ireland. He succeeded, like most persons who labour diligently. The curly-haired Italian lad became a general favourite. He took his native politeness with him everywhere; and made many friends among his various customers throughout the country.

Bianconi used to say that it was about this time when he was carrying his heavy case upon his back, weighing at least a hundred pounds—that the idea began to strike him, of some cheap method of conveyance being established for the accommodation of the poorer classes in Ireland. As he dismantled himself of his case of pictures, and sat wearied and resting on the milestones along the road, he puzzled his mind with the thought, "Why should poor people walk and toil, and rich people ride and take their ease? Could not some method be devised by which poor people also might have the opportunity of travelling comfortably?"

It will thus be seen that Bianconi was already beginning to think about the matter. When asked, not long before his death, how it was that he had first thought of starting his extensive Car establishment, he answered, "It grew out of my back!" It was the hundred weight of pictures on his dorsal muscles that stimulated his thinking faculties. But the time for starting his great experiment had not yet arrived.

Bianconi wandered about from town to town for nearly two years. The picture-case became heavier than ever. For a time he replaced it with a portfolio of unframed prints. Then he became tired of the wandering life, and in 1806 settled down at Carrick-on-Suir as a print-seller and carver and gilder. He supplied himself with gold-leaf from Waterford, to which town he used to proceed by Tom Morrissey's boat. Although the distance by road between the towns was only twelve miles, it was about twenty-four by water, in consequence of the windings of the river Suir. Besides, the boat could only go when the state of the tide permitted. Time was of little consequence; and it often took half a day to make the journey. In the course of one of his voyages, Bianconi got himself so thoroughly soaked by rain and mud that he caught a severe cold, which ran into pleurisy, and laid him up for about two months. He was carefully attended to

by a good, kind physician, Dr. White, who would not take a penny for his medicine and nursing.

Business did not prove very prosperous at Carrick-on-suir; the town was small, and the trade was not very brisk. Accordingly, Bianconi resolved, after a year's ineffectual trial, to remove to Waterford, a more thriving centre of operations. He was now twenty-one years old. He began again as a carver and gilder; and as business flowed in upon him, he worked very hard, sometimes from six in the morning until two hours after midnight. As usual, he made many friends. Among the best of them was Edward Rice, the founder of the "Christian Brothers" in Ireland. Edward Rice was a true benefactor to his country. He devoted himself to the work of education, long before the National Schools were established; investing the whole of his means in the foundation and management of this noble institution.

Mr. Rice's advice and instruction set and kept Bianconi in the right road. He helped the young foreigner to learn English. Bianconi was no longer a dunce, as he had been at school; but a keen, active, enterprising fellow, eager to make his way in the world. Mr. Rice encouraged him to be sedulous and industrious, urged him to carefulness and sobriety, and strengthened his religious impressions. The help and friendship of this good man, operating upon the mind and soul of a young man, whose habits of conduct and whose moral and religious character were only in course of formation, could not fail to exercise, as Bianconi always acknowledged they did, a most powerful influence upon the whole of his after life.

Although "three removes" are said to be "as bad as a fire," Bianconi, after remaining about two years at Waterford, made a third removal in 1809, to Clonmel, in the county of Tipperary. Clonmel is the centre of a large corn trade, and is in water communication, by the Suir, with Carrick and Waterford. Bianconi, therefore, merely extended his connection; and still continued his dealings with his customers in the other towns. He made himself more proficient in the mechanical part of his business; and aimed at being the first carver and gilder in the trade. Besides, he had always an eye open for new business. At that time, when the war was raging with France, gold was at a premium. The guinea was worth about twenty-six or twenty-seven shillings. Bianconi therefore began to buy up the hoarded-up guineas of the peasantry. The loyalists became alarmed at his proceedings, and began to circulate the report that Bianconi, the foreigner, was buying up bullion to send secretly to Bonaparte! The country people, however, parted with their guineas readily; for they had no particular hatred of "Bony," but rather admired him.

Bianconi's conduct was of course quite loyal in the matter; he merely bought the guineas as a matter of business, and sold them at a profit to the bankers.

The country people had a difficulty in pronouncing his name. His shop was at the corner of Johnson Street, and instead of Bianconi, he came to be called "Bian of the Corner." He was afterwards known as "Bian."

Bianconi soon became well known after his business was established. He became a proficient in the carving and gilding line, and was looked upon as a thriving man. He began to employ assistants in his trade, and had three German gilders at work. While they were working in the shop he would travel about the country, taking orders and delivering goods—sometimes walking and sometimes driving.

He still retained a little of his old friskiness and spirit of mischief. He was once driving a car from Clonmel to Thurles; he had with him a large looking-glass with a gilt frame, on which about a fortnight's labour had been bestowed. In a fit of exuberant humour he began to tickle the horse under his tail with a straw! In an instant the animal reared and plunged, and then set off at a gallop down hill. The result was, that the car was dashed to bits and the looking-glass broken into a thousand atoms!

On another occasion, a man was carrying to Cashel on his back one of Bianconi's large looking-glasses. An old woman by the wayside, seeing the odd-looking, unwieldy package, asked what it was; on which Bianconi, who was close behind the man carrying the glass, answered that it was "the Repeal of the Union!" The old woman's delight was unbounded! She knelt down on her knees in the middle of the road, as if it had been a picture of the Madonna, and thanked God for having preserved her in her old age to see the Repeal of the Union!

But this little waywardness did not last long. Bianconi's wild oats were soon all sown. He was careful and frugal. As he afterwards used to say, "When I was earning a shilling a day at Clonmel, I lived upon eightpence." He even took lodgers, to relieve him of the charge of his household expenses. But as his means grew, he was soon able to have a conveyance of his own. He first started a yellow gig, in which he drove about from place to place, and was everywhere treated with kindness and hospitality. He was now regarded as "respectable," and as a person worthy to hold some local office. He was elected to a Society for visiting the Sick Poor, and became a Member of the House of Industry. He might have gone on in the same business, winning his way to the Mayoralty of Clonmel, which he afterwards held; but that the old



idea, which had first sprung up in his mind while resting wearily on the milestones along the road, with his heavy case of pictures by his side, again laid hold of him, and he determined now to try whether his plan could not be carried into effect.

He had often lamented the fatigue that poor people had to undergo in travelling with burdens from place to place upon foot, and wondered whether some means might not be devised for alleviating their sufferings. Other people would have suggested "the Government!" Why should not the Government give us this, that, and the other,—give us roads, harbours, carriages, boats, nets, and so on. This, of course, would have been a mistaken idea; for where people are too much helped, they invariably lose the beneficent practice of helping themselves. Charles Bianconi had never been helped, except by advice and friendship. He had helped himself throughout; and now he would try to help others.

The facts were patent to everybody. There was not an Irishman who did not know the difficulty of getting from one town to another. There were roads between them, but no conveyances. There was an abundance of horses in the country, for at the close of the war an unusual number of horses, bred for the army, were thrown upon the market. Then a tax had been levied upon carriages, which sent a large number of jaunting-cars out of employment.

The roads of Ireland were on the whole good, being at that time quite equal, if not superior, to most of those in England. The facts of the abundant horses, the good roads, the number of unemployed outside cars, were generally known; but until Bianconi took the enterprise in hand, there was no person of thought, or spirit, or capital in the country, who put these three things together horses, roads, and cars and dreamt of remedying the great public inconvenience.

It was left for our young Italian carver and gilder, a struggling man of small capital, to take up the enterprise, and show what could be done by prudent action and persevering energy. Though the car system originally "grew out of his back," Bianconi had long been turning the subject over in his mind. His idea was, that we should never despise small interests, nor neglect the wants of poor people. He saw the mail-coaches supplying the requirements of the rich, and enabling them to travel rapidly from place to place. "Then," said he to himself, "would it not be possible for me to make an ordinary two-wheeled car pay, by running as regularly for the accommodation of poor districts and poor people?"

When Mr. Wallace, chairman of the Select Committee on Postage, in 1838, asked Mr. Bianconi, "What induced you to commence the car

establishment?" his answer was, "I did so from what I saw, after coming to this country, of the necessity for such cars, inasmuch as there was no middle mode of conveyance, nothing to fill up the vacuum that existed between those who were obliged to walk and those who posted or rode. My want of knowledge of the language gave me plenty of time for deliberation, and in proportion as I grew up with the knowledge of the language and the localities, this vacuum pressed very heavily upon my mind, till at last I hit upon the idea of running jaunting-cars, and for that purpose I commenced running one between Clonmel and Cahir." [2]

What a happy thing it was for Bianconi and Ireland that he could not speak with facility,—that he did not know the language or the manners of the country! In his case silence was "golden." Had he been able to talk like the people about him, he might have said much and done little, —attempted nothing and consequently achieved nothing. He might have got up a meeting and petitioned Parliament to provide the cars, and subvention the car system; or he might have gone amongst his personal friends, asked them to help him, and failing their help, given up his idea in despair, and sat down grumbling at the people and the Government.

But instead of talking, he proceeded to doing, thereby illustrating Lessona's maxim of *Volere e potere*. After thinking the subject fully over, he trusted to self-help. He found that with his own means, carefully saved, he could make a beginning; and the beginning once made, included the successful ending.

The beginning, it is true, was very small. It was only an ordinary jaunting-car, drawn by a single horse, capable of accommodating six persons. The first car ran between Clonmel and Cahir, a distance of about twelve miles, on the 5th of July, 1815—a memorable day for Bianconi and Ireland. Up to that time the public accommodation for passengers was confined to a few mail and day coaches on the great lines of road, the fares by which were very high, and quite beyond the reach of the poorer or middle-class people.

People did not know what to make of Bianconi's car when it first started. There were, of course, the usual prophets of disaster, who decided that it "would never do." Many thought that no one would pay eighteen-pence for going to Cahir by car when they could walk there for nothing? There were others who thought that Bianconi should have stuck to his shop, as there was no connection whatever between picture-gilding and car-driving!

The truth is, the enterprise at first threatened to be a failure! Scarcely anybody would go by the car. People preferred trudging on foot, and saved their money, which was more valuable to them than their time. The car sometimes ran for weeks without a

passenger. Another man would have given up the enterprise in despair. But this was not the way with Bianconi. He was a man of tenacity and perseverance. What should he do but start an opposition car? Nobody knew of it but himself; not even the driver of the opposition car. However, the rival car was started. The races between the car-drivers, the free lifts occasionally given to passengers, the cheapness of the fare, and the excitement of the contest, attracted the attention of the public. The people took sides, and before long both cars came in full. Fortunately the "great big yallah horse" of the opposition car broke down, and Bianconi had all the trade to himself.

The people became accustomed to travelling. They might still walk to Cahir; but going by car saved their legs, saved their brains, and saved their time. They might go to Cahir market, do their business there, and be comfortably back within the day. Bianconi then thought of extending the car to Tipperary and Limerick. In the course of the same year, 1815, he started another car between Clonmel, Cashel, and Thurles. Thus all the principal towns of Tipperary were, in the first year of the undertaking, connected together by car, besides being also connected with Limerick.

It was easy to understand the convenience of the car system to business men, farmers, and even peasants. Before their establishment, it took a man a whole day to walk from Thurles to Clonmel, the second day to do his business, and the third to walk back again; whereas he could, in one day, travel backwards and forwards between the two towns, and have five or six intermediate hours for the purpose of doing his business. Thus two clear days could be saved.

Still carrying out his scheme, Bianconi, in the following year (1816), put on a car from Clonmel to Waterford. Before that time there was no car accommodation between Clonmel and Carrick-on-Suir, about half-way to Waterford; but there was an accommodation by boat between Carrick and Waterford. The distance between the two latter places was, by road, twelve miles, and by the river Suir twenty-four miles. Tom Morrissey's boat plied two days a week; it carried from eight to ten passengers at 6 1/2d. of the then currency; it did the voyage in from four to five hours, and besides had to wait for the tide to float it up and down the river. When Bianconi's car was put on, it did the distance daily and regularly in two hours, at a fare of two shillings.

The people soon got accustomed to the convenience of the cars. They also learned from them the uses of punctuality and the value of time. They liked the open-air travelling and the sidelong motion. The new cars were also safe and well-appointed. They

were drawn by good horses and driven by good coachmen. Jaunting-car travelling had before been rather unsafe. The country cars were of a ramshackle order, and the drivers were often reckless. "Will I pay the pike, or drive at it, please your honour?" said a driver to his passenger on approaching a turnpike-gate. Sam Lover used to tell a story of a car-driver, who, after driving his passenger up-hill and down-hill, along a very bad road, asked him for something extra at the end of his journey.

"Faith," said the driver, "its not putting me off with this ye'd be, if ye knew but all." The gentleman gave him another shilling. "And now what do you mean by saying, 'if ye knew but all?'" "That I druv yer honor the last three miles widout a linch-pin!"

Bianconi, to make sure of the soundness and safety of his cars, set up a workshop to build them for himself. He could thus depend upon their soundness, down even to the linch-pin itself. He kept on his carving and gilding shop until his car business had increased so much that it required the whole of his time and attention; and then he gave it up. In fact, when he was able to run a car from Clonmel to Waterford- a distance of thirty-two miles-at a fare of three-and-sixpence, his eventual triumph was secure.

He made Waterford one of the centres of his operations, as he had already made Clonmel. In 1818 he established a car between Waterford and Ross, in the following year a car between Waterford and Wexford, and another between Waterford and Enniscorthy. A few years later he established other cars between Waterford and Kilkenny, and Waterford and Dungarvan. From these furthest points, again, other cars were established in communication with them, carrying the line further north, east, and west. So much had the travelling between Clonmel and Waterford increased, that in a few years (instead of the eight or ten passengers conveyed by Tom Morrissey's boat on the Suir) there was horse and car power capable of conveying a hundred passengers daily between the two places.

Bianconi did a great stroke of business at the Waterford election of 1826. Indeed it was the turning point of his fortunes. He was at first greatly cramped for capital. The expense of maintaining and increasing his stock of cars, and of foddering his horses was very great; and he was always on the look-out for more capital. When the Waterford election took place, the Beresford party, then all-powerful, engaged all his cars to drive the electors to the poll. The popular party, however, started a candidate, and applied to Bianconi for help. But he could not comply, for his cars were all engaged. The morning after his

refusal of the application, Bianconi was pelted with mud. One or two of his cars and horses were heaved over the bridge.

Bianconi then wrote to Beresford's agent, stating that he could no longer risk the lives of his drivers and his horses, and desiring to be released from his engagement. The Beresford party had no desire to endanger the lives of the car-drivers or their horses, and they set Bianconi free. He then engaged with the popular party, and enabled them to win the election. For this he was paid the sum of a thousand pounds. This access of capital was greatly helpful to him under the circumstances. He was able to command the market, both for horses and fodder. He was also placed in a position to extend the area of his car routes.

He now found time, amidst his numerous avocations, to get married! He was forty years of age before this event occurred. He married Eliza Hayes, some twenty years younger than himself, the daughter of Patrick Hayes, of Dublin, and of Henrietta Burton, an English-woman. The marriage was celebrated on the 14th of February, 1827; and the ceremony was performed by the late Archbishop Murray. Mr. Bianconi must now have been in good circumstances, as he settled two thousand pounds upon his wife on their marriage-day. His early married life was divided between his cars, electioneering, and Repeal agitation—for he was always a great ally of O'Connell. Though he joined in the Repeal movement, his sympathies were not with it; for he preferred Imperial to Home Rule. But he could never deny himself the pleasure of following O'Connell, "right or wrong."

Let us give a picture of Bianconi now. The curly-haired Italian boy had grown a handsome man. His black locks curled all over his head like those of an ancient Roman bust. His face was full of power, his chin was firm, his nose was finely cut and well-formed; his eyes were keen and sparkling, as if throwing out a challenge to fortune. He was active, energetic, healthy, and strong, spending his time mostly in the open air. He had a wonderful recollection of faces, and rarely forgot to recognise the countenance that he had once seen. He even knew all his horses by name. He spent little of his time at home, but was constantly rushing about the country after business, extending his connections, organizing his staff, and arranging the centres of his traffic.

To return to the car arrangements. A line was early opened from Clonmel—which was at first the centre of the entire connection—to Cork; and that line was extended northward, through Mallow and Limerick. Then, the Limerick car went on to Tralee, and from thence to Cahirciveen, on the south-west coast of Ireland. The cars were also extended northward from Thurles to Roscrea, Ballinasloe, Athlone, Roscommon, and Sligo, and to

all the principal towns in the north-west counties of Ireland.

The cars interlaced with each other, and plied, not so much in continuous main lines, as across country, so as to bring all important towns, but especially the market towns, into regular daily communication with each other. Thus, in the course of about thirty years, Bianconi succeeded in establishing a system of internal communication in Ireland, which traversed the main highways and cross-roads from town to town, and gave the public a regular and safe car accommodation at the average rate of a penny-farthing per mile.

The traffic in all directions steadily increased. The first car used was capable of accommodating only six persons. This was between Clonmel and Cahir. But when it went on to Limerick, a larger car was required. The traffic between Clonmel and Waterford was also begun with a small-sized car. But in the course of a few years, there were four large-sized cars, travelling daily each way, between the two places. And so it was in other directions, between Cork in the south; and Sligo and Strabane in the north and north-west; between Wexford in the east, and Galway and Skibbereen in the west and south-west.

Bianconi first increased the accommodation of these cars so as to carry four persons on each side instead of three, drawn by two horses. But as the two horses could quite as easily carry two additional passengers, another piece was added to the car so as to carry five passengers. Then another four-wheeled car was built, drawn by three horses, so as to carry six passengers on each side. And lastly, a fourth horse was used, and the car was further enlarged, so as to accommodate seven, and eventually eight passengers on each side, with one on the box, which made a total accommodation for seventeen passengers. The largest and heaviest of the long cars, on four wheels, was called "Finn MacCoul's," after Ossian's Giant; the fast cars, of a light build, on two wheels, were called "Faugh-a-ballagh," or "clear the way"; while the intermediate cars were named "Massey Dawsons," after a popular Tory squire.

When Bianconi's system was complete, he had about a hundred vehicles at work; a hundred and forty stations for changing horses, where from one to eight grooms were employed; about a hundred drivers, thirteen hundred horses, performing an average distance of three thousand eight hundred miles daily; passing through twenty-three counties, and visiting no fewer than a hundred and twenty of the principal towns and cities in the south and west and midland counties of Ireland. Bianconi's horses consumed on an average from three to four thousand tons of hay yearly, and from thirty to forty thousand barrels of oats, all of which were purchased in the respective localities in which they

were grown.

Bianconi's cars—or "The Bians"—soon became very popular. Everybody was under obligations to them. They greatly promoted the improvement of the country. People could go to market and buy or sell their goods more advantageously. It was cheaper for them to ride than to walk. They brought the whole people of the country so much nearer to each other. They virtually opened up about seven-tenths of Ireland to civilisation and commerce, and among their other advantages, they opened markets for the fresh fish caught by the fishermen of Galway, Clifden, Westport, and other places, enabling them to be sold throughout the country on the day after they were caught. They also opened the magnificent scenery of Ireland to tourists, and enabled them to visit Bantry Bay, Killarney, South Donegal, and the wilds of Connemara in safety, all the year round.

Bianconi's service to the public was so great, and it was done with so much tact, that nobody had a word to say against him. Everybody was his friend. Not even the Whiteboys would injure him or the mails he carried. He could say with pride, that in the most disturbed times his cars had never been molested. Even during the Whiteboy insurrection, though hundreds of people were on the roads at night, the traffic went on without interference. At the meeting of the British Association in 1857, Bianconi said: "My conveyances, many of them carrying very important mails, have been travelling during all hours of the day and night, often in lonely and unfrequented places; and during the long period of forty-two years that my establishment has been in existence, the slightest injury has never been done by the people to my property, or that entrusted to my care; and this fact gives me greater pleasure than any pride I might feel in reflecting upon the other rewards of my life's labour."

Of course Bianconi's cars were found of great use for carrying the mails. The post was, at the beginning of his enterprise, very badly served in Ireland, chiefly by foot and horse posts. When the first car was run from Clonmel to Cahir, Bianconi offered to carry the mail for half the price then paid for "sending it alternately by a mule and a bad horse." The post was afterwards found to come regularly instead of irregularly to Cahir; and the practice of sending the mails by Bianconi's cars increased from year to year. Dispatch won its way to popularity in Ireland as elsewhere, and Bianconi lived to see all the cross-posts in Ireland arranged on his system.

The postage authorities frequently used the cars of Bianconi as a means of competing with the few existing mail-coaches. For instance, they asked him to compete for carrying the post between Limerick and Tralee, then carried by a mail-coach. Before

tendering, Bianconi called on the contractor, to induce him to give in to the requirements of the Post Office, because he knew that the postal authorities only desired to make use of him to fight the coach proprietors. But having been informed that it was the intention of the Post Office to discontinue the mail-coach whether Bianconi took the contract or not, he at length sent in his tender, and obtained the contract.

He succeeded in performing the service, and delivered the mail much earlier than it had been done before. But the former contractor, finding that he had made a mistake, got up a movement in favour of re-establishing the mail-coach upon that line of road; and he eventually induced the postage authorities to take the mail contract out of the hands of Bianconi, and give it back to himself, as formerly. Bianconi, however, continued to keep his cars upon the road. He had before stated to the contractor, that if he once started his cars, he would not leave it, even though the contract were taken from him. Both coach and car therefore ran for years upon the road, each losing thousands of pounds. "But," said Bianconi, when asked about the matter by the Committee on Postage in 1838, "I kept my word: I must either lose character by breaking my word, or lose money. I prefer losing money to giving up the line of road."

Bianconi had also other competitors to contend with, especially from coach and car proprietors. No sooner had he shown to others the way to fortune, than he had plenty of imitators. But they did not possess his rare genius for organisation, nor perhaps his still rarer principles. They had not his tact, his foresight, his knowledge, nor his perseverance. When Bianconi was asked by the Select Committee on Postage, "Do the opposition cars started against you induce you to reduce your fares?" his answer was, "No; I seldom do. Our fares are so close to the first cost, that if any man runs cheaper than I do, he must starve off, as few can serve the public lower and better than I do." [3]

Bianconi was once present at a meeting of car proprietors, called for the purpose of uniting to put down a new opposition coach. Bianconi would not concur, but protested against it, saying, "If car proprietors had united against me when I started, I should have been crushed. But is not the country big enough for us all?" The coach proprietors, after many angry words, threatened to unite in running down Bianconi himself. "Very well," he said, "you may run me off the road—that is possible; but while there is this" (pulling a flower out of his coat) "you will not put me down." The threat merely ended in smoke, the courage and perseverance of Bianconi having long since become generally recognised.

We have spoken of the principles of Mr. Bianconi. They were most



honourable. His establishment might be spoken of as a school of morality. In the first place, he practically taught and enforced the virtues of punctuality, truthfulness, sobriety, and honesty. He also taught the public generally the value of time, to which, in fact, his own success was in a great measure due. While passing through Clonmel in 1840, Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall called upon Bianconi and went over his establishment, as well as over his house and farm, a short distance from the town. The travellers had a very pressing engagement, and could not stay to hear the story of how their entertainer had contrived to "make so much out of so little." "How much time have you?" he asked. "Just five minutes." "The car," says Mr. Hall, "had conveyed us to the back entrance. Bianconi instantly rang the bell, and said to the servant, 'Tell the driver to bring the car round to the front,' adding, 'that will save one minute, and enable me to tell you all within the time.' This was, in truth the secret of his success, making the most of time." [4]

But the success of Bianconi was also due to the admirable principles on which his establishment was conducted. His drivers were noted as being among the most civil and obliging men in Ireland, besides being pleasant companions to boot. They were careful, punctual, truthful, and honest; but all this was the result of strict discipline on the part of their master.

The drivers were taken from the lowest grades of the establishment, and promoted to higher positions according to their respective merits as opportunity offered. "Much surprise," says Bianconi, "has often been expressed at the high order of men connected with my car establishment and at its popularity; but parties thus expressing themselves forget to look at Irish society with sufficient grasp. For my part, I cannot better compare it than to a man merging to convalescence from a serious attack of malignant fever, and requiring generous nutrition in place of medical treatment" [5]

To attach the men to the system, as well as to confer upon them the due reward for their labour, he provided for all the workmen who had been injured, worn out, or become superannuated in his service. The drivers could then retire upon a full pension, which they enjoyed during the rest of their lives. They were also paid their full wages during sickness, and at their death Bianconi educated their children, who grew up to manhood, and afterwards filled the situations held by their deceased parents.

Every workman had thus a special interest in his own good conduct. They knew that nothing but misbehaviour could deprive them of the benefits they enjoyed; and hence their endeavours to maintain their positions by observing the strict discipline enjoined by their employer.

Sobriety was, of course, indispensable—a drunken car-driver being amongst the most dangerous of servants. The drivers must also be truthful, and the man found telling a lie, however venial, was instantly dismissed. Honesty was also strongly enforced, not only for the sake of the public, but for the sake of the men themselves. Hence he never allowed his men to carry letters. If they did so, he fined them in the first instance very severely, and in the second instance dismissed them. "I do so," he said, "because if I do not respect other institutions (the Post Office), my men will soon learn not to respect my own. Then, for carrying letters during the extent of their trip, the men most probably would not get money, but drink, and hence become dissipated and unworthy of confidence."

Thus truth, accuracy, punctuality, sobriety, and honesty being strictly enforced, formed the fundamental principle of the entire management. At the same time, Bianconi treated his drivers with every confidence and respect. He made them feel that, in doing their work well, they conferred a greater benefit on him and on the public than he did on them by paying them their wages.

When attending the British Association at Cork, Bianconi said that, "in proportion as he advanced his drivers, he lowered their wages." "Then," said Dr. Taylor, the Secretary, "I wouldn't like to serve you." "Yes, you would," replied Bianconi, "because in promoting my drivers I place them on a more lucrative line, where their certainty of receiving fees from passengers is greater."

Bianconi was as merciful to his horses as to his men. He had much greater difficulty at first in finding good men than good horses, because the latter were not exposed to the temptations to which the former were subject. Although the price of horses continued to rise, he nevertheless bought the best horses at increased prices, and he took care not to work them overmuch. He gave his horses as well as his men their seventh day's rest. "I find by experience," he said, "that I can work a horse eight miles a day for six days in the week, easier than I can work six miles for seven days; and that is one of my reasons for having no cars, unless carrying a mail, plying upon Sundays."

Bianconi had confidence in men generally. The result was that men had confidence in him. Even the Whiteboys respected him. At the close of a long and useful life he could say with truth, "I never yet attempted to do an act of generosity or common justice, publicly or privately, that I was not met by manifold reciprocity."

By bringing the various classes of society into connection with

each other, Bianconi believed, and doubtless with truth, that he was the means of making them respect each other, and that he thereby promoted the civilisation of Ireland. At the meeting of the social Science Congress, held at Dublin in 1861, he said: "The state of the roads was such as to limit the rate of travelling to about seven miles an hour, and the passengers were often obliged to walk up hills. Thus all classes were brought together, and I have felt much pleasure in believing that the intercourse thus created tended to inspire the higher classes with respect and regard for the natural good qualities of the humbler people, which the latter reciprocated by a becoming deference and an anxiety to please and oblige. Such a moral benefit appears to me to be worthy of special notice and congratulation."

Even when railways were introduced, Bianconi did not resist them, but welcomed them as "the great civilisers of the age." There was, in his opinion, room enough for all methods of conveyance in Ireland. When Captain Thomas Drummond was appointed Under-Secretary for Ireland in 1835, and afterwards chairman of the Irish Railway Commission, he had often occasion to confer with Mr. Bianconi, who gave him every assistance. Mr. Drummond conceived the greatest respect for Bianconi, and often asked him how it was that he, a foreigner, should have acquired so extensive an influence and so distinguished a position in Ireland?

"The question came upon me," said Bianconi, "by surprise, and I did not at the time answer it. But another day he repeated his question, and I replied, 'Well, it was because, while the big and the little were fighting, I crept up between them, carried out my enterprise, and obliged everybody.'" This, however, did not satisfy Mr. Drummond, who asked Bianconi to write down for him an autobiography, containing the incidents of his early life down to the period of his great Irish enterprise. Bianconi proceeded to do this, writing down his past history in the occasional intervals which he could snatch from the immense business which he still continued personally to superintend. But before the "Drummond memoir" could be finished Mr. Drummond himself had ceased to live, having died in 1840, principally of overwork. What he thought of Bianconi, however, has been preserved in his Report of the Irish Railway Commission of 1838, written by Mr. Drummond himself, in which he thus speaks of his enterprising friend in starting and conducting the great Irish car establishment:—

"With a capital little exceeding the expense of outfit he commenced. Fortune, or rather the due reward of industry and integrity, favoured his first efforts. He soon began to increase the number of his cars and multiply routes, until his

establishment spread over the whole of Ireland. These results are the more striking and instructive as having been accomplished in a district which has long been represented as the focus of unreclaimed violence and barbarism, where neither life nor property can be deemed secure. Whilst many possessing a personal interest in everything tending to improve or enrich the country have been so misled or inconsiderate as to repel by exaggerated statements British capital from their doors, this foreigner chose Tipperary as the centre of his operations, wherein to embark all the fruits of his industry in a traffic peculiarly exposed to the power and even to the caprice of the peasantry. The event has shown that his confidence in their good sense was not ill-grounded.

"By a system of steady and just treatment he has obtained a complete mastery, exempt from lawless intimidation or control, over the various servants and agents employed by him, and his establishment is popular with all classes on account of its general usefulness and the fair liberal spirit of its management.

The success achieved by this spirited gentleman is the result, not of a single speculation, which might have been favoured by local circumstances, but of a series of distinct experiments, all of which have been successful."

When the railways were actually made and opened, they ran right through the centre of Bianconi's long-established systems of communication. They broke up his lines, and sent them to the right and left. But, though they greatly disturbed him, they did not destroy him. In his enterprising hands the railways merely changed the direction of the cars. He had at first to take about a thousand horses off the road, with thirty-seven vehicles, travelling 2446 miles daily. But he remodelled his system so as to run his cars between the railway-stations and the towns to the right and left of the main lines.

He also directed his attention to those parts of Ireland which had not before had the benefit of his conveyances. And in thus still continuing to accommodate the public, the number of his horses and carriages again increased, until, in 1861, he was employing 900 horses, travelling over 4000 miles daily; and in 1866, when he resigned his business, he was running only 684 miles daily below the maximum run in 1845, before the railways had begun to interfere with his traffic.

His cars were then running to Dungarvan, Waterford, and Wexford in the south-west of Ireland; to Bandon, Rosscarbery, Skibbereen, and Cahirciveen, in the south; to Tralee, Galway, Clifden, Westport, and Belmullet in the west; to Sligo, Enniskillen, Strabane, and Letterkenny in the north; while, in the centre of

Ireland, the towns of Thurles, Kilkenny, Birr, and Ballinasloe were also daily served by the cars of Bianconi.

At the meeting of the British Association, held in Dublin in 1857, Mr. Bianconi mentioned a fact which, he thought, illustrated the increasing prosperity of the country and the progress of the people. It was, that although the population had so considerably decreased by emigration and other causes, the proportion of travellers by his conveyances continued to increase, demonstrating not only that the people had more money, but that they appreciated the money value of time, and also the advantages of the car system established for their accommodation.

Although railways must necessarily have done much to promote the prosperity of Ireland, it is very doubtful whether the general passenger public were not better served by the cars of Bianconi than by the railways which superseded them. Bianconi's cars were on the whole cheaper, and were always run in correspondence, so as to meet each other; whereas many of the railway trains in the south of Ireland, under the competitive system existing between the several companies, are often run so as to miss each other. The present working of the Irish railway traffic provokes perpetual irritation amongst the Irish people, and sufficiently accounts for the frequent petitions presented to Parliament that they should be taken in hand and worked by the State.

Bianconi continued to superintend his great car establishment until within the last few years. He had a constitution of iron, which he expended in active daily work. He liked to have a dozen irons in the fire, all red-hot at once. At the age of seventy he was still a man in his prime; and he might be seen at Clonmel helping, at busy times, to load the cars, unpacking and unstrapping the luggage where it seemed to be inconveniently placed; for he was a man who could never stand by and see others working without having a hand in it himself. Even when well on to eighty, he still continued to grapple with the immense business involved in working a traffic extending over two thousand five hundred miles of road.

Nor was Bianconi without honour in his adopted country. He began his great enterprise in 1815, though it was not until 1831 that he obtained letters of naturalisation. His application for these privileges was supported by the magistrates of Tipperary and by the Grand Jury, and they were at once granted. In 1844 he was elected Mayor of Clonmel, and took his seat as Chairman at the Borough Petty Sessions to dispense justice.

The first person brought before him was James Ryan, who had been drunk and torn a constable's belt. "Well, Ryan," said the magistrate, "what have you to say?" "Nothing, your worship; only

I wasn't drunk." "Who tore the constable's belt?" "He was bloated after his Christmas dinner, your worship, and the belt burst!" "You are so very pleasant," said the magistrate, "that you will have to spend forty-eight hours in gaol."

He was re-elected Mayor in the following year, very much against his wish. He now began to buy land, for "land hunger" was strong upon him. In 1846 he bought the estate of Longfield, in the parish of Boherlahan, county of Tipperary. It consisted of about a thousand acres of good land, with a large cheerful house overlooking the river Suir. He went on buying more land, until he became possessor of about eight thousand English acres.

One of his favourite sayings was: "Money melts, but land holds while grass grows and water runs." He was an excellent landlord, built comfortable houses for his tenantry, and did what he could for their improvement. Without solicitation, the Government appointed him a justice of the peace and a Deputy-lieutenant for the county of Tipperary. Everything that he did seemed to thrive. He was honest, straightforward, loyal, and law-abiding.

On first taking possession of his estate at Longfield, he was met by a procession of the tenantry, who received him with great enthusiasm. In his address to them, he said, amongst other things: "Allow me to impress upon you the great importance of respecting the laws. The laws are made for the good and the benefit of society, and for the punishment of the wicked. No one but an enemy would counsel you to outrage the laws. Above all things, avoid secret and unlawful societies. Much of the improvement now going on amongst us is owing to the temperate habits of the people, to the mission of my much respected friend, Father Mathew, and to the advice of the Liberator. Follow the advice of O'Connell; be temperate, moral, peaceable; and you will advance your country, ameliorate your condition, and the blessing of God will attend all your efforts."

Bianconi was always a great friend of O'Connell. From an early period he joined him in the Catholic Emancipation movement. He took part with him in founding the National Bank in Ireland. In course of time the two became more intimately related. Bianconi's son married O'Connell's granddaughter; and O'Connell's nephew, Morgan John, married Bianconi's daughter. Bianconi's son died in 1864, leaving three daughters, but no male heir to carry on the family name. The old man bore the blow of his son's premature death with fortitude, and laid his remains in the mortuary chapel, which he built on his estate at Longfield.

In the following year, when he was seventy-eight, he met with a severe accident. He was overturned, and his thigh was severely fractured. He was laid up for six months, quite incapable of

stirring. He was afterwards able to get about in a marvellous way, though quite crippled. As his life's work was over, he determined to retire finally from business; and he handed over the whole of his cars, coaches, horses, and plant, with all the lines of road he was then working, to his employes, on the most liberal terms.

My youngest son met Mr. Bianconi, by appointment, at the Roman Catholic church at Boherlahan, in the summer of 1872. Although the old gentleman had to be lifted into and out of his carriage by his two men-servants, he was still as active-minded as ever. Close to the church at Boherlahan is Bianconi's mortuary chapel, which he built as a sort of hobby, for the last resting-place of himself and his family. The first person interred in it was his eldest daughter, who died in Italy; the second was his only son. A beautiful monument with a bas-relief has been erected in the chapel by Benzoni, an Italian sculptor, to the memory of his daughter.

"As we were leaving the chapel," my son informs me, "we passed a long Irish car containing about sixteen people, the tenants of Mr. Bianconi, who are brought at his expense from all parts of the estate. He is very popular with his tenantry, regarding their interests as his own; and he often quotes the words of his friend Mr. Drummond, that 'property has its duties as well as its rights.' He has rebuilt nearly every house on his extensive estates in Tipperary.

"On our way home, the carriage stopped to let me down and see the strange remains of an ancient fort, close by the roadside. It consists of a high grass-grown mound, surrounded by a moat. It is one of the so-called Danish forts, which are found in all parts of Ireland. If it be true that these forts were erected by the Danes, they must at one time have had a strong hold of the greater part of Ireland.

"The carriage entered a noble avenue of trees, with views of prettily enclosed gardens on either side. Mr. Bianconi exclaimed, 'Welcome to the Carman's Stage!' Longfield House, which we approached, is a fine old-fashioned house, situated on the river Suir, a few miles south of Cashel, one of the most ancient cities in Ireland. Mr. Bianconi and his family were most hospitable; and I found him most lively and communicative. He talked cleverly and with excellent choice of language for about three hours, during which I learnt much from him.

"Like most men who have accomplished great things, and overcome many difficulties, Mr. Bianconi is fond of referring to the past events in his interesting life. The acuteness of his conversation is wonderful. He hits off a keen thought in a few

words, sometimes full of wit and humour. I thought this very good: 'Keep before the wheels, young man, or they will run over you: always keep before the wheels!' He read over to me the memoir he had prepared at the suggestion of Mr. Drummond, relating to the events of his early life; and this opened the way for a great many other recollections not set down in the book.

"He vividly remembered the parting from his mother, nearly seventy years ago, and spoke of her last words to him: 'When you remember me, think of me as waiting at this window, watching for your return.' This led him to speak of the great forgetfulness and want of respect which children have for their parents nowadays. 'We seem,' he said, 'to have fallen upon a disrespectful age.'

"'It is strange,' said he, 'how little things influence one's mind and character. When I was a boy at Waterford, I bought an old second-hand book from a man on the quay, and the maxim on its title-page fixed itself deeply on my memory. It was, "Truth, like water, will find its own level."' And this led him to speak of the great influence which the example and instruction of Mr. Rice, of the Christian Brothers, had had upon his mind and character. 'That religious institution,' said he, 'of which Mr. Rice was one of the founders, has now spread itself over the country, and, by means of the instruction which the members have imparted to the poorer ignorant classes, they have effected quite a revolution in the south of Ireland.'

"'I am not much of a reader,' said Mr. Bianconi; 'the best part of my reading has consisted in reading way-bills. But I was once complimented by Justice Lefroy upon my books. He remarked to me what a wonderful education I must have had to invent my own system of book-keeping. Yes,' said he, pointing to his ledgers, 'there they are.' The books are still preserved, recording the progress of the great car enterprise. They show at first the small beginnings, and then the rapid growth—the tens growing to hundreds, and the hundreds to thousands—the ledgers and day-books containing, as it were, the whole history of the undertaking—of each car, of each man, of each horse, and of each line of road, recorded most minutely.

"'The secret of my success,' said he, 'has been promptitude, fair dealing, and good humour. And this I will add, what I have often said before, that I never did a kind action but it was returned to me tenfold. My cars have never received the slightest injury from the people. Though travelling through the country for about sixty years, the people have throughout respected the property intrusted to me. My cars have passed through lonely and unfrequented places, and they have never, even in the most disturbed times, been attacked. That, I think, is an



extraordinary testimony to the high moral character of the Irish people.'

"'It is not money, but the genius of money that I esteem,' said Bianconi; 'not money itself, but money used as a creative power.'

And he himself has furnished in his own life the best possible illustration of his maxim He created a new industry, gave employment to an immense number of persons, promoted commerce, extended civilisation; and, though a foreigner, proved one of the greatest of Ireland's benefactors."

About two years after the date of my son's visit, Charles Bianconi passed away, full of years and honours; and his remains were laid beside those of his son and daughter, in the mortuary chapel at Boherlahan. He died in 1875, in his ninetieth year. Well might Signor Henrico Mayer say, at the British Association at Cork in 1846, that "he felt proud as an Italian to hear a compatriot so deservedly eulogised; and although Ireland might claim Bianconi as a citizen, yet the Italians should ever with pride hail him as a countryman, whose industry and virtue reflected honour on the country of his birth."

#### Footnotes for Chapter IX.

[1] This article originally appeared in 'Good Words.' A biography of Charles Bianconi, by his daughter, Mrs. Morgan John O'Connell, has since been published; but the above article is thought worthy of republication, as its contents were for the most part taken principally from Mr. Bianconi's own lips.

[2] Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee on Postage (Second Report), 1838, p. 284.

[3] Evidence before the Select Committee on Postage, 1838.

[4] Hall's 'Ireland,' ii. 76.

[5] Paper read before the British Association at Cork, 1843.