

PREFACE.

IN the summer of 1879 the publishers of this work entered into negotiations with the writer for the preparation of a work on the West; it was to be an octavo volume of about five hundred pages; and, having had considerable experience in geographical and historical works, the writer felt confident of its completion in the early spring of 1880. But as he proceeded with his work, both he and his publishers felt that their original plan was too circumscribed for the subject before them. The country to be described was vast, beyond our ordinary conceptions of vastness; much of it had never been adequately described, and the descriptions hitherto published were as far behind the existing facts as a ten-year-old almanac. The tide of immigration had doubled and quadrupled since 1876, and what was a howling wilderness, with only a half dozen straggling settlements, five years before, had already attained the population and organization of a State. The railways, which during the six years of financial depression, had added very little to their mileage in the new States and Territories, were now stretching their iron fingers across the continent, pioneers instead of followers of settlement and civilization. The loaded trains groaned beneath the weight of the superabundant crops; over all the hillsides the cattle roamed, fat, sleek and contented, in unnumbered thousands; all the plains were spangled with millions of white-fleeced sheep. Along both slopes of the Rocky Mountains, from Texas to British America, in the summits and passes of the Sierra Madre, the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades, as well as in the smaller outlying ranges between, and even on the hills of the lower Coast Range, gold and silver, quicksilver and platinum, copper, lead and zinc, coal, salt and sulphur, were yielding up their treasures; and every day was adding largely to the amount. The population, which was pouring into this vast empire, was composed of almost every people under the sun; and while the leaven of sturdy law-abiding citizens from the Atlantic States was large, it remained to be seen whether the amalgamation would result in an intelligent and patriotic citizenship; whether education, moral principle, and higher aims than mere money-getting, would gain the ascendancy.