

PREFACE.

IN attempting to write the story of the lives of the presidents of the latter half of the nineteenth century, several difficulties have to be faced. In the first place it is almost impossible to get trustworthy material. The lives of these great public men have been written by friends, often for party purposes, when their faults have been concealed and their mistakes made to appear as fine qualities. Time, the greatest of all critics, has not yet had the opportunity of sifting the wheat from the chaff in their lives.

It has been my aim in this book as far as possible to let the presidents speak for themselves. Where I could I have quoted freely from their letters and speeches, and from the utterances of their immediate friends. In each case considerable space has been given to the early life of the subject under discussion. It must be an inspiration to a nation such as the United States, as it considers the men it has raised to sit in authority at Washington to guide its destinies, to know that the majority of these men have risen from the very humblest origin. It only needs the study of the lives of the presidents to see that the child of the most obscure citizen of the