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WHEN the project of a railroad across the American Continent was first broached, and for many years afterward, the northern route, by way of the valleys of the Missouri and the Columbia rivers, was the only one thought of. This was the route explored by Lewis and Clarke in the first decade of the century. It was known to be a route through valleys and over plains for nearly its entire distance; it crossed the Rocky Mountain barriers at low altitudes; it approached the Pacific by way of the greatest river of the western coast; at its farthest limit lay the most capacious and beautiful deep-water tidal estuary to be found on the continent. It avoided the deserts lying further south, and was believed to traverse the only continuously habitable belt of country stretching from the Mississippi to the Pacific coast. Long before the epoch of rail transportation this route had been explored for military and commercial purposes by the United States Government. Very soon after the railway system was introduced in the United States—indeed as early as 1835—it was advocated by Dr. Barlow. Between 1845 and 1849 it was pressed upon the attention of Congress and State Legislatures by the earnest, persistent and self-sacrificing efforts of Asa Whitney. The ideas of Whitney were taken up in 1852 by one of the ablest of the world's great engineers, Edwin F. Johnson, and given practical form and value by the aid of his genius and technical skill. All this happened before any definite business plan had been formed for building the