

P R E F A C E.

BURIED amid the sublime passes of the Sierra Nevada are old men, who, when children, strayed away from our crowded settlements, and, gradually moving farther and farther from civilization, have in time become domiciliated among the wild beasts and wilder savages—have lived scores of years whetting their intellects in the constant struggle for self-preservation; whose only pleasurable excitement was found in facing danger; whose only repose was to recuperate, preparatory to participating in new and thrilling adventures. Such men, whose simple tale would pale the imaginative creations of our most popular fictionists, sink into their obscure graves unnoticed and unknown. Indian warriors, whose bravery and self-devotion find no parallels in the preserved traditions of all history, end their career on the “war-path,” sing in triumph their death-song, and become silent, leaving no impression on the intellectual world.

Among the many men who have distinguished themselves as mountaineers, traders, chiefs of great Indian nations, and as early pioneers in the settlement of our Pacific coast, is James P. Beckwourth, whose varied and startling personal adventures would have found no record but for the accident of meeting with a wanderer in the mountains of California, who became interested