

PREFACE.

EXPLANATORY

TO MY FEW PARTICULAR FRIENDS, IF I HAVE ANY SUCH,
WHICH THE GENERAL READER HAS PERMISSION TO
PASS BY, IF HE HOPE FOR SOMETHING BETTER FUR-
THER ON.

A CONSIDERABLE part of the book before you was written in '51. The finishing of it was so long delayed that I had nearly given it up; but a strong desire to complete what I had begun, and a resolution not easily defeated, prevented my doing so altogether; and within the last few months I have been so often urged to tell my story of California, that, at length, such as it is, it lies before you. If there appear to be discrepancies between the early and later pages, you will please bear in mind that, in many respects, there have been such changes in the things and aspects sought to be described, as half a century would not produce in many older countries.

In returning to the work, I frequently felt an inclination to strike out from the MSS. passages which

were not truly descriptive of things as they now are, but, remembering that whatever has been true in our history would be equally interesting with what is so to-day, I have not erased a line of the early writing. The book may, perhaps, have a greater interest from this fact than if it had been written in a few consecutive weeks.

The personal experience related in it, extraordinary as it may appear, is as tamely stated as truth will permit; and my own has been, in many respects, not more novel than that of scores of my sex who emigrated both before and after 1848. Mine has included none of that terrible physical suffering which has fallen upon many women who had been tenderly nurtured. To the mental anguish, the racking anxiety, the unmitigated loneliness, the numberless humiliations, have not been added the hardship and destitution which have been the lot of many on their first arrival. The Goodness which overrules all, and fits the burden to its bearer, has spared me that, and though I can never recall, even momentarily, what I have suffered, without shuddering, and shrinking from the recollection as the victim who turns his weary eye upon the rack, yet I have to thank one who better knew my strength than I did myself, that some bitter ingredients were withheld from my cup.

Let me pass to say a few words on general topics,

and close. Life in California is anomalous—unique—and a book which should faithfully describe it, must contain strange developments; tales and pictures, some of which would be set down by those who had never seen the country, and, perchance, by some who had, as exaggerations, others as falsehoods. I am not conscious that a single passage in this volume deserves the application of either of these comments. The grotesque features of our life defy the caricaturist—the pathetic ones could derive no additional power to pain the heart, from the most exalted and tender imagination. We are extreme in revelry, in gloom, in vice, in pleasure (not happiness), in sorrow, in munificence (not in meanness), and I feel that, so far from having exaggerated or embellished, I have, in many things, fallen greatly short of conveying the full impression which actual every-day facts make upon observing and thoughtful minds among us. My best abilities would fail me in the task. Only one of the masters—a Dickens or a Jerrold—could do that.

But such as I have been able to make it you have it;—the book long promised, and by some of you, I will please myself with believing, still desired.

Let it not be forgotten in the reading, that the California of to-day is neither in material nor moral aspect the California of 1851–2 and 3. The exterior and the interior life are alike advancing.

In riding through one of her large agricultural vallies, a few weeks since, where, so late as 1852, there was scarcely a mile of fence to be seen from one end of it to the other, I saw now continuous grain-fields, of six or eight miles in length, with, perhaps, a dozen reapers, of the best patent, marching up and down, leveling the tall thick harvest. Comfortable, substantial farm-houses, or neat cottages, stand upon the sites of the little canvas shanties we used to see, and neat, often elegant vehicles, have taken the place of the clumsy coarse wagon of those times. You may travel in summer on all the main roads, from the north to the south, in the best Concord or Troy coaches, and be received, in the more considerable towns, at as good hotels as you will find at corresponding places anywhere in the Union. And even this great material progress is less expressive of the growth of the state than other signs at present visible in her condition.

The revolution in progress here at this hour will shortly have inaugurated a new and more hopeful state; and there is little reason to dread that the influences from which we have hitherto suffered, will ever regather to such wanton waste of life and character as we have witnessed. The present is a war, not between parties or persons, but between the principles of good and evil. The latter of which has been so

long in the ascendant, that it is not wonderful that common observers should feel there was no redemption for the country that bore it. They erred. There is redemption for California—as, indeed, there ultimately is for all people, however low, whose lives contain the progressive principle that distinguishes ours in free America—for her there is swift redemption, which it is idle and wasteful for the outcast and worthless to resist. It will be the result of her intelligence and true moral life, working together for a result, which is preordained to them. The self assertion they labor for, is as certain to follow the overthrow of villainy and corruption as day the night.

God speed the fearless souls who are striving for it.

E. W. FARNHAM.

SANTA CRUZ, *July*, 1856.