

An intelligent gentleman of close and accurate powers of observation, who, in the summer of 1859, travelled leisurely across the continent to California, furnished the author with an extended and minutely graphic description of the country over which he travelled—to wit, the valley of the Platte, the mountains north of Denver, the basin of Utah north of Salt Lake, the valley of the Humboldt, and thence to the Sierra Nevada—very nearly the route of the Union Pacific Railway of the Platte, and that of the Central Pacific Railroad from Sacramento to Salt Lake. Upon reaching the eastern base of the Sierra Nevada range, under the head of “General Remarks upon the region traversed,” he said:

“The country passed over from Fort Laramie to this place is good for nothing, unless I except Bear River Valley; and that is said to be too cold for agricultural purposes. Certainly it is good for nothing else. With the exception of that about Bear River, the land is generally poor and rocky. The low bottoms on the head of the Humboldt are rich; but there we had ice before the middle of August; and from that down it is too dry, even if it would otherwise do. Then there is no timber, except a little on the main range of the Rocky Mountains, till we come to Bear River, and none from that, except a few scrubby cedars, until we come to the Sierra Nevada mountains. The Indians live on it, but how no one knows. And then nine-tenths of this extensive region are mountains. I do not believe that it will ever be anything but what it now is.”

It is manifest that a road through such a region must be mainly dependent upon its through business for its revenue. Yet the enterprise is a good one; for by no other can the Black Hill country, Southern Dacotah, the great Salt Lake valley, and the head of Lewis river, which runs through the best part of Idaho, be reached. But whether it is destined ever to be a safe and reliable route to California remains to be seen. How its managers are to cope with the tremendous difficulties, topographical and climatic, towards which they are driving with unprecedented speed, and with a boldness which, in the eyes of ordinary men, borders on recklessness, is a question not yet solved.

Since the managers of the Union Pacific Railway of the Kansas, with a forecast eminently wise and prudent, have resolved to seek the shores of the Pacific by a more southern line, strictly speaking, there is no longer any rivalry or competition between these two great national enterprises. Each will develop the region through which it passes, be its natural value what it may; and both may reach the bay of San Francisco, one approaching it from the northeast, through Northern California, the other from the southeast, through Southern