STORY OF TWO LIVES.

How Collis P. Huntington Rose From an Errand Boy.

THE BRILLIANT CAREER OF COLONEL CHARLES F. CROCKER.

Remarkable Tale From the Every-day Life of Two Men Who Won by Pluck and Energy—Inside History of the Building of the Central Pacific Railroad.

[S. F. Examiner, December 25, 1890.]

Charles Frederick Crocker was born in the city of Sacramento, the Capital of California, December 26, 1854. He is, therefore, at the present time 36 years of age. His father, Charles Crocker, one of the most distinguished financiers and railway-builders of his time, emigrated from northern Indiana to this State in 1849. The elder Crocker was a native of New York, but removed with his father in boyhood across northern Ohio and northern Indiana into the northwest portion of the latter State. It was here he grew to manhood and his earliest commercial venture was in the manufacture of iron. The absence of economic communication between the different portions of the country forced upon every community the task of self-support. The high cost of transportation operated as a protection to the value of home products; but for the same reason the profit of the forge was dependent upon a home market in its most restricted sense. The stories of the fabulous riches of the gold mines in California made a strong appeal to the bold and enterprising nature of the elder Crocker. He joined the earliest Argonauts, arriving in this State in 1849. His commercial and enterprising instincts led him to choose a mercantile life as a career in his new home. He soon found himself at the head of one of the most successful commercial houses in the State. Three years later he returned to his former home in Indiana, returning again to California in 1853 with his newly-wedded wife, the mother of the subject of this sketch. In 1860 he became identified with Leland Stanford, C. P. Huntington, Mark Hopkins, and his brother, E. B. Crocker, in the construction of the overland railroad.

The career of the father in the field of enterprise, upon which he achieved such eminence, began when Charles Frederick Crocker was but six years of age. It is therefore dealing in fact rather than metaphor to say that his earliest recollections were associated with the construction and operation of railroads. At the usual school age he entered the public schools of the city of Sacramento, which he attended until the age of sixteen. In 1870 he entered the University Mound College and California Military Academy, where he remained until April, 1873. As conducive to his general health, which during his early manhood was not at any time robust, as well as in view of its educational advantages, the summer of 1873 was occupied in a tour of the British Isles, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. Returning to the United States in the fall of the same year, he entered the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn, N. Y. Here he pursued his studies with diligence, but failing health, which threatened the loss of eyesight, forced him to retire from the school short of a graduation in 1875, and at the age of twenty-one he returned to this State.

The abbreviation of his scholastic course was a most serious disappointment. It was his intention to pursue his studies until graduation, and he entertained the further intention of taking a post-graduate course, with a full course in the best polytechnic school in the country. His first ambition was for scholarly attainments, and while he has not yet chosen a profession it was his own personal determination, as well as the desire of his father, that his attainments should be limited only by his capacity to learn and the capacities of the universities of the country for imparting knowledge. The disappointment of his plans in this particular remains a subject of profound regret. Considerations of health, as well as regard for the broadening influences of travel, led to suggestion of another trip to Europe. A schoolmate of the same age and a member of a family in medium circumstances had projected a tour of continental Europe, and young Crocker desired to accompany him. The father, Charles Crocker, required that the amount of money which his young companion would be allowed by his father should be ascertained. This being done, the young man was furnished with exactly the same amount, and was told under no circumstances to appeal to the father for more. The two young men, thus equipped, started on their career, with the clear understanding that economy would enable them to extend their travel and prolong their time abroad, while extravagance would shorten it. It has often been claimed by the fathers of the young men that the most judicious use was made of their money, and that they achieved a surprising amount of travel and observation for the money spent. The assurance that no reinforcement of their funds would be made put them upon a judicious and thoughtful plane of expenditure, and taught a valuable lesson on the relation of income to outgo. At the conclusion of this tour Charles F. Crocker returned to California.

His failing eyesight admonished him that his student life was at an end, and the first question which arose was the choice of a future career. He chose the occupation of his father, and determined to identify himself with the great transportation interests of the country.

At this time his father was one of the remaining four of the eminent railroad constructors of this coast. It is an additional evidence of the sound common sense of both father and son that the boy of 21 was not given the high-ounding official title which might easily have been commanded, nor placed as an hereditary figure-head in charge of some important department. His first employment connected with the railroad system of California was as clerk in the Division Superintendent's office at Oakland wharf. The position was in no sense a sinecure. He was required to perform the same service and received the same pay as like positions elsewhere. The details of operating a line of railroad as it can be seen only from the standpoint of the Division Superintendent became familiar to him. It was an apprenticeship in the most practical field of railroad operation. The first difficulty to be overcome was to make those with whom he came in contact understand that his position was real and actual, and that he exercised no more nor less authority than his position commanded. The railroad operatives appeared to regard his appointment as a sinecure, or as having been conferred upon him by reason of his relationship to one of the principal proprietors of the road; and, therefore, when it became necessary for him to give directions they were apt to be construed either as meaning something more than if issued by another in the same position or as signifying something less than the authoritative expression of one in real authority. Eventually it came to be understood, however, that he was under the same disciplinary regulation as any other clerk in the office, and that his authority did not extend beyond the realm of the natural functions belonging to the position. His first promotion was to the position of clerk in the General Freight office at the general offices of the company in San Francisco, a position which afforded a clear view of the whole field of railroad operation in its commercial and economic aspect. In this position he discharged the full round of duties.

His first position was at the desk of "over and short." The meaning of the term will be fully understood by railroad men, and as fully comprehended by shippers who deal with the General Freight office. From this he was promoted to the desk of "loss and damage," and from this to the still higher position of claim adjuster. His employment in these capacities lasted for one year, and to quote the language of the venerable chief clerk of the office, who still occupies the position, "He left an excellent record both as a clerk and as a gentleman." It was at this time that General David E. Colton died. Governor Leland Stanford, President of the road, sent for Charles F. Crocker, and to the very great surprise of the latter, informed him that it was desired that he should take Mr. Colton's place and discharge the duties of the office left vacant by Mr. Colton's death. It will be remembered that Mr. Colton was the financial agent of the company, and that he was also the purchaser of fuel, which included the direction of all the coal mines owned by the company, and the negotiation for their sale and purchase as occasion might require. This was a promotion appealing strongly to the pride of an ambitious young man, and with many misgivings as to his capacity for the discharge of the newly imposed duties he entered upon the office. His first plan to qualify himself was to make a diligent examination of all the correspondence conducted by his predecessor, thus making himself master of the past details of administration, so that its future conduct would be the equivalent of the continuity of a single memory. In this he succeeded admirably and, as the duties committed to him were executive in their nature, the office of Third Vice-President of the Southern Pacific Company was created for him by the unanimous vote of the owners and directors.

On September 7, 1880, at the age of 26, he was married to Miss Easton, the estimable daughter of A. M. Easton and Mrs. Adelia M. Easton, the latter the sister of D. O. Mills. Mrs. Crocker was a lady of rare accomplishments and strongly individualized character. To this happy union three children were born. His marital happiness was, however, of short duration, and he encountered the first great bereavement of his life in the death of his beloved wife, which occurred February 25, 1887.

As the son acquired knowledge and competency in the general administration of the company's affairs, the father began to withdraw his attention measurably from its more arduous duties and allow himself more of that well-merited leisure and retirement which his failing health so imperatively demanded. In 1888 young Crocker was promoted to the position of Second Vice-President. The position of Third Vice-President which had been created for him, would perhaps have lapsed into a sinecure but for the continued absence of the superior officers of the property. Leland Stanford, the President of the company, was frequently abroad in Europe. C. P. Huntington, its First Vice-President and financial head, was located in New York. The constant expansion of the railway system gave to its financial affairs a primacy of importance which required the presence in the general financial office in New York of Charles Crocker. And thus Charles Frederick Crocker, remaining at home the sole representative of the real ownership of the property, became the resident Managing Director. Exigencies constantly arise in the management of the affairs of a great railway system, requiring immediate decision. Even telegraphic communication with co-Directors abroad cannot wholly relieve the local resident Director of responsibility in the solution of important problems. Being on the ground he must act, and in acting must necessarily exercise a large discretion of judgment. His promotion, therefore, to the Second Vice-Presidency was well earned. In this new and higher position came broader discretion of judgment. His official relation to the administrative affairs of the company, however, was not the heaviest burden imposed upon him in the year of his promotion.

On August 14, 1888, his distinguished father died, leaving to him, as the oldest and most experienced member of the family, primary charge of an estate valued at $24,000,000. The estate was inextricably interwoven with the railway system and its concomitant interests. It was indeed a vast property, sustaining complex relations to other estates, with a very large percentage of its value depending upon the success of vast enterprises, the conduct of which demand the most experienced business sagacity. However active or real the official relation sustained by Colonel Crocker to the affairs of the railway system and to the varied interests of the estate to which he was in part prospective successor prior to to the death of his father, that event imposed upon him additional and more serious responsibilities. By the terms of his father's will he became, in co-trusteeship with his brother, William H. Crocker, trustee of the estate and by priority of age and experience its principal administrator. Thus to official function was added the augmented responsibility of increased personal ownership and the higher duties of a trust relation. Fourteen months later his beloved mother departed this life. Thus in three successive years he was bereaved of a wife, a father and a mother.

Upon the retirement of Leland Stanford from the Presidency and the election of C. P. Huntington to that office, Charles Frederick Crocker became, by the unanimous choice of the ownership, the First Vice-President, and was fully vested with all the discretionary power the position implies. Thus at the early age of thirty-six he stands a full participant in the administrative responsibility of interests involving $200,000,000 capital. Nor should it be forgotten that the advancement herein outlined has been at the hands of men who stand among the foremost railroad contractors, operators and financiers of the present age. The accident of relationship may afford opportunity for the achievement of official relations involving the discharge of great administrative duties, but such accidents do not go beyond the opportunity. In the discharge of functions connected with the operation of the great system of transportation, employing hundreds of millions of capital and carrying millions in value of property and millions of precious lives, ability must be present if the position which accident may have conferred is maintained. Mr. Crocker's promotion may have been in a measure a concession to his prospective ownership of the property controlled, but to maintain any position in the executive department of a railroad system ability equal to the place must be manifested.

It is extremely doubtful whether a completely candid biography was ever written. At best the biographer adopts a partial view. If the portraiture is at the hands of friendship, the warm colors of charity are applied; if by the hand of enmity, the distortion of malice is present. "Paint me as I am," said Oliver Cromwell to the artist before whom he was sitting for a portrait. "If you smooth out one wrinkle, or attempt the outline of symmetry where deformity exists, I will repudiate the picture." The task of the biographer, however, differs from that of the artist. The former deals with intellectual and moral elements of character, which elude exact measurements; the latter may invoke in his work the common rules of drawing and perspective. Cromwell was perhaps less vain of his personal appearance than of his record as a statesman; and if he could have anticipated the work of some of his biographers, we are inclined to the opinion that he would have verdicts of contemporaneous history and preferred less faithful portraiture. The biography alike encounter distrust as to their impartiality, but there must exist somewhere between the Charybdis and Scylla of detraction and flattery a free and open channel of personal criticism, wherein a just estimate of our contemporaries may find unobstructed way. Taking note of this chart, I may be permitted to say that my first knowledge of Charles F. Crocker began in 1865. One day in the summer of that year, a surgeon who occupied offices on the same floor with my own, called me to his assistance. Upon entering the office I found a lad of about eleven or twelve years suffering from a broken arm. He was a sturdy young fellow, in whom the sanguine temperament was loudly proclaimed by a very florid complexion. Although suffering much pain, he made no complaint. Both bones of the lower arm were broken about midway between the elbow and the wrist, and the hand hung limp and listless when held at a right angle at the elbow. While the surgeon's preparations for the operation were going on he engaged his little patient in conversation.

"How did this happen?" he asked.

"On the play-ground."

"Does your mother know of the accident?"

"No; I came straight from the school-house here."

"Why did you not inform your people of the accident?"

"Because I thought I would come here and get my arm fixed. I know if I went home they would send for you, and so I came right here to save time."

I held the upper arm at the elbow while the painful operation of setting was performed. There was a slight tremor of pain as the surgeon drew the arm into line in the operation of replacement, but no outcry. When the operation was completed and the boy sent home the surgeon told me that he was Fred Crocker, the son of Charles Crocker. In this incident there are many indications of character which identify the boy with the man—the quiet, undemonstrative endurance, the self-reliance, the plain common-sense view of the whole situation, the consideration of the question what was the right thing to be done and the immediate action when the conclusion of the proper action was reached. In school, in business, in the domestic circle, in friendship, in short in all the relations of life, these traits have been manifest. Personally, Charles F. Crocker is below the medium hight, with fully rounded form, which confers the appearance of robust health and vigor. His manner is deliberate and readily invites confidence. His method of conversation is unrestrained, easy and free of ostentation. His methodical habits of business are suggested by the obviously careful arrangement of his statements. When hesitating in the choice of words, he never accepts that proffered by his auditor, but proceeds with his own selection, and when it is put forth the auditor perceives that the hesitation was not the result of search for a missing word, but rather the deliberate choice between many words nearly synonymous in the mind. Mr. Crocker is well-informed upon a great variety of topics. His taste in reading runs in the line of history, essay and contemporaneous literature. It is one of the charms of conversation with him that his opinions are original and real. This is referable in part to the absence of those attributes of character which constitute the politician. Up to the present he has not been assailed by political ambition. His opinions are therefore the real convictions of his mind. He is broadly familiar with the political issues of his own country and the leading powers of the world. He would achieve a high degree of political success with great facility. Real influence resides in character. The faculty of attracting and holding the confidence of the masses of men has its root in the stability of friendship and the continuity of purpose. We feel to possess instinctively a knowledge of what some men may do under stated circumstances, and there is no deviation of confidence from real integrity and high purpose.

In thus retracing briefly the career of a young man born to fortune I am not unconscious of its departure from the monotonous features of American biography. Nearly all of our countrymen who have achieved sufficient eminence to justify the presentation of biographical sketches to the public have arisen from obscurity. The early disadvantages of our great men are the favorite theme of the eulogist. The contrast between the poverty and obscurity in which their young life was passed and the ultimate eminence achieved by them is constantly dwelt upon. We share in the admiration for men who by the force of manly character have raised themselves from the obscuring levels of our common humanity to the summits of true greatness. We share in a proud admiration for the broad liberality of American institutions which interpose no obstacles to the achievement of the highest distinction on every field of human activity. At the same time it should not be forgotten that it is less difficult to acquire a self-reliant and strongly individualized character in the school where necessity is master than to acquire the more solid elements of manliness against the demoralizing tendencies of great riches. The way from poverty to wealth is much easier than from wealth to substantial character. The philosopher who said that men acquire wisdom in solitude, but character in the stream of life, has furnished a key to the success of men of eminence whose lives had their source in poverty and obscurity. Necessity confers self-reliance, concentration and earnestness of purpose. The man whose boyhood was passed amid the discomforts, the apprehensions and even the terrors of poverty may readily refer the strength and tenacity of his character to its formative influence. Even the natural affections of the poor boy are powerfully enlisted on the side of his determination to rise from the conditions which offend every aspiration, from the commonest ambition to the dearest affections the human heart can know. When life begins in a complete competency, or in great wealth, there is no spur of necessity to prick the ambition of aimless exertion. The history of a thousand distinguished men provos that poverty is the great constructor of character, while wealth is its most insidious destroyer. The consciousness that the means of the gratification of every desire are practically limitless has the poison of surfeit, and the possessor of a great fortune in youth is beset by the danger of morbid tendencies. The ambition to acquire a competency is most worthy, and if the most honorable place in life is the ranks of honest industry the most honorable place in these ranks belongs to him who, standing shoulder to shoulder with his fellow-men in the great industrial army, is there from choice, not of necessity.

Of the four railroad constructors and operators, citizens of California, who achieved such distinction upon the great field of their chosen activity, Charles Crocker was the only one who had sons to succeed him. As the prospective successor of his father, a high position in railroad management was naturally conceded to Charles F. Crocker. The public, therefore, never troubled itself to inquire whether his promotion was by merit or as the result of inheritance. His advancement was looked upon as the natural and inevitable course of things. Under such circumstances, but little if any thought will be given to the question of intrinsic merit underlying hereditary promotion. This is a most trying and, indeed, a most unfortunate position in which to place any aspiring and ambitious young man. It deprives him of the opportunity of rising by force of energy or of rejoicing in each upward step as the unmistakable concession to fitness. There may be, as in the case of Colonel Crocker, there certainly is, the record of a well-ordered, sober, methodical and industrious life, wherein the attendant promotion to high station is attributed to inheritance, when in other cases it would be accepted as an evidence of real merit; and yet it is within the realm of sober truth to say that the subject of this sketch has received no undeserved advancement and that the position he has attained has been honorably won and fairly maintained.

If Mr. Crocker has not achieved official distinction it is a high ecomium to say that he has not sought it through the vanity which desire public adulation. If it is said that in making his way he has occupied the vantage ground of great wealth, it is a higher distinction to say that among all men of wealth he is the most unspoiled of millionaires. If at his present young age retrospection encounters but little to gratify his higher ambition, it discloses nothing to regret. At the age of 36 he has achieved wealth, position and high and honorable distinction among men.

C. P. HUNTINGTON'S CAREER.

History of His Remarkable Financial Ability and Success.

Collis P. Huntington descended from the very best of Connecticut stock. He inherited a splendid physical development, a vigorous brain, a completely normal mentality, well-balanced faculties, and mental and physical activities, which are temperamental, supervening upon a constitution possessing marvelous capacities for endurance. Experimental educators have declared that while intellectual brilliancy and scholarly attainment are possible in a single generation, long-sustained mental activity and constantly augmenting mental power are legacies which may be inherited only by the descendants of an educated ancestery.

His education was obtained in the common schools of New England, as such schools existed over half a century ago, and comprised three months' schooling in the district school during the winter and three months in summer. He may be said to have entered upon a business career at the age of twelve years. Whether from accident or choice, his first business venture was in mercantile pursuits. His first introduction into this realm of activity was at the very bottom round of the ladder upon which he has climbed to such distinguished eminence. The position of errand boy in the village grocery and store of Phineas W. Noble constituted his incipient introduction into that world of trade and commerce in which he eventually became a master. It was in its truest sense an apprenticeship. It began with the A B C of sweeping up the store, lighting the fires and running errands. But what was more important, it was an introduction, at a very plastic age of life, into a mercantile and commercial atmosphere. The village store, with its mercantile spirit, was the world of commerce in miniature. It encompassed all the essential elements of trade, barter and commerce, and comprised within the range of its business activity the ultimate and fundamental principles which, when once mastered, need only to be expanded to fit the broader theater of the world's exchange. What the deck, the masts and the broad expanse of ocean were to midshipman Nelson, that country store was to the apprenticeship of the errand boy Huntington.

At the age of fifteen he went to New York and purchased on his own account out of his small savings a few goods, watch findings, jewelry, silver goods, etc., but principally watch findings. These goods he sold for a little time in the vicinity of his home. But inherent energy and a true spirit of enterprise are the great emancipators from the thralldom of endeavor in the service of others. While still fifteen he went south, selling watch findings and watches. Even at this early age his capacity for higher ventures manifested itself. The faculties of negotiation were added to the skill of merchandising. He purchased at a heavy discount clock notes from a man who had employed 100 people traveling throughout the South. He was signally successful in collecting these notes, and pursued that business, traveling throughout the Southern States from the age of fifteen to twenty-one. In this way he became acquainted with the Southern States. In fact, in a short time he knew the whole United States as well as or better than any man of his age in the country. He had thoroughly mastered the geographical relations of trade between the different portions of America, and thus was his attention early called to the general subject of transportation and its importance to commerce.

This very unusual employment at a remarkably early age was at once an introduction to many phases of human character, as well as great diversity of transaction. It embraced the features of travel, and their consequent enlargement of the mind afforded opportunities for observation relative to many communities, and revealed the nature of their various enterprises, showing here fossilized conservatism and there the awakening spirit of enterprise, enabled comparisons to be made as to the deficiency of products in one part of the country and their superabundance in others, and was a contact with commerce and exchange at a point broadly suggestive of the great office performed by transportation in the production, distribution and consumption of the objects of human desire.

Notwithstanding these trips abroad, a mercantile business had been established at home, in which a brother had become interested, and shortly after the discontinuance of his Southern trips the announcement of the gold discoveries in California attracted the attention of the whole country. The new El Dorado was a most enticing field to young men of energy and enterprise, and leaving the business which had partially been created by their joint effort in the hands of his brother, early in the spring of 1849 Mr. Huntington took passage for California by way of Panama.

Upon arriving here and looking over the field, the geography of the country was first studied. Mr. Huntington's education in this branch of knowledge had been essentially a commercial one; that is to say, he understood geography in its commercial aspect.

Practically, the entire business activity of that day was in the mines. The first great mining enterprises had the country now comprising the counties of El Dorado, Yuba and Placer for their field of operations. Mr. Huntington, already a student of transporation as a factor in business, saw at a glance that Sacramento was the best point from which to sell to the traders.

In due time the house of Huntington & Hopkins had been established and was being conducted on the most approved business principles. It was rapidly acquiring wealth and prominence. It came to be recognized as sound, both financially and morally. Perhaps no house in the State had higher mark of commercial credit in the reports of commercial agencies. The house itself dealt principally in hardware, but Mr. Huntington's spirit of personal speculation was irrepressible. He dealt in all kinds of merchandise, outside of the lines carried by the house. He purchased and sold nearly every species of imperishable goods which men would want. He engaged in the brokerage business for other houses. With that forecast that belongs to genius in any occupation, it was his practice, in accordance with the custom of the time, to purchase large lots of goods in anticipation of their scarcity, owing to the inadequate means of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific seaboards. The period of scarcity which his business acumen foresaw resulted in sharp advances on the articles stored by him and consequent high speculative profit. The commercial conditions were highly favorable to phenomenal fluctuations of prices, and Mr. Huntington's speculative ventures in the year 1854 yielded him a profit of $800,000. As illustrative of the speculative methods of the time it may be incidentally remarked that of this large profit $200,000 was credited to the single article of powder, the house of Huntington & Hopkins in that year for a short time being the only source of supply. Notwithstanding the flush condition of the times a very large percentage of the business done by the house of which Mr. Huntington was the head was done on credit. Supplies were sold to the miners in the distant mountains. The miners' transactions with the house were carried on book accounts. It is recorded as a singular fact, and one highly complimentary to the commercial honesty of the time, that none of its accounts were lost; that while mining operations and enterprises were characterized by great vicissitudes of fortune, sooner or later these accounts were nevertheless all collected. The experience of the house of Huntington & Hopkins, however, in this regard, was not common to all houses. A very large part of its success in the way of closing its books by payments of balances must be attributed to the superior finesse of its conductors.

By the period of 1855 the agricultural capabilities of California were in a great measure recognized. The American occupation of the territory had continued long enough to make the peculiarities of the climate better understood. It had before begun to be perceived that the period of verdure in the broad valleys and fertile hills west of the central axis of the Sierra Nevada Mountains was longer than a like period in the Northern, Middle and Western States. The great diversity of horticulture so favored by the clemency of the climate had begun to be apprehended. The settlement, which up to the time of the recognition of the natural resources of the country, had been regarded as nomadic, began to lose its ephemeral character, and the American population turned its attention seriously to the great question of laying the foundation of a civil and social fabric.

Perceiving that the discovery of gold and the resultant hegira from the Eastern States in search of the precious metal was soon to become a mere incident in the settlement of a country possessed of really great natural resources, the thoughts of far-seeing men were naturally turned to the question of establishing cheap and expeditious communication with the main body of the civilization of this country.

In the meantime the Comstock lode, on the eastern flank of the Sierra Nevada mountains, had been discovered, and had been so far developed as to make its vast riches suspected. The necessity of carrying supplies across the mountains to this new El Dorado of mineral wealth had resulted in a reconnoissance survey of some of the mountain passes. T. D. Judah, a civil engineer, had made some of these experimental surveys over the mountains. The newly acquired national significance of the enterprise had strongly attracted Mr. Huntington's attention. Hearing that Mr. Judah had returned and would hold a meeting for the purpose of securing aid for the completion of the survey, Mr. Huntington attended the meeting.

Mr. Huntington, though present, did not give anything, and when asked whether he was going to subscribe replied that he did not think a great transcontinental road could be built by contributions to a picnic. At the close of the meeting he approached Mr. Judah, making himself known to him, and invited him to come to his house on the following evening. The appointment was kept, and this first meeting between the engineer and the financier constituted the incipient beginnings of the Central Pacific Railroad. Mr. Huntington agreed to form a syndicate to advance the sum of $35,000 in cash toward the completion of a survey. After much persuasion he secured the co-operation of his partner, Mark Hopkins. Subsequently, he approached Leland Stanford on the subject. This was but a short prior to his election as Governor of the State. Governor Stanford entered into hearty co-operation with the scheme. Later Charles and E. B. Crocker were induced to bear a portion of the expense of the survey. The syndicate number six—Huntington, Hopkins, Charles Crocker, Stanford, James Bailey and L. A. Booth, or seven, including T. D. Judah, who was to give his surveys for that interest without contribution of money.

At the time of his subscription, Mr. Booth had a mine at Virginia City, which he thought was worth a large sum of money. A week or two later, and before any of the money had been expended, he told Mr. Huntington that the indications of a profitable mine has disappeared and that there was, therefore, no longer any inducement on his part to remain in the syndicate. The understanding was that a contribution to the cost of the survey did not commit any party making such contribution to any further investment. A survey was to be made over the Sierra Nevada mountains and an outlook taken from the eastern slopes. The report of this survey when completed was highly satisfactory. Notwithstanding many mountain chains have since been surmounted, the summit of no range is approached a grade of like persistency of ascent. A line was run without losing a foot from tide water to the summit of the Sierras, except a loss of twenty-four feet near the town of Colfax. The engineering experiments having disclosed a practicable route for a railroad, Mr. Huntington became convinced that the road could be built. From this point the new purpose of becoming the projector and constructor of a great overland railroad became one of the fixed purposes of Mr. Huntington's mind and one of the definite plans of his life. The first point of safety in the construction of the road resided in the fact that a road could be built to Dutch Flat, where it would find connection with a wagon road to the Comstock mines. This link of the road at least would be profitable and its construction was immediately determined upon. The undertaking was formally inaugurated. One of the original syndicate having fallen out by the way, the other six paid in each month the obligations incurred by the construction, until Newcastle was reached. After paying about $200,000 each, James Bailey became distrustful of the enterprise and decided not to pay any more. Engineer Judah also became appalled at the magnitude of the financial phase of the question, and each sold upon satisfactory terms to the five remaining co-partners, and thus it was that Huntington, Stanford, Charles and E. B. Crocker and Mark Hopkins became the sole proprietors of the road. The Central Pacific Railroad Company in California was organized in 1860. Aaron A. Sargent was Representative in Congress from California. Appreciating the new phases of national issues, which had revitalized the old suggestion of constructing a great highway to the Pacific Ocean, he comprehended fully the propitious character of the opportunity, and with that directness and energy for which he was so distinguished, he introduced and passed the Act granting Government aid in the construction of a railroad and telegraph line from the Missouri river to the Pacific Ocean, approved March 2, 1862. The road was constructed, however, to Newcastle without Government aid. A portion of the finances necessary for the prosecution of this undertaking was obtained by the issuance of convertible bonds, but which in fact were never converted; at the end of ten years they were taken up.

In its every aspect, whether in the direction of the details or in the solution of the broader and higher problems involve, the construction of the Central Pacific Railroad was a gigantic undertaking. To fully appreciate its magnitude, the discouraging features of the time in which it was undertaken must be considered. These can only be generalized here. The Government had granted aid in lands and and had created bonds, but the perpetuity of the nation itself was rendered doubtful by the fast-gathering clouds of civil war. The national credit was scarcely better than that of solvent individuals. Personality is inseparable from every great undertaking. However feasible the undertaking, however aided by national subsidy and credit, the standing of an enterprise must inevitably borrow its characterization from the character of those directing it. The men who stood sponsors for this great undertaking were citizens of the most remote and most obscure little group of Anglo-Saxon civilization in the world. Thus the financial phase of the undertaking became supremely paramount, and by comparison subordinated even to simplicity all the mechanical problems of construction.

Near the close of 1862 Mr. Huntington, armed with the full power of attorney from the company, went to New York, fully charged with the administration of its financial affairs. Henceforth upon his success or failure would depend the success or failure of the enterprise. He knocked at the gate of the financial world, strong in the consciousness of the legitimacy of the undertaking he represented. Thus to Mr. Huntington was confided that portion of the task, the successful accomplishment of which required the highest diplomatic and negotiating faculties.

In New York Mr. Huntington had already established a very high personal credit. He had been a purchaser of goods in the wholesale market since 1837, and all obligations incurred in his mercantile life had been met by prompt payment. His acquaintanceship in the mercantile community was extensive, and he availed himself of this acquaintanceship most effectively to float the securities of the new undertaking. The success which attended his efforts is now a part of the well-known financial history of the country. At the time of the building of the Central Pacific Railroad its capital and securities constituted the largest aggregation of capital in the United States. In addition to the procurement of money necessary to the successful prosecution of the enterprise, the duties of purchasing agent were superadded. Some idea of the magnitude of the transactions in this line will be realized by the statement that Mr. Huntington purchased in one day 65,000 tons of rails and chartered over twenty ships in which to transport them to the Pacific coast.

In estimating the difficulties which attended any undertaking after its triumphant accomplishment appreciation is fettered by the almost irresistible tendency to measure their magnitude by the standard of existing facilities. To-day five overland roads span the continent. Communication between the Atlantic and Pacific seaboards on American soil is cheap and expeditious. An equal number of lines of telegraph now confer certainty upon communication.

At the time of Mr. Huntington's arrival in New York to enter upon the great duties with which he was charged no railroad line had penetrated west of the Missouri river, and but a single line of telegraph was to be depended upon for communication. Practically, the entire line from the Missouri river to tide water on the Pacific coast lay through a country occupied by untamed savages, whose hostility to advancing civilization would seriously complicate the task in hand. The geographers of the world had written upon the face of the maps of the region with unstinting dogmatism the characterization, "The Great American Desert." The South pass, discovered by Fremont, was the only geographical designation to be found on the face of any map indicating a gateway through the Rocky Mountains. There were but few to believe in the practicability of railroad construction through that pass. The territory to be opened by the construction of the road was three times greater than that subdued by Cesar to Roman dominion in all his wars of conquest.

As the financial agent, by whose finesse, address and skill the funds necessary for the prosecution of the work must be procured, and as purchasing agent, who must procure and ship everything used in the construction and equipment of the road, Mr. Huntington confronted many difficulties. The duties committed to him were superlatively paramount, demanding in their successful discharge the combined ability of the financier, the diplomat and the far-sighted negotiator. Great difficulties are forever the opportunity for great distinction, and the manner in which these difficulties were met and overcome by Mr. Huntington proves the possession on his part of financiering and diplomatic faculty equal if not superior to that of any American who has gained distinction upon these fields. The masterly manner in which the paramount problems committed to him were solved entitles him to the high distinction of the pioneer builder of American transcontinental railroads.

Mr. Huntington's career furnishes an example of those whose claim to distinction is disproportionate to the official positions held by them. Notwithstanding his clear insight into the relation between legislation and the successful prosecution of any business, Mr. Huntington has never at any time consented to serve in any official position. At no time in his life could he be classed with the politicians. This has been due very largely to a singular absence in his mind of any desire for distinction merely for his own sake. If at any time he has been beset by personal ambition, it has been for the accomplishment of large undertakings in the realm of financial and commercial activity. The common comprehension seeks in high official station for justification of any claim to distinction. This is true, because the discharge of duties in public station affords standards of comparison with distinguished men who may have occupied analogous positions. A President of the United States may leave the impression of his personality upon the history of his country, and the measures of public policy inaugurated by him may be brought into comparison with the policies of the long line of Presidents in which he stands. Standing alone, the statement of the biographer that the subject of his biography became President of the United States carries with it a presumption of the possession on his part of exalted character or distinguished ability. But of one who has achieved great wealth by the successful prosecution of great enterprises, as broad in their beneficence as the entire basis of modern civilization, it may be said that he has won a more just distinction than can possibly be conferred by mere official prominence.

Men possessed of genius for originating great enterprises, devising general policies and the administrative force necessary to carry their plans and policies into successful operation, have seldom been credited with the capability of directing the smaller details of their plans. The possession of eminent administrative ability, presupposes a habitual mental attitude commanding a general rather than a specific view of things. It is like the study of topography from a commanding summit, wherein the minutia of detail is obscured by distance. However true this may be of men in general, Mr. Huntington affords a conspicuous example of one equally master in the conception of general policies and the direction of the smallest details. The possession of these great characteristics is due chiefly to the clearness and incisiveness of his mind, which perceives with a single glance all the bearings and combinations of a business proposition at its first presentation. He possesses also a singular faculty of perfect concentration upon the matter in hand, which, coupled with a directness of method admitting of no digression from the subject under consideration, brings negotiations to speedy conclusion. Thus affairs of the largest magnitude to which other men would feel justified in devoting the attention of days are with him concluded in as few hours, opening large margins of time for the bestowal of that diligent attention which he confers upon every matter of business, from its broadest generality to its latest details.

No one, however obscure his position in administrative relation to the broad empire of affairs over which Mr. Huntington presides, has ever had cause to complain of inattention to any letter addressed to him. Every letter of a vast volume of correspondence is answered in such a manner that the correspondent perceives clearly that every item of the letter answered has been carefully noted and clearly understood. In this way his personality is present in every detail of the vast business undertakings, of which he is, by reason of superior energy, the moving and directing center, and thus also is diffused and distributed throughout the whole the strong propulsion of his matchless energy. To this mastery of details is attributable the superior practicability of his plans. General administration is closely allied to theory, and when pursued wholly without knowledge of detail, tends to become merely theoretical and consequently unpractical.

It is the common belief, justified by common observation, that one possessed of such eminent faculty for the practical affairs of life could have little sympathy with other realms of thought and being. Mr. Huntington supplies a very notable exception to the theory. Some of the most notable schemes of his active and busy brain have had reference solely to the accomplishment of results in which the public good has been the controlling factor. One of the chief incentives to the construction of an overland railroad was the influence its completion would have upon the solution of the slavery question, by the creation of new free States. Mr. Huntington saw clearly that the construction of a great highway of commerce from the Atlantic to the Pacific seaboard, along the latitudes of freedom, would extend settlement along the highway, which would carry with it the institutions of the free States of this Republic—that Northern settlement and sympathies would be first in possession of the great unsettled territory west of the Missouri river if it secured first and most important communication. In making a subscription to the construction of a railroad in the Congo basin, Mr. Huntington remarked that if the investment were wholly lost he would find his compensation in promoting the civilization of the Dark Continent.

The faculty of mind and the discipline of will which enable him to acquire such complete concentration of thought on any matter of business in hand also confers upon him the faculty of wholly dismissing business considerations in moments of leisure, in social intercourse and in the domestic circle. The closing of the desk and the office door behind him completely emancipates his mind from the cares, perplexities and annoyances of business, and in these moments of freedom his mentality undergoes a transformation as complete as it is surprising. The man of affairs, whose restless energy is felt as a quickening factor in all the financial and commercial concerns of a continent, becomes the genial center of social intercourse, or the cordial entertainer in a home whose domestic atmosphere presents the highest charms of refined hospitality and elegant serenity and repose.

The history of human progress presents in the succeeding eras of its advancement a constant succession of dramatic spectacles. The representative thought of any time determines the dramatic plane, and for the time being, appears to close the avenues for distinction upon any other field. The chief actors become the heroes of history; to them is committed the great roles, and around them revolve the minor parts. Thus the history of any distinguished individual and the times in which he achieved distinction are so completely introactive as to lose almost entirely dramatic coherency unless presented at a single view.

The distinguishing feature of the times in which Mr. Huntington has borne so conspicuous a part was that of material development. During the past fifty years, and covering the period of his prominence upon the stage of public affairs, the American republic has grown from almost an infancy of national life into a vast empire of wealth and population. Its strides have been marked by a constantly advancing frontier which presented a resistless wave of development, sweeping across a great continent in which vast territorial areas have been laid under the subduing scepter of industry and enterprise. It will remain forever the most phenomenal period of our country's growth. Hereafter its progress will be by less remarkable steps.

The development of the past fifty years has produced on this continent conditions more nearly analagous to those of the older civilizations. The tidal-wave of advancing civilization has already passed over the most important areas of the national domain. The social, commercial and financial conditions of the future will be less alluvial in their character, and resemble more the granite formation of longer historic periods. The future history of our growth must supervene upon developed rather than primitive values. The past fifty years of our history will, therefore, as already indicated, mark the most phenomenal period of our growth. It was a time rich in opportunities for distinction. Its history, when fully written, will present a succession of eras far more interesting in their dramatic action than the crimson pages which record the triumphs of arms or embellish the annals of conquest. In common with all great historic eras, it will not be wanting in great personalities; men, whose strong character and symmetrically rounded greatness appear as the controlling moving spirits of the time; men, to whose hands were committed the great parts of the dramatic story, just as the great parts in every drama are committed to the highest genius; and among these the name of Collis P. Huntington will take the highest rank.

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