BY MAY OF 1851, when this volume begins, the first flush of the Gold Rush had subsided. Lawyers and doctors, merchants and professional men had for the most part given up the back-breaking, ague-ridden labor of digging for gold in the streams and creeks of the mountains and had returned to the towns and cities to coin wealth in more prosaic ways—to capture it second hand, so to speak. Men like Belden, Brannan, Green, Larkin, Leese, Mellus, Howard—and thousands of others—old settlers and newcomers alike, went into business and agriculture, while another horde, rushing in from all parts of the world, continued the search for the glittering, tantalizing metal. The harvest was great, judging by the thousands of ounces of gold shipped East via the new steamers of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company that had begun to ply the waters of the Pacific, in 1849, news duly reported in the newspapers.

There was no let-up in the vast, unending search for wealth. Men still gambled their lives for the pawn that would send them home rich; yet untold numbers succumbed to illness or deserted the mines and took up new careers in various hamlets and villages of California and built such rural crossroads or other stopping places into thriving towns almost overnight. These places spawned great cities, such as San Francisco and Sacramento. Growth brought stability, or some semblance of it. Cities grew, burned down, and rose overnight into bigger and better ones. San Francisco burned repeatedly, 1849, 1850, 1851. Sacramento was nearly wiped out in November, 1852; Marysville suffered the scourge several times; and so did Stockton. Or, if it was not fire, it was floods, from which the towns on the Sacramento and San Joaquin experienced almost the same fate. The result, in every instance, was immediate rebuilding on a better basis, more permanent structures, better city planning. These were the birth pangs of growth in the rowdy new commonwealth on the Pacific—golden California.

Corresponding to the growth of the cities came an increasing stream of immigrants who sought out choice spots for farms and homesites. Ignorant (or
resentful) of the land grants made before the end of Mexican rule, they took root wherever the soil looked good or fancy dictated. Many selected tracts along the Sacramento river, much of which had been included in the vast, unmarked grants owned by such pioneers as Dye, Flügge, Frémont, Thomas, Larkin, Sutter, and many others under the Spanish-Mexican law. These newcomers acted on the frontiersman’s instinct of settling on “free” land, planting a cabin, scratching the surface and sowing a bit of grain, or raising cattle. When they were told the land belonged to others, they protested, made an issue of it, and often determined to stay. Removing them was not easy, as they usually refused to leave. Moreover, they were a defense against marauding Indians, and helped to build up the country, so were not wholly undesirable. “Squatterism,” it was called by Larkin and other grantees, while to the people in question it was a simple right of pre-empting free land—as had been the custom “back East,” as the Indian frontier receded before the gun and plow of a westward moving society. The issue reached its climax in the period covered by Volume X of The Larkin Papers, when the most notable case of infringement on old land grants, Limantour’s claim to a major portion of San Francisco, came to a head—and was finally shown to be a fraud. Elsewhere, there were many compromises and out-of-court settlements by which the squatters stayed to become permanent residents. Larkin, evidently unwilling to fight these colonists, usually bought out intruders who had settled on his lands, while awaiting a good opportunity to sell some of his vast holdings.

Amid the wild scenes of speculation that characterized this period, some of the old Californians prospered, became enormously wealthy, while others, unable to match the race of progress (or possibly cut down by illness), fell behind. Job F. Dye went East to live, too ill to enjoy the fruits of his pioneering struggles in California. W. D. M. Howard, one of a half-dozen among the giants, early was seized by tuberculosis. Talbot H. Green, who ranked in achievement with the financial greats of the new California, was recognized as Paul Geddes, a bank official who had absconded in 1840 from his home in Pennsylvania with some company funds, had left wife and children, and “made good” in the new world of the West, where he had married a remarkable woman and “gone straight.” The story unfolds throughout Volumes IX and X. Faxon Dean Atherton remained at his post in Valparaiso, unable to follow closely the gigantic events of California, got only infrequent messages from his old friend Larkin, now too occupied with business to spend hours in writing letters in longhand to keep his friends up to date on the news. J. B. R. Cooper, the old
sea captain of the 1820's, stayed on top, kept his lands and goods, sent his boy, Rogerio, East to go to school, as did Larkin with his three—Oliver, Francis (often called Francisco), and Frederic. So too did Dr. E. T. Bale and Salvador Vallejo, among others. A decade earlier, boys were sent to the Sandwich Islands for training, but now, with their families among the wealthiest in the country, they had to be sent East, to the established centers of culture and learning. Indeed, Larkin's relatives and friends on the Atlantic Coast induced him not only to send his boys to school there, but persuaded him to go to New York with the intention of making it his future home, in preference to the wild and untutored San Francisco. He bought a home in New York, 10th Street near Broadway, and invested in real estate there and in Brooklyn, and brought Mrs. Larkin to the great metropolis (1850–1853)—but the experiment was not a success. The West was in Larkin's blood. Business called him back to California, and within a few years, his wife could tolerate the New York winters no more and returned to make the family home in San Francisco. These themes run throughout Volumes IX and X.

In this new West, promotion schemes multiplied on every hand. Every city wanted to become the site of the state capitol. From its original seat at Monterey, where the constitutional convention had met in 1849, it moved to San José, thence to Vallejo, Benicia, and finally, in 1854, to Sacramento, which had recovered from fire and flood to become a populous and progressive city.

There were schemes for railroads, for shipping lines, for colleges. The Benicia-Marysville Railroad, projected in 1852 with Larkin as one of its directors, aroused some interest, and it immediately set about the age-old device of getting a subvention from Congress to help it over the early years of costly construction. There were others, mostly paper roads. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company, incorporated in 1848 as something of a wild speculation, with William H. Aspinwall as the moving spirit, proved to be a golden bonanza, until too many other lines sprang up to cut into the enormous “tourist” traffic engendered by the Gold Rush and the growth of the Pacific Coast, a traffic that flowed in both directions—the newcomers heading westward, the old-timers, rich and poor, returning back home.

Nor was education ignored. By 1852, Charles M. Blake, supported by such leaders as the Reverend Samuel H. Willey and Captain John Paty, urged Larkin to contribute liberally to a Collegiate Institute, to be established at Benicia. Larkin had already been asked to give a tract of land for a suitable site.

While such promotions went on, many California schemes contemplated the
sale of lands to hungry investors, American or English, especially. Some of these projects, like those of Larkin and Frémont, were gigantic. California's reputation for wealth, and the hunger of the promoters and investors, combined to provide an ideal setting for such plans. Frémont, after rejecting offers of London financiers for his Las Mariposas estate, exploited its quartz mines, though he was to lose it later to clever competitors.

Larkin, who had several ranches on the upper Sacramento, including the Children's, the Jimeno, and the Boga, the latter on the Feather River, launched a scheme to sell one of these, the Boga, thought to be rich in gold-bearing gravels, to London investors. Through agents in New York and London, his agent sought to sell it to an English syndicate, and many of the letters in The Larkin Papers concern this estate, its reputed wealth, and the huge sum it would bring its owner, about a million dollars. The plan ultimately failed, partly on account of the presence of squatters and Larkin's inability to provide a clear title—and partly from fear that the speculation was too uncertain.

Confirmation of the Mexican land grants in California, especially those made immediately before the American conquest, soon became a major issue, since it was suspected that some had been granted illegally. Larkin, like other grantees, took every precaution to assure his titles, though the path to success was not without its stones. When he felt it necessary to substantiate by legal documents the naturalization of his children, born in California as Mexican subjects, and to assure their eligibility to hold land, he fell into the hands of one Colonel A. Juan Atocha of New York. Described as a "cunning and perfectly unscrupulous intriguer" by Justin H. Smith (War with Mexico, Vol. II, p. 123), Atocha had tried to negotiate a deal between President Polk and President Santa Anna of Mexico in 1847, by allowing the exiled Santa Anna, then in Cuba, to slip through the American blockade and get back to Mexico, where he would presumably bow to superior force and arrange a peace treaty satisfactory to the United States—at Mexico's expense. Nothing came of it, of course, except that Santa Anna got back home and was able to lead the Mexican armies against the United States in the war that followed.

Atocha, in his deal with Larkin, was to go to Mexico City to obtain certifications of the legality of the naturalization of Larkin's children and of their land grant, known as the Children's Rancho. All this for a price, of course. He did so, but then, in a letter of October 28, 1852, he added a very confidential note to Larkin, stating that the Mexican government considered Micheltorena's acts in his favor as null and of no value. Whatever the truth of this statement—and
naturally it was not made public—the Board of Land Commissioners in California did uphold the validity of the Children's grant.

Among the dramatic human-interest episodes of the time, none was more unexpected than the accusation that Talbot H. Green, who had risen from the position of one of Larkin's clerks to a man of equal stature with Sam Brannan, W. D. M. Howard, Francis Mellus, or Joseph P. Thompson, was really an embezzler. In April, 1851, Green, then a man of wealth, sailed from San Francisco for the East to clear himself of these charges, amid the cheers of his old friends, and disappeared, seemingly forever. Then, about August, 1853, Larkin was surprised to get a letter from him, from a hide-out in Tennessee, begging for money, and imploring Larkin never to reveal his place of hiding, a request he honored. The story of Green's breakdown, and his eventual recovery, remains a major theme of Volumes IX and X of this series.

Ebenezer L. Childs, Larkin's half-brother, holding a clerical position in the post office in Washington, D. C.—he never had enough courage to seek his fortune in California's goldfields!—almost overwhelmed his brother with letters of news from the East. Indeed, after the Rev. Wm. M. Rogers died in 1851, Childs served as Larkin's agent in numerous business matters, and finally two of the Larkin boys, Francis and Frederic, who had been in a private school near Boston, came to Washington to live with Eben and Sarah Childs while they continued their studies. Oliver, the oldest of the boys, remained at Cambridge, but he was not the intellectual type and returned to California to join the workmen on one of his father's ranchos.

The Larkin children wrote frequently to their parents in San Francisco, typical children's letters, most of which have been here omitted. Unfortunately, the other side of the correspondence—Mr. and Mrs. Larkin's letters to the children—has not been preserved, so far as known, though Frederic told his father how he was carefully binding them, and admonished him to leave a sufficient margin on the left to permit of proper binding.

To bring this volume within reasonable limits, other papers deemed of lesser historical importance have also had to be left out, but I believe that the most significant have been included up to the end of the year 1853.

Once again I am indebted to Miss Frances Molera, granddaughter of John B. R. Cooper, for a photograph of a member of the family, the Reverend Wm. M. Rogers, Larkin's cousin and business agent. He died in the summer of 1851, a comparatively young man.