XLVI. THE THROES OF THE CONTINENT.

HOW THE LAND GREW.

WHILE the great plan of organic life was unfolding itself, the continental theater of its exhibition underwent a process of expansion which no less reveals a plan, and no less awakens our interest and admiration. By what stages the region east of the Great Plains acquired its form and dimensions, has long been understood; but the method of the building of the western half has only been brought to light through the recent researches of Hayden and Meek, King and Wheeler, Powell and Dutton, Gilbert and Hague, Whitney and Gabb, and their compeers and collaborators.

East of the Great Plains, rose first a long, hook-shaped ridge, with its longer branch stretching from the north shores of the Upper Lakes to the Arctic Ocean, in the region between Hudson's Bay and McKenzie's River; while the shorter branch extended northeastward as far as the coast of Labrador. Not improbably this branch stretched across the North Atlantic to the British Islands and Scandinavia. This primitive area I have styled the *Great Northern Land.* It is also known as the Laurentian area—a name which applies properly only to the portion sustaining some contiguity to the St. Lawrence.

Along the low seaboard region east of the Appalachians, stretches, from Maine to Alabama, the stump of an ancient mountain range which appears to have been of the same age. The stump only, I say, for the tooth of time has gnawed it nearly level with the sea, and the old material has been rebuilt in the foundations of later lands. This was the great *Seaboard Land.*

West of the Great Plains, as we now understand, stretched another long belt of land, which was destined eventually, to be consolidated with the eastern lands, to form the continent. In width, it extended originally—that is, at the beginning of the Palæozoic Æon, from the eastern bases of the Rocky Mountains to western Nevada—probably seven hundred and fifty miles; in length, it stretched far northward and south-