PREFACE.

I FEEL that an apology, as well as an explanation, is due to the subscribers of the 'Biologia Centrali-Americana' for the length of time that has been occupied in the production of this work. When it was commenced, in September 1879, it was estimated in our prospectus that, when completed, the Zoology would "not much exceed sixty parts, equivalent to about twelve volumes of 500 pages each," and that twenty parts would suffice for the Botany, the two subjects to be issued concurrently. The inclusion of the Archæology was not at that time contemplated, and this subject was only undertaken later in consequence of the investigations made by my friend Mr. A. P. Maudslay of the famous ruins in Central America, which, together with his beautiful photographs, made a valuable addition to our knowledge of the country. We had, moreover, underestimated the vast amount of additional material which subsequently came into our possession, and thus necessitated the extension of the work to a total of 215 parts, or 63 volumes.

It had been our intention at the termination of the work, and after a careful study of the Zoological and Botanical material accumulated from this hitherto little-known but exceedingly rich country, to have summarised the result and discussed its bearing on the interesting subject of geographical distribution. Salvin's death after a long illness, and my own advancing years and ill-health, compelled me to abandon this project, and I should have been obliged to content myself with the conclusions arrived at by the various contributors in their respective Introductions had it not been for the assistance of Messrs. R. I. Pocock and C. Tate Regan, to whom I am greatly indebted for their respective articles on the Mammals, Reptiles, Fishes, Arachnida, Chilopoda, etc., which are included in the Indroductory Volume. As regards the Insecta generally, which occupy such a large portion of the work, so little is as yet known of the fauna of other tropical regions that no satisfactory comparison can be made.