

farming region, it presents frequently an excellent soil, and when the rainfall is sufficient and the altitude not too great, considerable connected tracts may yet be brought under cultivation.

North of the North Saskatchewan no extensive treeless plains occur in the central region of the continent, and the forest country of the east forms a wide unbroken connection with that of the northern part of British Columbia, and though prairies of very attractive character are found near the Peace River, they are limited in area and isolated by belts of woodland. The width of the Mesozoic and Tertiary plain gradually diminishes to the north, being less than 400 miles near the 56th parallel, and it is possibly completely interrupted north of the 62nd parallel by the inosculation of the palaeozoic rocks of the east and west. The three steppes of the southern plains cannot be defined in this northern region, but its features are yet little known. In the basin of the Peace, the lower areas are covered superficially by fine silty deposits resembling those of the Red River valley, and doubtless indicating a former great lake or extension of the sea in the time immediately succeeding the glacial period.

Though thus so remarkably simple and definite in its grand features the interior region of the continent shows many irregularities in detail. The second steppe has some elevations on its surface as high as the edge of the third plateau, and that part surrounding the Assiniboine River and its tributaries is abnormally depressed, causing some portions of the eastern edge of this prairie-level which overlook Manitoba Lake, more to resemble outliers than integral parts of it.

The transverse water-sheds which bound the drainage area of the Saskatchewan and Red Rivers to the south and north, though comparatively low and diffuse, and insignificant as geological boundaries, are important geographically. Taken as a whole, however, the central portion of the Dominion may be regarded as a great shallow trough, of which the western edge is formed by the Rocky Mountains, the eastern by the Laurentian axis, but in which the western portion of the floor is now, (probably as the result of Post Tertiary elevation,) higher than its eastern rim. Of the area as at first defined, extending from the 54th to the 49th parallels, the great Saskatchewan River and its tributaries drain by far the largest part, or about 139,000 square miles. The Red River and its tributary the Assiniboine drain 70,500 square miles, and the valleys of the numerous small streams flowing into the Winnipeg group of lakes, including the area of the lakes themselves, drain 52,800 square miles. The upper branches of the Missouri, and especially those of its tributary the Milk River, drain a considerable area to the south, embracing about 22,800 square miles, while to the south of the first named parallel the tributaries of the Mackenzie