

more northerly than the United States, it had the advantage in nearness to the ports of the other northern continents.

Communication was convenient. In the east the waters of the St Lawrence and Hudson Bay offered shipway far into the heart of the continent, though in the winter months the northern frosts sealed the St Lawrence channel and studded Hudson Strait with ice—a drawback railway construction could not altogether remove, with Halifax twice as far as New York from Toronto. On the west coast, though nearly half the length was cut off from direct access to the sea by the Alaskan extension jutting south—as Newfoundland's Labrador strip in parallel but less hampering way barred half the Atlantic coast—the sunken mountain valleys of the southern half provided deep fiord harbours of unsurpassed magnificence. In the interior the St Lawrence chain of lakes and rivers afforded unequalled facilities for transport, with formidable barriers of falls and rapids to conquer. Far to the west the Saskatchewan carried the possibilities of navigation to the foot of the Rockies, its waters falling into Hudson Bay through the Nelson, and into Lake Superior through the Winnipeg and Rainy Lake chain; but the capriciously winding, swift or shallow waterways of the west, running through plain and prairie land that offered open paths, were destined, in spite of oft-recurring plans and projects, long to play a lesser part than the waterways of the east, flowing deep and straight through dense and trackless forests. The broad Mackenzie found outlet in a frozen sea; the rivers of the Pacific coast were more valuable for the railroad bed they had channelled out than for what traffic their own swift waters could bear. Through the mountains of the Far West, passes, some still unknown, were destined to afford passageway for railroads at less than half the altitude to which the transcontinental roads of the United States were forced to climb. Throughout the whole half-continent there were no impassable barriers and but few grades so steep as to hamper traffic.

Of momentous import for the Dominion's future was the geological basis, which has elsewhere been fully described.¹

¹ See 'The Physical Basis of Canada' in this section.