

the construction of a railroad. I refer to the zone of natural prairie along the Rocky Mountains, from the mountains of the Upper Saskatchewan to the banks of the Hay River, one of the feeders of the Great Slave Lake. I have been told by very many persons who have travelled over the Great Prairie, by which name this fertile belt is known, that it comprises every condition requisite for settlement, as well as being rich in lumber requisites and minerals of all kinds. Sulphur, bitumen, and coal crop up in many places, with rock-salt, iron, native copper, and even gold (according to report). Against these advantages, must be set the fact that the means of subsistence have become more and more rare, from the rapid diminution and imminent extinction of the animals which supplied the daily food of the Indians, such as the moose, caribou, wapiti, bison of the woods (a distinct species from the musk-ox and prairie bison), beaver, porcupine, &c. The musk-rat alone seems not to have failed as yet, and continues as before to swarm on the lakes, ponds, and smallest streams. I can only regret that I have no personal knowledge of this fertile region.

## II.

Lake Athabasca is the smallest of the fresh-water seas which stretch like a chain from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to the Arctic Ocean, east of the Mississippi, the Red River of the North, and the Athabasca-Mackenzie system.

It is 230 miles long by 20 miles broad, and about 600 feet above the level of the Arctic Ocean, according to the observations of General Sir J. H. Lefroy. The position of Fort Chipewyan, the headquarters of the district, is  $58^{\circ} 43' N.$  lat., and  $111^{\circ} 18' 32'' W.$  long.; that of Fort Fond-du-Lac is  $59^{\circ} 20' N.$  lat. and  $107^{\circ} 25' W.$  long.

Like a number of other lakes in this region, it is a crystal sheet of water lying in a deep bed, granitic at the north end, and with sandy and muddy deposits at the south. Three of its sides are granite, and a great number of granite islands thickly set with pines dot its surface. But there are no mountains there, and Hearne, the first explorer in 1771, would have been more correct in naming it Lake of the Isles than Lake of the Hills, as the abundance of islands strikes the traveller at the first glance.

I have already explained the Cree meaning of Athabasca. The present inhabitants, the Chipewyan Tinney, call it "Yétapè-t'ué" (Lako Superior), or more habitually "Kkpay-t'èlè-Kkè," or Willow-bed, alluding doubtless to the deltas. This was also the name of an old trading fort at the mouth of the Athabasca river, where willows were the dominant feature of the vegetation, only conifers and aspens being to be seen elsewhere.

The nature of the soil of the lake is therefore identical with that of the great lakè's tributary to Hudson's Bay, such as Lakes Wollaston,