

belt of populous settlements along the American boundary. These branches will pretty thoroughly gridiron the country with railroads and occupy the field for a generation to come, to the exclusion of any other railway enterprise. It is a fact of some interest that the syndicate will have a land grant along all the branches. It seems that, though the railroad act does not make special provisions for a land grant to branches, it provides, in case the main line grant does not supply the requisite 25,000,000 acres, indemnity lands may be taken along branches. It is estimated that it will take all the lines whose survey has been ordered to make up the aggregate.

The Saskatchewan branch has the first absolute importance, since it will penetrate the famous fertile belt of the great river and open to settlement the choicest agricultural lands of the Northwest. The Souris branch has an immediate importance, however, second to no other, since it will penetrate the famous coal fields of the Souris. These promise the best coal in the Northwest Territory. I talked with two or three intelligent persons who had personally visited the Souris coal region, just north of the American boundary, and made a careful inspection of the coal formations. The country along the bank of the river is described as rocky and barren and unfit for agricultural purposes. The geological formation is cretaceous sand rock, rising on the banks of the river into abrupt cliffs worn by the action of water, wind and weather into a thousand picturesque and fantastic shapes. I picture to myself from the description something like the Missouri bad lands, with sand rock instead of clay buttes and without burnt coal or scoria. The coal strata are exposed on the banks of the river, and lie in two distinct groups. The upper group of strata, not far below the surface, are two or three feet thick, are simple lignite in constitution, and are clearly the same strata exposed in the Missouri bad lands. This coal is still considered of doubtful value, though industrious and enthusiastic experimenters in the United States are confident that they can contrive some form of furnace in which it may be burned successfully. The second series of coal strata, lying many feet below the first, is of a greater geologic age and more substantial character. It is still lignite, but consolidated by age and pressure, like the cretaceous coal of