

probably less than two thousand feet above the sea-level. The most pronounced inclination, however, giving direction to the rivers of this portion of the great plains, is that from the base of the Rocky Mountains to the east or north-east. The Red River valley, which constitutes the lowest prairie-level, and lies along the base of the eastern Laurentian plateau, has an altitude of about eight hundred feet only. From this level, with minor exceptions, the surface may be regarded as sloping gradually and continuously upward, at a rate of from four to five feet in the mile, to the foot-hills. There the horizontal and unaltered strata of the cretaceous and Laramie formations break against the base of the ancient rocks of the mountains into a series of sharp and nearly parallel flexures, producing a varied and picturesque region, with quite peculiar characters. In the central portion of the plains, the most marked exceptions to their generally even and monotonous contour are found in the tumultuously hilly belt of country known as the Missouri Côteau and in a line of diffuse and indefinite elevations nearly parallel to the Côteau, which includes Turtle Mountain, Moose Mountain, and the File and Touchwood Hills. These hills, or mountains so called, are really tracts of considerable size, with rolling or hilly surface, more or less wooded. The northern extension of the Côteau, where known as the Eagle Hills, near Battleford, also becomes partly wooded.

To any one familiar with the territory lying west of the Missouri, the most remarkable difference of a general character, observable in this northern extension of the same region, is perhaps the extraordinary abundance of small lakes, ponds, or 'sloughs,' which are scattered everywhere over its surface. This peculiarity is evidently in connection with

the mantle of glacial drift, which is here universal, and dependent on the irregular deposition of its material. The lakes and ponds, while at times arranged in intercommunicating linear series, are usually distributed without the least apparent regularity, and occupy shallow basins without outlet. Filled by the melting of the snow or rains of the early summer, a great proportion are completely emptied by evaporation before the autumn, while the water remaining in others becomes more or less distinctly saline in many instances. This is more particularly the case with those of the southern and more level portion of the region. Near the northern margin of the plains, saline lakes are quite exceptional. It is generally on the edge of one of these rush-bordered pools that the traveller makes his evening camp; and, while the abundance of water in one respect facilitates travel in the spring and early summer, the moist condition of the deep alluvial soil at these seasons may prove a more than countervailing disadvantage. The most serious obstacles, however, to be met with in long journeys across the plains, are the various rivers. The Assiniboine, Souris, Qu'Appelle, and other streams of the eastern district, during the breaking-up of the ice, and for some time subsequently, may prove formidable barriers in the absence of bridges or ferries. The North and South Saskatchewan, the Red Deer, Bow and Belly Rivers, all eventually uniting to pour their waters into the northern end of Lake Winnipeg, rise far back in the Rocky Mountains, and, while subject to considerable spring freshets in some seasons, are generally not in full flood till June or July, when the snow is disappearing from the highest summits of the range, and the snow-field and glaciers about the sources of some of them are melting most rapidly. These streams have trenched valleys