

THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHY IN
COMMERCE.

James Keillor, B.A., Coll. Inst., Ridgetown.

At the present day, when we hear so much about commercial education in our schools and universities, it seems strange that so little attention should be paid to a subject of prime importance in commercial life—I mean the subject of Geography. While constant improvements are being made in the methods of teaching and in the text-books dealing with other subjects, this one has suffered gross neglect.

Geography has been well described by Mr. H. J. Mackinder as “the physical basis of history.” We may go even farther, and say that it is the physical basis of all human activity. For is it not a description of the earth, with all its varied features of mountain and table-land, plain and desert, ocean, lake and river, forest and prairie, continent and island, air and ice, rain and sun-hine, in all their complex combinations, which, since they form man’s immediate environment, must largely influence his activities in all directions.

In Germany, for many years past, able men have devoted themselves to the special study of geography. Ever since Ritter’s time a specially human turn has been given to the subject by his countrymen; it has been recognized that the ultimate aim of geography is to study the earth as a dwelling-place for mankind. As a result of this careful cultivation of the geographical field, a voluminous literature is growing up, and many valuable results have been attained. These results are likely to prove valuable, not only in the study of history, but also in

their bearings on industry, on commerce, and on colonization. For example, in Germany commercial geography is something practical, something that the merchant and the merchant’s clerk can take with him into his office and apply to his every-day transactions—not the somewhat barren thing that is called by that name in many of our Canadian schools. It embraces a field that touches the practical business of commerce at every point.

Modern commerce is no longer the monopoly of any one nation; it has become cosmopolitan, and carries its operations into every quarter of the globe. The intensity of the competition is felt by every nation and every merchant; and we are convinced that while speed and strength are important, they are of little avail without knowledge—superior knowledge must in the end win the race. Hence we believe that modern commerce has become an object which ought to receive full recognition in our schools and colleges. It is a subject worthy of being treated in a scientific and philosophical way, and of being placed in the curricula of all our universities.

The growth of commerce in the past has been intimately associated with the progress of geographical discovery. Without the explorer as a pioneer there would be but little advancement in trade. And as in the past so it is at the present day, commerce is inseparably associated with the progress of geographical enterprise.

It must necessarily be so if we