

THE SASKATCHEWAN COUNTRY.

GEORGE M. DAWSON.

The district at present attracting attention as the scene of an insurrection of half-breeds and Indians against the Canadian government is situated on the North Saskatchewan River, near the northern margin of the great plains. The vast region of plain and prairie which occupies the whole central portion of the continent, crosses the 49th parallel of latitude—which constitutes the international boundary-line—with a width of 750 miles, but extends north of the boundary about 300 miles only, being there limited by the edge of the great northern forest which stretches, with little interruption, to beyond the arctic circle. Prairies of considerable size occur, it is true, in the valley of the Peace, but these are isolated from the great plains by wide forests. There is reason to believe that the greater part of the prairie country in Canadian territory might become permanently wooded but for the almost annually recurring prairie-fires, which are still tending to increase its area. The southern edge of the forest is, however, in the main, coincident with that of a region of abundant rainfall.

The northern border of the prairie country may be generally defined by a line drawn from the vicinity of the city of Winnipeg westward to the junction of the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle rivers; thence north-westward to the junction of the North and South Saskatchewan rivers; thence westward, nearly following the latter river, to Edmonton; from that point south-westward to Calgary, on the Bow; and thence southward along the eastern base of the Rocky Mountains. The total area thus outlined, which is either altogether treeless or characterized by wide stretches of prairie interspersed with scattered groves of aspen and other trees, is approximately 300,000 square miles. The southern and south-western parts of this region may be described as entirely without wood, though even there the rivers are almost invariably fringed by groves of cottonwood.

The general elevation of the plains of the Canadian north-west is very considerably less than that of the corresponding portion of the continent farther south, the mean height of the whole region above outlined being probably less than two thousand