

NATURE'S OUTLET FOR THE NORTH-WEST.

BY HUGH SUTHERLAND.

ASSURED that the subject is of interest to the readers of *THE CANADIAN MAGAZINE*, I gladly supplement my short paper in the August number by a more extended discussion of some of the principal features of the scheme of a Hudson Bay Railway. I have already explained briefly why I advocate the construction of such a railway. It is, in a word, because I believe the circumstances of the North-West demand this shorter and cheaper outlet to the markets of the world, and because I believe the route to be entirely practicable for commercial purposes.

I am sensible, however, that my confidence is not shared by large numbers in the Eastern Provinces, because, perhaps, they have not given to the subject the same careful, exhaustive consideration, which it has been my duty to bestow upon it. They are too apt to hasten to the conclusion that the far-north water of Hudson Strait is not navigable for a longer period than a few weeks, or a month or two at most, in mid-summer; that the rivers and harbors are frozen during much the greater part of the year, and that in any case, no one in his senses would think of using a route so much out of the beaten path. There are readers of these lines who can well remember when the St. Lawrence route was spoken of much in the same way, a fact which does not, it is true, testify to the practicability of the other, but which should at least warn us not to be too sceptical of the claims made in its behalf.

There is no difficulty about the railway. That can be built as easily as the average railway in Ontario, and much more cheaply. But that will count for nothing, unless it can be

shown that the railway can be reached from the ocean without more than the usual risk, and for a sufficient period each year to make it worth while. The whole scheme depends upon the navigation; if we can get to the railway terminus on the bay, the project is a good one; if not, it is no good and must fall. We naturally, therefore, come to consider the question of navigation first of all. Until the explorations of the *Neptune* and *Alert* in 1884, '85 and '86, at the instance of the Dominion Government, the public knew in a general way only, that the bay and strait were being regularly frequented by ships of the Hudson's Bay Company, and that they had been for a hundred or two hundred years. But it was supposed they slipped in through the strait between the flows of ice, and that a passage was really a matter of accident. This has not been the case, however. Those ships had one round trip to make each year, and naturally the time was chosen when there was the least risk of interruption from ice. Delays in or out have been the exception, not the rule. But sometimes they have been detained, and this fact has given rise to the supposition that there is always ice in greater or less quantity, and therefore always risk. The mistake we have been making is that we did not go beyond or behind this fact. There is the risk of ice almost any month in the year, although during three or four of those months, it is very rarely heavy enough to be an impediment to any sort of navigation. This ice is much more formidable in imagination than in reality. It comes down from Fox's Channel in broken bits of all sizes, not in the mass. A field of it, however loose, will offer impediment