

far got the start. Ever since the discovery of gold in California the ablest military engineers of the United States have been engaged in searching for a practicable outlet in the Rocky Mountains, but not a single pass has been detected for 1,000 miles south of the 49th parallel less than 6,000 feet high. Ten years ago, when Jefferson Davis was Secretary of War, he said, "the only practicable route for railway communication between the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts of North America is through the Hudson's Bay territory, on account of the desert land from the north boundary of the United States to the extreme south of Texas." In 1858 the Governor of Minnesota also admitted that a "great inter-oceanic communication is more likely to be constructed through the Saskatchewan basin than across the American desert." Depressions in the passes north of lat. 49° are generally manageable, numerous, and so well distributed as to leave us at no loss in entering whatever portion of British Columbia from north to south we may desire. Captain Palliser takes notice of eight passes,¹ the altitudes of which were measured by him, the Vermillion Pass, 4,944 feet high, being the most convenient of ascent he had discovered. About three years after the explorations conducted by that gentleman, the Leather Pass attracted attention as the most favourable for wheel conveyances and as requiring the least expense for grading. It is situated in lat. 54°, is 400 or 500 feet lower than the Vermillion, and has a mean clear ascent of only from 3¼ to 3½ feet in the whole distance from Fort Edmonton. It was crossed in 1862 by several parties of adventurers bound for the mines of British Columbia, embracing more than two hundred persons in all. One of these companies travelled with one hundred and thirty oxen and seventy horses. From the lips of many of these emigrants I have received uniform testimony to the clear and level aspect of the country through which they journeyed, and to the practicability of the Leather Pass for railway purposes. From the description given by Viscount Milton and Dr. Cheadle of their travels through the Rocky Mountains, it will be seen that these sublime heights, covered with eternal snows, are no longer invested to the traveller with repellent terrors. His lordship and his friend thus write: "From Red River to Edmonton, about 800 miles, the road lies through a fertile and park-like country, and an excellent cart trail already exists. From Edmonton to Jasper House, a distance of about 400 miles, the surface is slightly undulating. . . . From Jasper House to Tete Jaune's Cache—the pass through the main ridge of the Rocky Mountains, about 100 or 120 miles in length—a wide break in the chain, *running nearly east and west*, offers a natural roadway, unobstructed except by timber. The rivers, with the exception of the Athabasca and the Fraser, are small and fordable, even at their highest. The

(1) Explorations, p. 14.