

is the great natural highway of the Dominion. The St. Lawrence during the summer is reached from the ocean by two channels, the Strait of Belle-Isle to the north of Newfoundland and Cabot Strait to the south and west. The gulf and River St. Lawrence admit the passage of ocean steamers to Montreal, a distance of 900 miles inland from Belle-Isle. Of the two routes to the open ocean that by the Strait of Belle-Isle is the most direct from the cities on the St. Lawrence to Europe. It is not used by the shipping of other nations unless they are engaged in Canadian trade; it is therefore practically and essentially a Canadian route of immense value to Canada and Great Britain.

We cannot correctly estimate the value of the Belle-Isle route without referring to certain peculiar climatic conditions which impose a limit to its utility. During the winter the St. Lawrence is not available as a means of communication. Navigation closes by the end of November, and when Spring returns, although the river and gulf may be sufficiently free from ice in May to admit of ships entering by Cabot Strait to ascend to Quebec and Montreal, Belle-Isle remains practically closed until a later date. The more northern entrance is not generally available for ships until the last half of June, and the regular mail steamers do not attempt to pass before July 1st.

The explanation of this late opening of navigation by Belle-Isle is well known. It is due to the fact that in the spring months the Arctic current descends from the north along the Labrador and Newfoundland coast, laden with innumerable icebergs which extend a long way to sea and drift into the Straits in the earlier months of summer so as to impede navigation. The ice-drift varies from year to year. It may leave its source at an earlier or later date than usual, and as a consequence its arrival opposite Belle-Isle varies a few weeks: but late or early, vessels cannot enter the Straits until the icebergs have become sufficiently reduced in number to admit an easy passage in open water between them. The Arctic current gradually carries the ice southerly into warmer latitudes where it is melted, and hence it is, that as the summer months advance the icebergs largely disappear. In clear weather steamships have seldom much difficulty in finding their way through the Belle-Isle passage, but it is not so easy during fog. All winds from the southward bring