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4th Session, 8th Parliament, 29th Vic., 1865.

FIRST REPORT

Of the Select Standing Committee on Immigration and Colonization.

Printed by Order of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. JACKSON.

QUEBEC:

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JAS. STURGEON

FIRST REPORT

OF THE

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE

ON

IMMIGRATION AND COLONIZATION.

Your Committee are impressed with the conviction that any inquiry into the adaptation of existing appliances for the settlement of the Public Lands, by Immigrants, must be somewhat partial, and therefore unsatisfactory, in view of the general expectation that a very large area of fertile land, known as the "North-Western" territory, is shortly to be placed under the control and supervision of the Canadian Legislature. Under these circumstances, Your Committee propose to present, in a concise form, the testimony of authorities of unquestioned ability and veracity, in reference to the character and extent of the territory in question, as may be presumed to be of great general interest,—which testimony has especial reference to that district of country lying between the Rocky Mountains, Lake Winnipeg, the Lake of the Woods, and the 49th parallel, containing about 380,000 square miles, with a width of 750 miles, and is variously denominated the "Valley of the Saskatchewan," the "Basin of Winnipeg" and the "High Central Plain."

Captain Pallisser, who explored those portions of British North America lying between the British boundary and the watershed of the Northern Ocean, under the authority of the Imperial Government, in the years 1857, '58, '59 and '60, says:—"The extent of surface drained by the Saskatchewan and other tributaries to Lake Winnipeg, which we had an opportunity of examining, amounts in round numbers to 150,000 square miles. This region is bounded to the North by what is known as the "Strong Woods" or the southern limit of the great circum-arctic zone of forest, which occupies these latitudes in the northern hemisphere."

This line sweeps to the North-West from the shore of Lake Winnipeg, and reaches its most northerly limit about 54° 30' N., and longitude 119° West, from whence it again passes to the South-West, meeting the Rocky Mountains in latitude 51° North, longitude 115° West. Between this line of the "Strong Woods" and the northern limits of the true prairie country, there is a belt of land varying in width, which at one period must have been covered by an extension of the northern forests, but which has been gradually cleared by successive fires.

It is now a partially wooded country, abounding in lakes and rich natural pasturage, in some parts rivalling the finest park scenery of our own country. Throughout this region of country the climate seems to preserve the same character, although it passes through very different latitudes, its form being doubtless determined by the curves of the isothermal line. Its superficial extent embraces about 65,000 square miles, of which more than one-third may be considered at once available for the purposes of the Agriculturist.

In reference to the "belt of land," alluded to in the previous quotation, Professor Hind—under the caption of the "Fertile Belt in the valley of the Saskatchewan," at page 55 in his "Sketch of an overland route to British Columbia,"—says, "The Fertile Belt of arable soil, partly in the form of rich, open prairie, partly covered with groves of aspen, which stretches from the Lake of the Woods to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, * * * averages 80 to 100 miles in breadth. The North Saskatchewan flows through the

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fertile belt, in a valley averaging from one-fourth of a mile to one mile in breadth, and excavated to the depth of 200 to 300 feet below the level of the prairie or plains, until it reaches the low country, some miles east of Fort à la Corne. The area of this extraordinary belt of rich soil and pasturage is about forty million acres. It was formerly a wooded country, but by successive fires it has been partially cleared of its forest growth, but abounds with the most luxuriant herbage, and generally possesses a deep rich soil of vegetable mould."

In addition to the testimony of Captain Pallisser and Professor Hind, respectively, on the character and extent of the said territory, Your Committee submit the following quotation from the appendix to an official report by Mr. James W. Taylor, of St. Pauls, Minnesota, under date of 2nd March 1858 to the Governor of Minnesota:—"There is, in the heart of North America, a distinct sub-division, of which Lake Winipeg may be regarded as the centre. This sub-division, like the valley of the Mississippi, is distinguished for the fertility of its soil, and for the extent and gentle slope of its great plains, watered by rivers of great length, and admirably adapted for steam navigation. It has a climate not exceeding in severity that of many portions of Canada and the Eastern States. It will, in all respects, compare favorably with some of the most densely peopled portions of the continent of Europe. In other words, it is admirably fitted to become the seat of a numerous, hardy and prosperous community. It has an area equal to eight or ten first-class American States. Its great river, the Saskatchewan, carries a navigable water-line to the very base of the Rocky Mountains. It is not at all improbable that the valley of this river may yet offer the best route for a railroad to the Pacific. The navigable waters of this great sub-division interlock with those of the Mississippi. The Red River of the North, in connection with Lake Winipeg, into which it falls, forms a navigable water-line, extending directly north and south nearly eight hundred miles."

Mons. E. Bourgeau, who accompanied Captain Pallisser in his explorations, addressed the following remarks to the late Sir William Hooker in reference to Hudson's Bay Territory:—"But it remains for me to call the attention of the English Government to the advantage there would be in establishing agricultural districts in the vast plains of Rupert's Land, and particularly in the Saskatchewan. This district is much more adapted to the cultivation of staple crops of temperate climates, wheat, rye, barley, oats, &c., than one would have been inclined to believe from this high latitude."

On the question of climate, to which an allusion is made in the last paragraph, Professor Maury, in a letter from the Observatory, Washington, January 4, 1859, says:—"Most men of our age were educated under the belief that parallels of latitude and terrestrial climates are correlatives; that we might tell the temperature of any unknown country, or region of country, if we knew its latitude. Humboldt and Dove exploded this idea with their isothermal lines. For example, they show that the mean annual temperature of North Cape, lat. 70° in Europe, is the same as that along the north shore of Lake Superior, in lat. 50°. Here is a difference of 20° of latitude without any difference in the average annual temperature of the two places."

An important feature in the commercial geography of this north-western country is the extent of its navigable water-line. Captain Blakeston, another of the colleagues of Captain Pallisser, says, "Taking either branch of the Saskatchewan River, it is navigable for boats from Lake Winipeg to near the base of the Rocky Mountains, a distance of 1200 miles. I am glad to say I was fortunate enough to travel on it from its mouth to Fort Edmonston, 1000 miles up, at a time of year when I saw the water at its lowest."

The next, and not the least important consideration in view of the settlement of the North-Western territory by Canada, is brought with great distinctness to the notice of Capt. Pallisser by the under Secretary of State for the Colonies, in the following question:—"What means of access exist for British Emigrants to reach this settlement?" Answer, the direct route from England *via* York Factory, and also that from Canada *via* Lake Superior, are too tedious, difficult, and expensive for the generality of settlers. The manner in which natural obstacles have isolated the Country from all other British possessions in the East is a matter of considerable weight; indeed, it is the obstacle of the country, and one, I fear, almost beyond the remedies of art. The egress and ingress to the settlement from the East is obviously by the Red River Valley and through the States."

The reply of Captain Pallisser, though of a slightly discouraging kind, can by no means

be regarded as exhaustive; at the time when he made his explorations the current of travel to the Red River settlement, and to the Hudson's Bay Company's trading ports, was by way St. Paul, Crow-Wing and Pembina. This route had been so far improved he says, "that no greater difficulty will exist in gaining access to the Red River settlement, than to any of the more western towns of the United States which are not yet reached by railways. Under these circumstances he might be disposed to conclude, somewhat hastily, that there would be no *immediate* advantage commensurate with the required sacrifice of capital; nor can I advise such heavy expenditure as would necessarily attend the construction of any *exclusively* British line of road between Canada and Red River settlement." In a review of the answer of Captain Pallisser to the Colonial Secretary, previously quoted, Professor Hind says, that "he (Captain Pallisser) has not had the opportunity of examining and reporting on the Fort William and Arrow Lake route from Lake Superior to Red River. Practical experience of the facilities offered by that route would, I venture to say, have greatly modified the sweeping condemnation of existing and possible means of communication comprehended in the foregoing brief reply to the important question proposed by the Colonial Office.

Mr. W. H. E. Napier, an Engineer of the Canadian exploring party under the direction of Mr. Gladman, in 1857, estimates the distance from Lake Superior, to Fort Garry at 647 miles, but remarks, "that to determine the most eligible line of communication through this section, a thorough examination of the country between Fort William and Rainy Lake, would be requisite, both by the North and South of the Canoe route; that there is every reason to expect that a direct and easily constructed road can be formed, and that a party is at present exploring a line through from Fort Garry." This reference is undoubtedly to the party, at that time directed by Mr. S. J. Dawson, from whose report, addressed to the Commissioner of Crown Lands, and dated, Red River Settlement, December 17, 1857, the following extracts are made:—

"We came by the usual canoe route from Fort William, following the Kaministiquia, the Rainy and Winnipeg Rivers. The Kaministiquia, for ten or twelve miles upwards from Lake Superior, has a smooth course; rapids then occur, in close succession, for ten or twelve miles further, to the Grand Falls; but canoes can be either towed or poled up these with tolerable facility. Within the next ten miles the river makes a descent of about 300 feet, forming many serious obstructions to the navigation, with but short intervals of quiet water between them. On this portion of the route there are numerous portages, half-portages and rapids, which render the ascent of canoes extremely tedious and difficult. After this there is a short reach of quiet water to the Great-Dog portage. There the river makes a descent of 347 feet, in the short distance of a mile and twenty-three chains. This is the steepest portage on the route; the summit of the ridge, over which the water passes, being 500 feet above the level of the water at the lower end. Arrived at Dog Lake, the distance from Lake Superior by the windings of the Kaministiquia, is about 46 miles, while in a direct line from Thunder Bay, on that lake, it is only about 24 miles. It will at once occur that the rough and rocky Kaministiquia would be best avoided by making a direct road from Thunder Bay to Dog Lake, which would then be within half a day's drive from Lake Superior, instead of its taking nearly five days to reach it, as it did by the Kaministiquia, although we were tolerably manned and but lightly loaded.

The length of land and water carriage, from Lake Superior, would be nearly as follows:—

From Lake Superior to Dog Lake, allowing for curves, say land carriage.....	25 miles.
Through Dog Lake and from thence to Cold Water Lake, supposing the navigation to be rendered practicable by a dam thrown across the outlet of Dog Lake—water carriage.....	35 "
From Cold Water Lake over the prairie, and passed the Middle and Savanne portages to the Savanne River—land carriage ...	5 "
From the Savanne Portage, by the river of the same name, and through the Lake of a Thousand Isles, to the rapids below its western extremity—water carriage... ..	84 "
From these rapids to Rainy Lake, the distance is about 60 miles, but this part of the route is not yet explored; however, from the information we had from the Indians, it would be safe to	

allow two-thirds of the distance to be navigable, say, therefore	
—land carriage.....	20 miles.
And water carriage.....	40 “
Through Rainy Lake, by the river of that name, and the Lake of the Woods, to the head of Lake Platte, interrupted only by the falls at Fort Francis, navigable for	160 “
From Lake Platte to Fort Garry, allowing for curves, say—land carriage.....	100 “
Total.....	469 miles,

of which 150 miles would be by land, and the remaining 319 miles by water; the distance by the present route is not less than 635 miles, so that in this respect, there would be a great saving. The opening of this route would, in the opinion of Your Committee, be succeeded by explorations and works of a more extended nature, and would tend to the establishment of a route through Canada and British Columbia.

From Red River to the base of the Rocky Mountains, there is but little interruption to navigation, and through these easy passes have been discovered within the limits of British Territory. A continuation of a road from the Rocky Mountains to Frazer River, and the Pacific is the shortest that can be adopted and would, unquestionably, become the high-way of an emigration to the gold region, the extent of which cannot be foreseen.

The Hon. W. H. Seward, now Secretary of State, United States,—in 1857, after visiting Labrador and parts of Canada, wrote thus:—“I see, in British North America, stretching as it does across the continent, from the shores of Labrador and Newfoundland to the Pacific, and occupying a considerable belt of the temperate zone, traversed equally with the United States by the Lakes, and enjoying the magnificent shores of the St. Lawrence, with its thousand of islands in the river and gulf, a region grand enough for the seat of a great empire. In its wheat fields in the West, its broad ranges of the chase at the North, its inexhaustible lumber lands,—the most extensive now remaining on the globe—its invaluable fisheries, and its yet undisturbed mineral deposits, I see the elements of wealth.”

In the absence of official records of surveys or explorations, Your Committee are not in a position to describe a land route passing to the north of Lake Superior.

In the examination of Mr. A. J. Russell, of Ottawa, a Surveyor of large experience—Your Committee took occasion to call his attention to the feasibility of a land route from some prominent point in Canada to Fort Garry. In substance that gentleman said, that a direct line drawn from Montreal to Fort Garry on Red River, will lie along the Upper Ottawa, strike the mouth of Montreal River at Lake Temiscaming, and passing up the valley of Montreal River, will strike the more northerly point of Lake Superior and the north part of the Lake of the Woods. This line would be 400 miles shorter to Fort Garry, than any line south of the great lakes. The depth of snow at Lake Temiscaming is less than at Quebec, and becomes less as you approach the Lake of the Woods. By a direct route, Montreal is distant from Fort Garry about 1,400 miles.

All which is respectfully submitted.

GEORGE JACKSON,
Chairman

Committee Room,
House of Assembly
12th Sept., 1865