

137. As the area of Canada is great, its general physical features and its soil and climate vary very much in character. The whole of the eastern part of Canada, from the Atlantic to the north-west boundaries of Ontario, was at one time a vast forest, still in many places very heavily wooded. Fuller particulars of the forest wealth of Canada are given in chap. V.

138. Between the northern boundary of Ontario and the Rocky Mountains lie the Province of Manitoba and the southern part of the North-west Territories. This great tract of land is remarkable for its division, along lines running generally north-west and south-east, into three distinct prairie steppes, or plateaux. The first of these is known as the Red River valley and Lake Winnipeg plateau. The width at the boundary line is about 52 miles, and the average height about 800 feet above the sea; at the boundary line the height is about 1,000 feet. The first plateau lies entirely within the Province of Manitoba, and is estimated to contain about 7,000 square miles of the best wheat-growing land in the world. The second plateau or steppe has an average altitude of 1,600 feet, having a width of about 250 miles on the national boundary line; and an area of about 105,000 square miles of rich, undulating, park-like country lies in this region. This section is specially favourable for settlement, and includes the Assiniboine and Qu'Appelle districts. The third plateau or steppe begins on the boundary line at the 104th meridian, with an elevation of about 2,000 feet, and extends west for 465 miles to the foot of the Rocky Mountains, where it has an altitude of about 4,200 feet, making an average height above the sea of about 3,000 feet. The three plateaux, though varying considerably in character, are all most favourably adapted for agricultural pursuits, including dairying and stock-raising. Numerous and prosperous homesteads and cattle ranches have been established.

139. The northern part of the centre of the Dominion, extending from the Rocky Mountains to Hudson Bay, is very extensively wooded, and has generally been considered for the most part unfit for settlement, and only useful as a preserve for fur-bearing animals. But during the session of Parliament of 1888 a committee of the Senate held an investigation into the capabilities of these regions, the result being that all previous ideas were upset. The area inquired into was about 1,260,000 square miles, and of these it was estimated 860,000 square miles were suitable, and about 400,000 square miles useless for cultivation; 656,000 square miles were fitted for potatoes, 407,000 square miles for barley, and 316,000 square miles for wheat. There is a river navigation of about 2,750 miles, 1,390 miles being navigable with stern-wheel steamers and 1,360 miles with light draught sea-going steamers. There are large deposits of gold, silver, iron, graphite, ochre, brick and pottery clay, mica, gypsum, lime and sandstone, "while the petroleum area is so extensive as to justify the belief that eventually it will supply the larger part of this continent." Peltry are at present the chief commercial products of this last great fur preserve of wild animals, and in view of the danger of the extinction of animals whose furs are fashionable, the committee suggested that districts should be leased by the Government, and a limitation placed on the take of certain kinds of skins. The lakes and rivers abound in fish, especially whitefish and lake trout. The committee pointed out that the valuable whale fisheries of the