

Gulf of Mexico, includes the basins of the Mississippi, St. Lawrence, Nelson, Churchill, Missouri, and Mackenzie rivers, and occupy a total area of 3,245,000 miles. They embrace, therefore, every variety of scenery, from the exuberance of the tropics to the sterility of the Arctic world. They expand as they proceed northward, and though nowhere so monotonously flat as the South American llanos, present no considerable elevation; the only rising ground of importance being the watershed, which throws off, on the one side, the affluents of the Mississippi, and, on the other, the tributaries of the Arctic Ocean. This watershed averages 750 feet in height, but occasionally reaches 1500 feet.

The general characteristics of this region may be rapidly summed up: a sandy desert at the base of the Rocky Mountains as high as 41° N. lat.; bare, treeless steppes in the greater part of Texas and Arkansas; a deltoid region of rank vegetation, covering 35,000 square miles, at the mouth of the Mississippi; east of that great river a magnificent undulating country, which forms the staple wealth of the American republic; gloomy pine-barriers, or vast tracts of sand covered with forests of gigantic pine-trees in Alabama and Florida; glorious woodlands, rich in azaleas, rhododendrons, tulip trees, hickory, plane, and maple, in Tennessee and Kentucky; acres of forest and fertile soil in Canada, and along the Saskatchewan and Columbia; and, finally, westward of the Mississippi, leagues upon leagues of rolling savannahs, which, covered with long rank grass and flowers of the liliaceous tribe—refreshed by numerous streams—enriched with vigorous and beautiful shrubs—occasionally shaded by groups of oak and black walnut, magnolia, tulip and cotton-trees—and traversed by immense herds of wild horses, bisons, and deer—have become famous throughout the civilized world under the name of *the Prairies*,\* and as a scene of wild romance, of daring adventure, and profitable enterprise.]

\* [The word is of French origin, and identical with *pré*, a meadow.—See, for fuller particulars, Lewis and Clark's "U. S. Exploring Expedition;" Colonel Fremont's "Expedition to Oregon;" Lord Milton and Dr. Cheadle's "North-West Passage by Land;" and Hepworth Dixon's "New America."]