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NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE: A GEOGRAPHICAL COMPARISON¹

NOTHING could surpass my curiosity when I landed for the first time in North America, a new world, separated from the old one by a great ocean. As a geologist, I knew that similar rocks formed the land and that similar surface features would occur, but as a geographer, I knew too that the vegetation of North America differs from that of Europe and that there are only a few species common to both sides of the water. What will be the impression of the landscape—will it be European or a different type? But when I put my foot on the land near Quebec I became aware that the general features of the landscape and the surroundings of man were nearly the same there as in Europe, and only a closer inspection convinced me that I was amid a new flora. Indeed, I had the feeling of being not in a latitude south of Vienna, whence I had just come, but rather of being in the same surroundings as at Stockholm—twelve degrees of latitude farther north.

There are, indeed, very strong similarities between North America and Europe. A superficial glance at our maps will reveal similar features. Europe is only a peninsula of Asia, and the peninsular character determines all features of this continent. North America may be compared with the whole of Eurasia, and its eastern part shows a similar peninsular articulation as

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¹ Inaugural lecture by the Kaiser Wilhelm Professor, delivered at Columbia University on November 3, 1908.

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