

the Caspian Sea. Yet Russia extends south of this range ; and the rest of the land which lies between the Caspian Sea, Black Sea, Mediterranean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf, is probably more closely connected with European than with Asiatic politics. In this area lie great highroads which have been of commercial importance since very early times, some of them having been followed by races which, like the Turks, have come into Europe from Asia.

The southern boundary of Europe is formed by the Mediterranean—a sea that has never proved of much importance as a barrier, while the districts lying around it have such broad physical characteristics in common that they may be considered to form together one important natural region. The Mediterranean region therefore includes part of Asia and Africa, as well as Southern Europe, and extends southwards to the Sahara. This desert has always been a great barrier between regions of totally different characteristics, and it is only south of it that vegetable and animal life become typically African, and the black race takes the place of the white.

On the north and west Europe is bounded by the ocean, which long ages ago invaded the lower parts of the great northern plain and formed the shallow White Sea, Baltic Sea, North Sea, English Channel, and Bay of Biscay. Before this inundation, which was probably a very gradual process, took place, the British Isles were joined to the continent, and probably North Britain to Iceland ; for at slight depth the latter are united by a ridge of land, from which rise the Shetland and Faroe Isles. Another submerged ridge lies between Iceland and Greenland, and divides the Arctic basin from the North Atlantic. These ocean basins are deep, and west of the British Isles the sudden slope downwards from the shallow submarine plateau on which the islands stand is very noticeable.

The sea often fosters a maritime life in the dwellers along the shores ; but, though some adventurous voyages were made by the Norse Vikings in early mediæval times, and a good deal of commerce was carried on by sea in coasting vessels, it is only since America has been settled that the ocean has ceased in a large measure to be a barrier, and has become a region of great commercial routes between the Old and New Worlds. Thus, Europe is now able to benefit to the full by its intermediate position between the densely-populated regions of Asia and the newly-developed resources of America.