

## MOUNT ST. ELIAS.

THE highest mountain in North America is surrounded by the darkest mystery. It towers out of an unknown land, where no human foot has ever trod. It fronts upon an unfrequented and dangerous coast, seemingly at the confines of the Arctic regions. In lonely grandeur, in awfulness, and white splendor, St. Elias is not equaled. Nowhere else is there an alp nearly four miles high, robed down to the very base in eternal snow, and pending above the deep, dark azure of the sea. And very rarely is the mountain seen, for the warm and moisture-laden winds

that same island Aliaska, filling the Pacific down to the forty-eighth parallel, as he had said. Therefore, these wisecracks drew a map, setting forth how the island ought to be. An expedition was equipped under one Vitus Behring, a Dane, and took two years before launching its little squadron on Pacific waters. The land was coasted right north to Behring straits, but there it began to trend westward again. So, at last, there set out the memorable second expedition. I think it was in 1741. Behring and Tschirikoff, in their little ships *St. Peter* and *St. Paul*, sailed into the unknown east—and found nothing. They coasted about just where the island ought to be, but it wasn't



ALASKA—MOUNT ST. ELIAS, 19,000 FEET HIGH.

of the Pacific break upon these mighty heights of ice and shroud them in almost perpetual cloud.

In the beginning of the last century rumors reached the court of Russia that, from the last confines of Siberia there had been described by natives an island—Aliaska, a great land, from which trees came drifting upon the coast. The Empress Catherine called her geographers together. Nothing, they said, was known of the Pacific to the northward of California, which was then a Mexican colony. There was, indeed, the legend, told by that old Greek pilot, Juan de Fuca, of the Straits of Anian, that began at the forty-eighth parallel and led through Meta Incognita to the Atlantic; and, north of said Straits of Anian, the land must be

there. The world was not laid out correctly and in accordance with the charts, and provisions were running short. Behring still cruised about in search of the runaway island. Tschirikoff slipped away one night and sailed to the north and west, until, at last, he came to Cross straits, and was thus the discoverer of Alaska. Seeing natives, he landed a boat's crew for water; but the boat vanished behind a point and was seen no more. Heart sick, he sent another boat's crew, and that vanished behind the point and was seen no more. After long delay he sailed, and, in defiance of thirst and scurvy, through wonderful adventures on the south coast of Alaska, got back alive to Siberia.