

Hence they have assumed all conceivable shapes and forms. In some places they are serrated into sharp, angular peaks, and in other places they appear architecturally arranged, so as to present cloud-capped castles, towers, domes, and minarets. The mountain sides are furrowed with deep and straight ravines, down which the thawing fields of ice and snow are precipitated, generally in the month of May, with such a vehemence as to have produced in every valley immense level plains of intervale land. These plains, as well as the sides of the mountains, almost to the summits, are covered with forests so dense and dark as to be impenetrable, except to wild beasts and savage huntsmen. On the lowest intervale land the cottonwood grows. It seems to be the species of poplar which is known in the Atlantic States as the Balm of Gilead, and which is dwarfed on the Rocky Mountains. Here it takes on such large dimensions, that the Indian shapes out of a single trunk even his great war canoe which safely bears over the deepest waters a phalanx of sixty warriors. These imposing trees always appear to rise out of a jungle of elder, alder, crab-apple, and other fruit-bearing shrubs and bushes. The short and slender birch, which, sparsely scattered, marks the verge of vegetation in Labrador, has not yet been reached by the explorers of Alaska. The birch tree sometimes appears here upon the river side, upon the level next above the home of the cottonwood, and is generally found a comely and stately tree. The forests of Alaska, however, consist mainly neither of shrubs, nor of the birch, nor of the cottonwood, but, as I have already intimated, of the pine, the cedar, the cypress, the spruce, the fir, the larch, and the hemlock. These forests begin almost at the water's edge, and they rise