

# OUR NEW NORTHWEST.

WHEN, only a few years ago, the cry was 54° 40' for our northern boundary or fight, and, in spite of the cry, the Government yielded and fixed the northern boundary of the United States on the Pacific side at 49°, certainly it was not expected that so soon we should acquire by purchase a vast territory whose southern boundary should be 54° 40', and whose northern extremity should reach to 73°; but the deed has been signed and sealed, and the parties are preparing for the payment of the money and the delivery of the land.

Most of us have already seen what was Russian America on the map, and need not be told that it begins at 54° 40' north latitude, and runs along the coast with a width of about thirty miles, till it reaches Mount St. Elias, in latitude about 60° north, that the line then runs northward to the Arctic Ocean, leaving on the west a large territory, which terminates on the south in the peninsula of Alaska, on the west in Cape Prince of Wales, which extends into Behring Strait, and on the north extends to the Arctic Ocean.

We know that there are numerous islands along the coast from 54° 40' to Mount St. Elias; that Kodiak is a large island south of Alaska; that at the end of Alaska the Aleutian Islands, some fifty in number, form an arc of a circle reaching nearly to Asia, and inclosing Behring Sea, otherwise named the Sea of Kamtchatka. These boundaries many can give now who a few weeks ago only knew that there was a part of the continent somewhere north that belonged to Russia. When the United States own it her citizens study again their Geographies, and with new zeal learn of a land which they can call their own.

Our Geographies and Encyclopædias help us little more than to bound this territory and to estimate the number of its inhabitants. It is only after a considerable search among books of all kinds and in various languages, and conversations with some of the few persons now in the States who have visited this territory, that we feel at all satisfied with the imperfect knowledge we can obtain of this country. It is our object in this paper to throw together such information as we have obtained from various sources in regard to this territory; to satisfy, as we can, the desire of those who wish to know more of what the United States has bought for seven millions of dollars in gold.

The extent of this territory, including the islands, is about 550,000 square miles. The general coast-line, as measured on a line without following the smaller indentations of the coast, is about 4000 miles, while the coast-line as it runs into the bays and around the islands is about 11,270 miles.

The title of Russia to her possessions in America was the title of the discoverer. Though it was known in the early part of the last cen-

tury that America and Asia were separated by a wide ocean at the south, it was not known that they were not united at the north, and the Czar Peter the Great, being curious to know whether his possessions were bounded on the east by water or land, sent Vitus Behring, then Captain, with his vessels to see if Asia and America were contiguous, or separated by a channel. When Behring found that they were separated by a strait, which now bears his name, he returned home with his report, and in 1741 was sent out on another expedition, with the rank of Commodore, to discover a passage to the frozen sea. Crossing in the latitude of the Aleutian Islands, the two ships of the expedition were separated, and Captain Tschirikow reached the coast on the 15th of July, at about 56° north latitude, while the Commodore, three days later, got sight of the continent in latitude 58° 28' north.

At this time Behring saw a high mountain, and it being St. Elias day he called it Mount St. Elias. Behring never lived to return to Russia, but died of scurvy in the next winter on the American coast, in what was afterward called Behring Bay, a bay just south of Mount St. Elias. The eastern coast of the continent had been discovered and occupied already by the English, who did not cling to the coast, but pushed inland. It was the policy of Great Britain to allow to her companies large tracts of land, which they occupied. The Russians, however, discovered and occupied the coast only, and that for the carrying out of the fur-trade alone. When, in 1825, Great Britain and Russia by treaty fixed a boundary line between their possessions in America, this boundary line did not run near the centre of the continent, but for nearly five degrees of latitude gave Russia only a width of thirty miles, and then ran north into territory which was an unknown land to each party. This same boundary line now separates the territory of the United States from that of Great Britain.

Not long after the return of the expedition of Behring the Russian American Fur Company was chartered, and established itself on the islands around the continent; but they did not settle on the main land, nor did they penetrate into the interior. Since Behring's voyages various nations have sent exploring expeditions to this coast, and in what we write hereafter we shall give information collected from the narrative of the Russian expeditions of Behring, Billings, Lisiansky and Golovin, and the English expeditions of Cook, Vancouver, Simpson, and Belcher.

Admiral Wilkes went no further north than Puget Sound, and no expedition has ever been made into this country by the United States, if we except the expeditions made by private individuals seeking to find the best route for the Russian American telegraph. With this