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8. THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH

THE SPANIARDS, as we have seen, immediately began planting colonies in the West Indies, and in a few years, they took possession of all the islands. The Spaniards in Cuba and Haiti, hearing many tales of the gold to be found in the West, soon sent out several expeditions. They also planted a few colonies along the coast of Central America; but at first these did not thrive.

Among the colonists in Haiti there was a Spaniard named Balboa. He joined an expedition bound for the mainland and soon became a leader in the settlement they founded on the Isthmus of Panama. After a time, he learned from the natives that a great ocean lay on the other side of the ridge of mountains. He therefore made his way through the tangled underbrush and climbed the mountain alone.



Ponce de Leon

On reaching the top, he gazed southward and beheld a great stretch of water, which he called the Great South Sea (1513). He took possession of it in the name of Spain, declaring that all the countries it bathed belonged to his sovereigns.

That same year, one of the former companions of Columbus, Ponce de Leon, started out from Puerto Rico. Like many other men of his time, he believed that all the stories he had heard were true, and that somewhere in the world there was a magic spring called the Fountain of Youth. He thought

that if one drank of its waters, or bathed in them, one would be sure to become young again, and as he was rapidly growing old, he longed to find and try it.

On Easter Sunday (in Spanish: Pascua Florida—"Festival of Flowers"), he landed in a beautiful country, which, in honor of the day, he called Florida. After taking possession of it for Spain, he began exploring; but although he drank from every spring and bathed in every stream, he could not find the Fountain of Youth.

In 1519 a Portuguese named Ferdinand Magellan took a Spanish fleet down the coast of South America. After a time he came to the strait that now bears his name and, sailing through it, beheld the Great South Sea. Magellan was such a brave seaman that he steered boldly across this unknown expanse of water. It was so much smoother than the Atlantic that he called it the Pacific, or "Peaceful," Ocean, a name which it has borne ever since. After a journey of a year and a half, Magellan finally reached the Philippine Islands, where he was killed in a fight with the natives.

One of his officers now took command, and went on until he reached India. Thence, by way of the Cape of Good Hope, he came to Spain, sailing for the first time all around the globe, a journey that took three years. Besides proving that the earth is round, this voyage showed that South America is separated from India by a great stretch of water.

The Spanish, anxious to grow rich, continued to explore up the Gulf Coast. In 1519 Hernando Cortez conquered Mexico. That same year the Spanish conquered Peru. Tales were told of a "Land of Gold," and the Spanish were desperate to find it. Although El Dorado was never found, their explorations took them as far as the Grand Canyon and even to the "Father of Waters," the Mississippi River.



Searching for the Fountain of Youth

9. FRENCH AND SPANISH QUARRELS

FRANCE AND SPAIN often waged costly wars, and, seeing that the Spaniards received much gold from the New World, the French longed to have some of it too. Their king, therefore, said that he had as good a right to any undiscovered land as the Spaniards, and that the latter should not be allowed to keep the New World all to themselves.

After one unsuccessful expedition under Verrazano, France sent out another expedition led by Jacques Cartier. After sailing nearly all the way around Newfoundland, this explorer, in 1534, came to the mainland, set up a huge wooden cross, and took possession of the country in the name of France.

The next year he came back, and, sailing up the St. Lawrence River, gave it that name because it was Saint Lawrence's day in the calendar. He visited the place where Quebec now stands and went on up the stream until he came to a native village. Near this village there was a hill which Cartier climbed, and when his eyes rested upon the beautiful view at his feet, he exclaimed that this was truly a Montreal, or royal mountain. A city built some time after on this very spot still bears the name he gave the place.



Giovanni da Verrazano



Jacques Cartier