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## LEGENDS AND TRADITIONS OF QUIVERA

How Ponce de Leon Sought the Fountain of Youth and Found His Death; How Francisco Vasquez Coronado Sought the Seven Cities of Cibola and the Gold of Quivera, and Found Them Not; and How Alvarado and His Goodly Knights Have Found the Fountain and the Treasure for Which the Adventurers Sought.

PONCE DE LEON, in the opinion of a great many people, missed finding the Fountain of Youth by just about the distance that stretches between the sun-kissed plains of Nebraska and the Everglades of Florida. If the old Spaniard had turned his footsteps to the north, instead of plunging into the subtropical jungle of the Land of Flowers, he might not have secured eternal youth, but he would have discovered a clime whose salubrity far surpasses any of which he ever knew, and where his life would have been prolonged to such "length of years as the many wintered crow that leads the clanging rookery home." In support of this assertion, the number of golden weddings that have been celebrated in the Kingdom of Quivera within the last five years is cited. It must be recalled in this connection that only about fifty years have elapsed since the white people really began to settle in Nebraska, and the proof of the beneficent effect of the bright sunshine, the blue sky and the fresh air, the pure water and the bracing ozone that make Nebraska the healthiest spot on earth, is only beginning to be afforded by these witnesses.

Ponce de Leon was imbued with the spirit of his time. In years since various writers have assigned many reasons for the activity of the nations of western Europe, especially the maritime nations of Portugal and Spain, in their feverish activity in the way of discovery during the fifteenth century. Partly on a scientific basis, but mainly on the pursuit of some delusion, are these explanations founded, but each is largely speculative and no writer of reputation seeks to dispose of the topic in a dogmatic way. It is only certain that the age was one of wondrous activity, and adventures by land and sea were numerous and strange, and veracious accounts of the doings of those early voyagers exceed in interest the most entertaining of modern fiction. Expeditions then consumed years in accomplishing what is now achieved in days, or weeks at the most. For example, the first Portuguese expedition to round the Cape of

Good Hope and sail up the east coast of Africa as far as the Gulf of Aden was more than three years going and coming. The same journey can be accomplished now in six weeks.

Taught for ages that a belt of fire circled the globe below a certain parallel, and strengthened in this belief by the increased temperature due to the approach to the equator, the intrepidity of the first sailors to adventure in direction of the boiling sea exceeds the courage of the putative heroes who vanquished dragons and demolished Minotaurs. These men were no longer satisfied with the legendary lore of the southern hemisphere, and determined to discover the truth or to die in the hissing waves of the sea whose waters steamed far aye. Nor were they alone in their hardihood. Other men made adventures equally as daring and as successful, all to the end of extending the limit of human knowledge. Man's dominion over earth is due to these bold spirits, some of whom have appeared in all times, but in no age in greater numbers than during the closing years of the fifteenth century. They sailed on unknown seas, they plunged into untrodden wilds, and they carried with them the light of Christianity and civilization and made of the world a fitting place for man to live. These adventurous spirits were not always the most cultured and thoughtful of men. Some, like Columbus, Vespucci, da Gama and their associates, were the thinkers of their time, and when they sailed it was with a definite object in view. Columbus knew with a reasonable certainty that he would make land if he pursued his westward course long enough. His compeers sailed with similar exactitude, and achieved their results with even more certainty than did Columbus. But it was not only these educated men, experienced in the ways of nature and capable of demonstrating by mathematics their proposals who contributed to the sum of human knowledge.

Other men were lured on by tales of wonderful wealth, of delights that abounded in undiscovered countries, of wonderful things to be

seen, plunged into the unknown. Some came back with disappointment to their homes, some did not come back at all, but all made way for the future. From the time of Prester John, Europe had been filled with yarns about the wonderful country of the great Khan, where gold and precious stones were more plentiful than dirt; where eternal summer abode, and where, most wonderful of all, a fountain, fed by waters from Paradise, splashed in eternal beauty, and none who quaffed thereof ever died or decayed. This desire for a deathless youth was not novel then, nor has it yet died out. Just recall the furore made a few years ago over the Brown-Sequard elixir, and you will understand how eager the old men of Europe in the days of Columbus were to stave off the inevitable. So when Juan Ponce de Leon, serving in New Spain under the viceroy, heard the Indians tell that, in a delightful land, far to the north, the Fountain of Youth sparkled forever under sunshine that never dimmed, his old heart swelled with a great hope.

Sailing away from Cuba one morning in May of 1513, Ponce began his search. It was not long until he had raised Florida, then so bright with its tropical verdure and flowers, that he gave it the name of "Flower Land." It must be here that the fountain was to be found. The external appearance of the country was such as to make it a most appropriate place for the location of the earthly paradise. Experience soon disabused him of this opinion. The natives were the most inhospitable Spaniards he had yet encountered. Efforts by Ponce to land his men failed, and after a brief struggle, he sailed away for Spain, where he was given royal permission to explore and conquer the new land. In 1515 he landed a force and began the work, but the Indians fought with such determination and skill that the Spaniards were beaten back, and the gallant old leader succumbed to wounds received in battle with the red men of the land. Instead of finding a paradise, and renewing his wasted body by a plunge into the crystal waters of the Fountain of Youth, Juan Ponce de Leon lost his life in a gallant adventure to prove or explode a story that demanded investigation. He gained immortality, but not in the way he sought.

Just as the longing to live always imbued men of all countries and ages to search for the source of life, so did the desire for wealth and the comforts and luxuries it brings set them to its pursuit. Get-rich-quick plans were as numerous at one time as at another in history. Columbus expected to discover untold wealth when he reached Cathay; it was the same dream of wealth that led the Portuguese around the Cape of Good Hope; that took Magellan around the world, and that led Cortez to Mexico and Pizarro to Peru. Cabot and others



JOHN LUND AS A PIRATE CHIEF.



FRANK WILCOX, THE SNUG DECEIVER.

sought it in the cold north, and in every direction did "gentlemen adventurers" put out to discover the country where wealth abounded. When Francisco Vasquez Coronado, then high in favor at the vice regal court of Mexico, heard the tales the Indians told of the "Seven Cities of Cibola," whose inhabitants used gold for the commonest purposes, he was eager to prove the stories to the utmost limit. So he marched away from Mexico 366 years ago, to follow the will-o'-the-wisp across the deserts of the southwest. From Mexico he crossed the mountains and down onto the west lope, finding the gulf at what is now Guaymas. Here he learned the cities lay off to the northeast, and he made his way across the sandy wastes of Sonora, of Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Kansas and into Nebraska. Back he went through Kansas, Oklahoma, Indian Territory, Texas and eastern Mexico, without having sighted the castellated walls of the fabulous cities, nor having handled gold or precious stones, fine stuffs, dyes or spices. It was a grievous disappointment to Coronado, for he didn't even have the consolation that he was the old captain when he returned to Nantucket after a four years' cruise, empty holded and short of provisions. After confessing that he had no oil, no whalebone and no marketable produce whatever as the result of his trip, the captain said with a sigh: "Well, we had a d-d, fine sail." Coronado didn't even have a fine march; for he was harassed by Indians, bedeviled by the climate and generally suffered.

If Coronado could only have looked into the future for three centuries, he would have discovered a richer source of treasure than any of the conquistadores dreamed of. The region he traversed in search of the mythical cities have produced wealth and brought about happiness within half a century such as the dreamers of the sixteenth century could not conceive. During the century that elapsed between Ferdinand and Isabella and Philip II of Spain, the accumulated treasure of the new world was ravished from the barbarians and savages by the cruel Spaniards and poured in what seemed a never-ending stream into the royal coffers. Millions of human lives were sacrificed by the Spanish in their pursuit of the gold and silver the people of the new world had hoarded or in efforts to develop mines and bring more light. It is estimated that during this time, when Spain reached the zenith of its ascendancy in the affairs of man, treasure to the amount of what would now be five billions of dollars was taken across the Atlantic, and there spent in a fruitless effort to put an end to human liberty. It was to add to this store that Coronado sought the Seven Cities of Cibola. He was fired by the religious enthusiasm of a Columbus; had none of the scientific zeal of Vespucci or

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