

north, there existed a land abounding in gold and in all manner of delights; but, above all, possessing a river of such wonderful virtue, that whoever bathed in it would be restored to youth! They added that in times past, before the arrival of the Spaniards, a large party of the natives of Cuba had departed northward in search of this happy land and this river of life, and, having never returned, it was concluded that they were flourishing in renewed youth, detained by the pleasures of that enchanting country." Others told him that in a certain island of the Bahamas, called Bimini, there was a fountain possessing the same marvellous and inestimable qualities, and that whoever drank from it would secure perennial youth. Juan Ponce listened to these fables with credulity, and actually fitted out three vessels at his own expense to prosecute the discovery, and obtained numerous volunteers to assist him. "It may seem incredible," says Irving, "at the present day, that a man of years and experience could yield any faith to a story which resembles the wild fiction of an Arabian tale; but the wonders and novelties breaking upon the world in that age of discovery almost realised the illusions of fable, and the imaginations of the Spanish voyagers had become so heated that they were capable of any stretch of credulity." A similar statement was made by an eminent man of learning, Peter Martyr, to Leo X., then Bishop of Rome. Juan Ponce left Porto Rico on the 3rd March, 1512, for the Bahama Islands, on his search for the Fountain of Youth, but all his inquiries and explorations failed in its discovery. Still he persevered, and was rewarded in discovering on the mainland a country in the fresh bloom of spring, the trees gay with blossoms and abounding with flowers. He took possession of it in the name of the Castilian sovereigns, and gave it the name of Florida, which it still retains. He subsequently discovered a group of islands, where his sailors, in the course of one night, caught one hundred and seventy turtles. He appropriately named them the Tortugas, or Turtles, the title they also still bear. Disheartened by the failure of his special mission, he gave up the command to a trusty captain, and returned to Porto Rico, "where he arrived infinitely poorer in purse and wrinkled in brow, by this cruise after inexhaustible riches and perpetual youth." His captain arrived soon after with the news that he had discovered the island of Bimini, and that it abounded in crystal springs and limpid streams, which kept the island ever fresh and verdant; "but none that could restore to an old man the vernal greenness of his youth." As late as 1521 we find old Juan Ponce engaged in a new expedition to Florida, where, in an encounter with the Indians, he was fatally wounded by an arrow. He retired to Cuba, where he died shortly afterwards. The Spaniards said of him that he was a lion by name, and still more by nature.

The name of Magellan, or Magalhaens, is more familiar to the general reader than some of those which have preceded it in this chapter. He was a Portuguese of noble birth, and had served honourably in India. When he made the offer of his services to his own sovereign, there is no doubt that the undertaking he proposed—viz., to determine the question whether the shores of South America were washed by an open sea—had been mooted before. To him however, belongs the credit of having brought that question to an issue. His own king would have nought to do with his project, and dismissed him with a frown. Magellan, accompanied by Ruy Falero, an astrologer (the astrologers were in part the astronomers of those days), who was associated with him in the enterprise, next made his proposals to the Spanish Emperor, Charles V., by whom he was received with attention and respect. Articles of agreement were drawn up, to this effect: the navigator agreed to reach the Moluccas *by sailing to the west*;