

ANNALS OF THE WEST.

CHAPTER I.

SPANISH AND FRENCH DISCOVERIES, A. D. 1512 TO 1750.

Discovery of Florida—De Soto's Expedition and Discovery of the Mississippi—Marquette and Joliet's Expedition—Enterprise of La Salle—Visit to Illinois—Fort Croveccar—Hennepin's voyage up the Mississippi—La Salle's Expedition down the Mississippi to the Gulf—"Proces Verbal"—Returns to Illinois and starts to France—La Salle returns to the Gulf of Mexico—Discovers and takes possession of Texas—His Assassination—Tonti's Achievements—La Hontan—Kaskaskia Founded—D'Ibberville's Voyage—Grant to Crozat—Mississippi Company—New Orleans Founded—The Natches Extermination—War with the Chickasaws—Mississippi Valley in 1750.

In the year 1512, on Easter Sunday, the Spanish name for which is Pascua Florida,* Juan Ponce de Leon, an old comrade of Columbus, discovered the coast of the American continent, near St. Augustine; and, in honor of the day, as well as because of the blossoms which covered the trees along the shore, named the new-found country Florida. Juan had been led to undertake the discovery of strange lands, partly by the hope, common to all his countrymen at that time, of finding endless stores of gold, and partly by the wish to reach a fountain that was said to exist, deep within the forests of North America, which possessed the power of renovating the life of those who drank of, or bathed in, its waters. In return for his discovery he was made Governor of the region he had visited, but various circumstances prevented his return thither until 1521, and then he went only to meet with death at the hands of the Indians.

In the mean time, in 1516, a roving Spanish sea captain, Diego Miruelo, had visited the coast first reached by Ponce de Leon, and in his barter with the natives had received considerable quantities of gold, with which he returned home, and spread abroad new stories of the wealth hidden in the interior.

*Pascua, the old English "Pasch" or Pasover; "Pascua Florida" is the "Holy-day of Flowers."