

## ORIGIN OF "CALIFORNIA" AND "OREGON."

ABOUT the source from which sprung the names of the two great States bordering on the Pacific Ocean there clings an odor of mystery that renders a study of the subject peculiarly interesting. In either case all that is positively known is the work in which it first appeared in print, but beyond that all is mystery; and this perplexing uncertainty has given rise to many theories, ingenious and otherwise, in regard to which it may be said that while each possesses an element of possibility, more proofs can be brought forward to disprove them than to bolster them up.

The word "California" was first printed in a romance issued in Seville in 1510, and entitled "The Sergas of Esplandian, the Son of Amadis of Gaul." This was three years prior to the discovery of the Pacific by Balboa, and at a time when it was the universal belief that the great continent which Columbus had discovered, and the Cabots, Cortereal and others had partially explored, was the Indies, or at least a great southeast and hitherto unknown extension of the continent of Asia, about which geographers then knew so little. Here, perhaps, would be found the magnificent Cathay of Marco Polo and the wonderful island of Cipango. Imagination peopled it with nations of strange civilizations, filled it with precious metals and jewels in profusion, gave to it the fabulous Fountain of Youth, and invested it with every desirable feature that could be conceived necessary to make of it an earthly realization of Heaven, even to giving into its keeping the Terrestrial Paradise from which the great progenitors of mankind had been driven in disgrace. These ideas were seized upon by the author of the romance and embodied in the "Sergas," and the result was that his work became immensely popular, and was universally read in Spain for many years afterwards. In this wonderful book occurs the following passage:

Know that on the right hand of the Indies there is an island called California, very near to the Terrestrial Paradise, which was peopled by black women, without any men among them, because they were accustomed to live after the manner of the Amazons. They were strong and hardened of bodies, of ardent courage and of great force. The island was the strongest in the world, from its steep rocks and great cliffs. Their arms were all of gold, and so were the caparisons of the wild beasts they rode.

Fourteen years later we find the victorious Cortez writing from Mexico to his sovereign, the great Charles V. of Spain, that he is about to undertake the conquest of Colima, on the South Sea, as the Pacific was then called, and that he had information of "an island of Amazons, or women only, abounding in pearls and gold, lying ten days' journey from Colima." Ten years later a vessel dispatched by Cortez landed its mutinous crew on the peninsula of Lower California, twenty of whom were murdered by the natives, including Ximines, their leader. The remainder escaped and returned to Mexico. The next year Cortez himself landed where Ximines had been slain, and named the port Santa Cruz, though upon the country as a whole, which was supposed to be an island, no title seems to have been bestowed. Here Cortez planted a colony, which endured many hardships, and was finally compelled to abandon the inhospitable region. Writing of this a few years later the historian Gomara

said: "Cortez, that he might no longer be a spectator of such miseries, went on further discoveries, and landed in California, which is a bay." Here we find the first specific application of the title, evidently to some port on the peninsula visited by the great Conquistador; and gradually this name became associated with the entire country claimed by Spain northwest of Mexico, as well as the gulf lying between them. Still later, when more was known of the coast, that portion lying east of the great Colorado, and north of the mouth of the Gila River, was designated as Alta California; and that is the land which the United States conquered from Mexico in 1846, which was invaded by a vast army of gold hunters in 1849, and which in 1850 was admitted into the great sisterhood of States under the name of California.

Many efforts have been made to trace the etymology of the word, and some historians have advocated theories far more ingenious than plausible. One of them advances it as his opinion that the word is derived from the Latin *calix fornax*, which being translated into English becomes "a hot furnace," and that it was manufactured to order by the priests who first planted the Cross of Christ upon the burning sands of Lower California. That the title is peculiarly appropriate, any one who has traversed the wild wastes of sage brush and cactus beneath the scorching rays of a noonday sun will freely admit, but beyond this it can have no support, since the name appeared in the old romance in its entirety nearly two centuries before the Jesuits invaded the peninsula. There is also an unpleasant air of pedantry attached to it, which is of itself a sufficient reason for discarding it; names are seldom manufactured in such a cold-blooded classical manner. Another thinks that *Calida fornalla* may be considered the original words from which the title was evolved; but this, besides being like the other several centuries too late, seems to depend simply upon the euphony of sound, and resembles too closely the idea of the Irish immigrant, who supposed that Oregon was named in honor of his great ancestors, the O'Regans. It has generally come to be admitted that the word has no etymology, and that it emanated solely from the brain of the romancer of Seville.

Though a word of more modern manufacture, fully as much mystery surrounds the origin of "Oregon" as we have found to attend the birth of "California." The theory most generally accepted is thus set forth by Bishop Blanchet in a letter recently published in the *Oregonian*:

Jonathan Carver, an English captain in the wars by which Canada came into the possession of Great Britain, after the peace, left Boston June 6, 1766, crossed the continent to the Pacific, and returned October, 1768. In relation to his travels, which were published in 1774, and republished in 1778, he is the first who makes use of the word "Oregon." The origin of that word has never been discovered in the country. The first Catholic missionaries—Father Demers, now Bishop of Vancouver Island, and Father Blanchet, now Bishop of Oregon City—arrived in Oregon in 1838. They traveled through it for many years, from south to north, from west to east, visiting and teaching the numerous tribes of Oregon, Washington Territory and British possessions. But in all their various excursions among the Indians they never succeeded in finding the origin of the word "Oregon." Now it appears that what could not be found in Oregon has been discovered by Archbishop Blanchet in Bolivia, when he visited that country, Chile and Peru in 1855 and 1857. The word "Oregon," in his opinion, most undoubtedly has its root in the Spanish word *oreja* (ear), and came from the qualifying word *orejon* (big ear). For it is probable that the Spaniards, who