

FLAGLER AND FLORIDA

By EDWIN LEFÈVRE

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FATE gave to Ponce de Leon for a ward the daughter of a companion who had died in his arms on the field of battle. On a visit to Spain, his last, he saw her. She was very beautiful—and very young. Fame, wealth, power: husks! Love: heaven! After a while his ward consented to be his wife. But he, in his middle age, would be loved as only youth loves and is loved. Once more he sailed over the salt seas, ordered by the king on the old quests and by Eros on a new. The Caribs whom he subdued had often spoken of a magic land where was the Fountain of Perpetual Youth! A delectable vision came to him, and, following its irresistible beckoning, he discovered on Easter Sunday—*Pascua Florida*, in Spanish—March 27, 1513, the land he sought. In honor of the day and because it was a land green and beautiful, he called it Florida.

He did not find youth. But, in seeking it, he grasped Immortality.

Nearly four centuries later, from the gray North, a man named Flagler, a commercial discoverer, an industrial *conquistador*, past the age of Ponce de Leon, also went to Florida. It may be he sought the precious gold of the sunlight or the turquoise of the sky; perhaps merely a comfortable rocking-chair in a hotel piazza. But he found what his brother-*conquistador* missed. It did not gush from a fountain, but blossomed on the tree of his life's philosophy, which later bore marvelous fruit, as you shall see. He found: his Second Youth. And, like Ponce de Leon, he also grasped Immortality.

What he has done you may see for yourself; and the children of your children will see still more clearly. The tramp of the marching years will not grind to dust his work, but make it the more solid—like the concrete of his viaducts and his buildings, which will grow harder, more like stone,

with age. In no other place, in no other way, by no other man could the work have been done.

Of this work the American people know very little; of the man's self, nothing. Florida is far away, and Flagler's is not only an excessive modesty but a personality so elusive as to be unseizable by the ordinary grappling hooks of character analysts. He has no intimates. The friends of his youth, the business associates of his active middle age, the men who are leading his forces down the East Coast of Florida, do not know him. They know some of him; not one of them knows all of him. They do not realize the two youths of him!

The two youths—in no other way can you reconcile 1879 with 1909, or secure consistency in seeming inconsistency. His photographs show the difference. You see more than the mere change of thirty years. Where once he had the look of the Money Maker, now he has the look of the Money Spender! The same efficient human machine; the same vision; the same thoroughness; the same passion for permanence—and suddenly a different work and different results; and infinitely greater success.

Supposing you accept, as I did, EVERYBODY'S invitation to go to Florida in mid-winter and see what is there, and learn how it happened, and meet Henry Morrison Flagler.

When you cross the Georgia line, you begin, subconsciously, to Floridize yourself. You prepare for the scenery on the railroad folders to become moving-picturesque. But it is only as you approach St. Augustine that the car-window messages begin to interest you. Among clumps of verdure you catch a glimpse of red-tiled roofs and Spanish towers: the "Ponce de Leon" and the "Alcazar." Flagler: his hotels!

And a beautiful dome, dominating as the