

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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El Dorado

I wonder how many of our readers know what the word El Dorado means? There is a street in Monterey which bears that name and there is a county in California which also has that name. An inquiry came to me a few days ago from a lady who uses that street address.

She wished to know if it was all one word and what it meant. I was able to tell her and so the conversation ceased. Then I thought if one person does not know the meaning there may be others. This particular lady said: "Now I will have to have new stationery printed, for the reason that my address is spelled Eldorado street."

The word El means "the" in Spanish and Dorado means "gilded man". Although it is known to most people, in a vague, general way, that the name El Dorado was given to this county on account of the discovery of gold there, the romantic tales connected with the name are probably not so well known.

Nellie Van de Grift Sanchez in her book "Spanish and Indian Place Names of California" tells the story: "The Indians of Peru, Venezuela, and New Granada, perhaps in the hope of inducing their oppressors to move on, were constantly pointing out to the Spaniards, first in one direction, then in another, a land of fabulous riches.

This land was said to have a king, who caused to have his body to be covered every morning with gold dust, by means of an odorous rosin. Each evening he washed it off, as it incommoded his sleep, and each morning had the gilding process repeated. From the fable the white men were led to believe that the country must be rich in gold and long, costly, and fruitless expeditions were undertaken in pursuit of this El Dorado. In time the phrase El Dorado came to be applied to regions where gold and other precious metal were thought to be plentiful.

According to General Vallejo, one Francisco Pizarro wrote a fictitious account of an El Dorado in South America, "A region of genial clime and never-fading verdure, abounding in gold and precious stones, where wine gushed from never-ceasing springs, wheat fields grow ready-baked loaves of bread, birds, already roasted flew among the trees and nature was filled with harmony and sweetness."

Although old mother nature has not yet provided us with "bread ready-baked" or "birds ready-roasted" in California, her gifts to her children have been so bountiful that they may almost be compared to the fabulous tales of El Dorado, the gilded man. So ends Mrs. Van de Grift Sanchez's story of El Dorado.

Mrs. Sanchez lived in Monterey for many years. She was a sister of Mrs. Robert Louis Stevenson and her late husband was Adolfo Sanchez, a popular young man in Monterey in the time of Robert Louis Stevenson's stay here. Their son was the late Louis Sanchez.