

II

SPANISH VOYAGES AND EXPLORATIONS

And while he held above his head the conquering flag of Spain,
He waved his glancing sword and smote the waters of the main:
For Rome! For Leon! For Castile! thrice gave the cleaving blow,
And thus Balboa claimed the sea four hundred years ago.

T. B. Read

9. How the New World Came to be Called America.—The ships of Columbus chased the imaginary monsters from the sea, or at least chased them from men's minds. After the successful voyage of 1492, sailors everywhere grew bold and were eager to sail for the new-found lands.

Among the first to cross the Atlantic in the wake of Columbus was Americus Vespucius, a native of Florence, Italy. This man, in 1501, sailing under the flag of Portugal, visited the coast of what is now Brazil, and not long afterward wrote an interesting account of what he saw. "I have found," he wrote, "in the southern part, a continent more populous and more full of animals than our Europe, Asia, and Africa." A letter from Vespucius thus describing Brazil fell into the hands of a German professor who at the time was preparing a book on geography. In this book he suggested that the region described by Vespucius be named the land of Americus (America) in honor of the man who discovered it. And it was named *America*. The professor probably intended that Brazil only should be called America, but the people of Europe fell into the



Americus Vespucius.

Born at Florence, Italy, in 1452; entered commercial service in Spain; accompanied four expeditions to the New World, on the first of which, in 1497, he claimed to have reached the continent of America before the Cabots and Columbus; died at Seville in 1512.