

Passage into the Pacific was now crystalized into a general belief. Magellan had simply passed through the straits and was unaware of the open sea lying still further to the south, and it was many years before Dutch freebooters discovered the passage around Cape Horn. It was supposed that he had simply traversed a dangerous passageway leading through a narrow portion of the great South American Continent. Just such a waterway the Straits of Anian were then supposed to be, piercing the continent from the Atlantic to the South Sea. To find it England, Spain, France and Russia vied with each other for nearly three centuries before all belief in its existence was finally abandoned.

The kingdom of Ferdinand and Isabella was then approaching the zenith of its power. Wealth flowed in a golden stream from the New World to fill the coffers of their successors upon the throne of Aragon and Castile, the powerful Charles and haughty Philip. The ancient throne of the Montezumas was overturned in blood and the kingdom of the Incas plundered of its hoarded treasure. The South Sea was crossed, the Philippine Islands were subdued, and Spain gained a foothold in the Indies, whose long sought treasures of porcelain, silk and spices were conveyed to Europe to aid in upholding the power and magnificence of the Castilian throne. No flag but that of Spain waved over Pacific waters. Spanish galleons loaded with rich cargoes from the Indies reached the western coast of Central America, where the precious freight was landed and transported across to ships waiting on the other side to convey it to the mother country. In vain England, eager to share this rich harvest with her rival, sought for some entrance into the South Sea other than the dangerous one by the Straits of Magellan. To use this involved a voyage too long and too full of dangers to render it practicable for the purposes of commerce in those days. England and Spain were frequently at war, and the discovery of a means by which English ships of war could easily enter the Pacific and prey upon the commerce of Spain was as much desired by the one nation as it was feared by the other.

Even were this passage not discovered, exemption from interference with her Pacific commerce Spain could not hope to enjoy forever. The monarch of that powerful nation was the personification of arrogance. Over all lands even technically discovered by his subjects he claimed dominion and the exclusive right of trade, even if no settlement of any kind had been attempted. Foreigners of all nations were prohibited, under pain of death, from having any intercourse whatever with such territories, or from navigating the adjacent waters. The result of such presumption was most disastrous to Spain. English, Dutch and French "free traders" made sad havoc with the Spanish shipping on the Atlantic Coast of America; and though these ravages were continued in times of peace, they were winked at by the rival sovereigns, who often directly, and always indirectly, received their share of the booty, and one of these robbers, Captain Francis Drake, was knighted by his queen for being the most daring and successful of them all. And why

not? Many a peer of England has been created for less services to his country than were rendered by Sir Francis Drake in leading the assault upon the great avenue of wealth through which came the means of putting afloat that wonderful Spanish Armada, from whose power England was saved only by the valor of her seamen and the winds of Heaven.

These roving marauders made great exertions to discover a northern route into the Pacific, urged on by reports of the wonderful richness of the East Indian commerce of Spain. Unsuccessful in this, they finally invaded the South Sea by the passage of Magellan's tempestuous straits. The pioneer of these was Drake. In 1578 he thus passed into the South Sea, and spread terror and devastation along the coast. He captured the East Indian galleon, levied contributions on the Spanish ports, and finally, with his only remaining vessel freighted with plunder, sailed north with the purpose of reaching the Atlantic through the Straits of Anian. In this he was thwarted, and to avoid the Spanish fleet awaiting him at the Straits of Magellan, he returned to England by way of the Cape of Good Hope. Other English freebooters, encouraged by the dazzling success of Drake, followed his example, and for years Spain's commerce in the Pacific suffered many ravages at their hands.

Meanwhile navigators continued their search for the Northwest Passage, while the Spanish government was in a constant state of alarm lest their efforts should be crowned with success. Rumors that the Straits of Anian had been discovered were spread from time to time, creating great consternation in Spain, Spanish America and the Philippines. Several navigators claimed to have passed through these mythical straits, either for the purpose of giving themselves importance in the nautical world, or to secure some employment in their profession or emolument for the services they thus claimed to have rendered. Those were the halcyon days of the romancer. "Sailor's yarns" were in great demand. A man who had visited foreign lands in Europe was a rarity, while one who had extended his travels to these new and wonderful regions, or been one of the very few who had encompassed the world, was as much of a curiosity as would be Lieutenant Greely to-day were he to return from the Arctic with the report that he had actually entered "Symmes' Hole" and visited that land of wonderful phenomena in the interior of the earth. What else could be expected when three-fourths of the globe were an unexplored wilderness of land and water, about which new and totally unexpected revelations were constantly being made? The most wonderful fabrication, cleverly contrived, could contain nothing more unharmonious with prevailing geographical theories than were the reports of actual expeditions of whose correctness there could be no doubt. Of the many stories thus set afloat, the one the most plausible, and which took the deepest hold upon the people, receiving, in fact, universal credence for many years, was that of Captain Lorenzo Ferrer de Maldonado, a Portuguese. It was related by him to the Spanish Council of the Indies, to whom he