

in 1519 with Magellan, led to much speculation concerning a nearer way to the Moluccas than the one thus opened by the Spaniards. Many minds were excited, both by this great feat, and by the reports of the rich empire which Cortes was then conquering, to new geographical enquiry. Cortes himself offered, in 1524, to search both oceans for the supposed northern strait leading to the west, though it appears that he confined himself to exploring the South Sea only.*

Meanwhile the attention of Francis the First was turned in the same direction, whether from the report that such a blank was to be filled in the maps, or that the French king had learned as much from his own cosmographers. That he hoped to find a short passage to the Moluccas, we know from the letter of Giovanni de Verrazano of 1524, who had been directed to search for it. Perhaps among the crews of the vessels captured by this navigator on previous corsairial expeditions, there were men who had revealed to him the state of Spanish geographical knowledge, and the probability of a western passage, to be found between the parallels above mentioned. It was also no doubt the desire of the king to discover a rich empire like Mexico, which the Spaniards were then plundering, and which might open to *him* also a supply of the precious metals. Verrazano seems to have failed in a first effort to sail, with four vessels, as he says, northwardly, but with one vessel only he started again, and after an exploration of some months, between the parallels of 34° and 50° N. according to his own estimate, he returned with information that no passage could be found.

The explorations of Verrazano and of Gomez on the eastern shores of North America, and those directed by Cortes on the west, closed all hopes of a short sea-way to the Indies. But the entire disconnection of Asia with America was not positively proved until Behring discovered in 1728, the strait to which his name was given.

* See notes, *Cortes* and *Zuazo*.