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HEROES OF  
AMERICAN HISTORY

THE CABOTS









SEBASTIAN CABOT  
Picture formerly at Whitehall



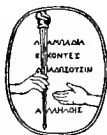


JOHN AND SEBASTIAN  
CABOT

BY  
FREDERICK A. OBER

HEROES OF AMERICAN HISTORY

ILLUSTRATED



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## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

FOR

JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

As the various authorities consulted in the preparation of this book appear in the footnotes and throughout the text, it is deemed hardly necessary to refer to them in detail. The so-called *Flateyar-Bok*, or *Codex Flateyensis*, is reproduced in Reeve's *Finding of Wineland the Good*, and in Professor Rafn's *Antiquitates Americanæ*, the latter published at Copenhagen in 1837, in the original Icelandic, with Latin and Danish translations. The first writer, of recent times, it is said, to call attention to the Icelandic voyages to America, was Arngrim Jonsson, in his *Crymogœa* (Hamburg, 1610); but the "first to bring the subject prominently before European readers" was Thormodus Torfæus, in two books, the *Historia Vinlandiæ Antiquæ*, and of *Grœnlandiæ Antiquæ* (Copenhagen, 1705 and 1706).

Referring to the Cabots, the writers making first mention of them were, in chronologic sequence: Peter Martyr, in his *Decades*, 1524; Gomara, in the *Historia General de las Indias*, 1552; Richard Eden, in his reprint of the *Decades*, in 1555, said to be the first account in English which has descended to the present time; Hakluyt's *Divers Voyages Touching the Discovery of America*, 1582; amplified in his *Principal Navigations and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 1589; Purchas, in his *Pilgrimage*, 1613, etc.

Modern works are numerous, but deserving of mention are: Richard Biddle's *Sebastian Cabot*, 1831—a valuable and critical study of the subject, but with a strong and unwarranted bias in favor of its hero; Harrisse's *Jean et Sebastien Cabot*, 1882; Tarducci's *John and Sebastian Cabot*, translated by H. E. Browning, Detroit, 1893; *The Discovery of North America*, by G. E. Weare, 1897; the last two most excellent works; the former particularly full, fair, and exhaustive.

JOHN AND SEBASTIAN  
CABOT



# JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

## I

### PRECURSORS OF THE CABOTS

876-1006

**A**LTHOUGH John and Sebastian Cabot are universally accredited with the discovery of North America, in the sense of having brought it to the Old World's knowledge, it is a well-established fact that they were preceded by others. These were the Norsemen, who, sailing from Iceland in the latter part of the tenth century, formed a settlement in Greenland that existed for more than four hundred years, and began another, on the northeast coast of our continent, which, short-lived at best, long since passed out of memory.

As a Cabotian proem, therefore, we should

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first glance at the voyages of the only people who preceded these Venetians. The personalities of the Cabots are so indistinct, so faintly outlined in contemporaneous chronicles, that, it is believed, no excuse need be offered for subordinating them and their adventures to the great continent they discovered. It is, moreover, consonant with the plan of this *Heroes of America* series to elucidate particularly the beginnings of whatever region its "hero" may have had his adventures in — as, for example, "Columbus and the West Indies," "Vespucci and South America," "Cortés and Mexico," "Pizarro and Peru."

The prelude to North America's discovery by the actual heroes of this biography will now be discussed without further remarks of a prefatory nature. It is unfortunate, we must admit at the outset, that no complete records exist, or have ever been found, of either the Northmen's or the Cabots' voyages. Though they occurred five hundred years apart, many years passed away before the chief events of either were chronicled, hence neither story may be accepted as authentic in every detail. The Norse voyages, however, are of absorbing interest, and, says

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a learned investigator, "in dealing with the subject, we stand, for a great part of the time, on firm historic ground." More than this cannot, with truth, be said of the Cabotian voyages, the vessels engaged in which emerge for but a brief period from their age-long obscurity, their hulls and sails gleaming through mists only partially dissolved, then fade into oblivion again forever.

When the Norse Vikings—the "Sons of the Fiords"—sailed in their dragon ships from Norway to Iceland, between the years 870 and 880, they had traversed two-thirds the distance that separates northwestern Europe from Greenland. Two years after the first Icelandic settlement was formed, or in the year 876, a too-venturesome Viking, Gunnbiorn by name, was stranded on the Greenland coast, where his ship was ice-enclosed for a whole winter. He made his way back to Iceland with tidings of a strange, new country; but though the two islands are only two hundred and fifty miles apart (less than half the distance between Iceland and Norway), more than a century slipped by before Greenland was visited again.

This visit will be detailed in the *Saga of Eirik the Red*, quoted in this chapter, and

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which has been declared by an accepted authority to be, taken as a whole, "a sober, straightforward, and eminently probable story." The account of the so-called Vinland voyages is based upon two sagas, one of which was probably written between 1305 and 1334, and the other about 1387. The latter is contained in a famous compilation known as the *Flateyar Bok*, because it once belonged to a man who lived on Flat Island, in one of Iceland's numerous fiords. It was probably copied from a more ancient manuscript since lost, or, at least, not at present known, but which may be concealed in some dwelling that has been buried by volcanic overflow.

Here follows

### THE SAGA OF EIREK THE RED<sup>1</sup>

There was a man named Thorvald, of goodly lineage. Thorvald and his son Eirek [or Eric] surnamed the Red, were compelled to fly from their home in Norway [983] on

<sup>1</sup> Mainly copied from Professor Eben Norton Horsford's valuable work, *The Landfall of Leif Erikson*, but without literally following the original, which has been critically examined by other authorities.



## PRECURSORS OF THE CABOTS

account of a homicide committed by them. They settled in Iceland (which at that time had been one hundred and nine years colonized). The father soon died, but Eirek seems to have inherited his quarrelsome spirit, for he became involved with his Icelandic neighbors, the result of which was another homicide, though the last quarrel appears to have originated in an injury unjustly inflicted upon him. He was, however, condemned by the court and outlawed, so he determined to fit a vessel and set out in search of the western land which Gunnbiorn had discovered, and where he had passed the winter of 876.

He and his friends set sail from Snafeellsjokul, a mountain on the western coast of Iceland, for the "rocks of Gunnbiorn." At length they found land, and called the place Midjokul. Thence they coasted along the shore in a southerly direction, in order to learn whether it were habitable, and passed the first winter at Eirek'soe, or Eirek's island, the next spring fixing their residence at the head of Eireksfiord, which is thought to have been near the modern Julianeshaab. The fiord was very deep and gloomy, hidden within ice-covered headlands, but at its

head the hardy voyagers found a smooth and grassy plain, where "may still be seen the ruins of seventeen houses, built of rough blocks of sandstone, their chinks calked up with clay and gravel." These were the habitations of Eirek and his followers, who during the summer of the same year explored the western part of the country, imposing names on various places. Eirek passed the following winter also in this land, but in the third summer he returned to Iceland. He called the land which he had thus discovered "Greenland," saying that men would be induced to emigrate thither by a name so inviting; but which, as a learned author has well said, is a "flagrant misnomer," and was at the time Eirek applied it.

These events happened fourteen or fifteen years before the Christian religion was established in Iceland, by King Olaf of Norway, in the year 1000, so that we may say that the first colony in Greenland, and in America, was founded about the year 985 or 986. In the latter year Eirek went back to Iceland, and with twenty-five vessels set out on his return voyage to Greenland, arriving, however, with only fourteen, eleven having foundered, with all their crews and





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passengers. Among the survivors was a sturdy Icelander named Herjulf, kinsman to Ingolf, the first settler of Iceland. Herjulf had a wife named Thorgerd, and a son, Biarni, who was a youth of great promise. This young man was a great voyager, a typical Viking, and passed the winters alternately abroad and at home with his father. He had recently fitted out a vessel in which he sailed to Norway, and there passed the winter, and it was during his absence that Herjulf passed over, with his entire company or family, to Greenland with Eirek the Red. In the same ship with him was a Christian from the Hebrides. Herjulf fixed his residence at Herjulf-ness, where he was a man of great authority, while Eirek the Red sat down at Brattahlid. He was chief in authority there, and all were subject to his will. His sons were Leif, Thorvald, and Thorstein, and he had also a daughter named Freydis. She was married to one Thorvard, who was weak-minded, and whom she is said to have chosen for the sake of his money.

Now, some time in the summer succeeding to the sailing of Eirek and Herjulf from Iceland, the latter's son Biarni reached the port of Eyrar, from which his father had

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

recently departed for Greenland. When he learned of what had taken place during his absence he was unwilling to disembark, and when asked what course he intended to pursue, replied: "I shall do as I have been accustomed, and spend the winter with my father. Hence, if you, sailors, are willing to accompany me thither, we will proceed to Greenland together." They professed their willingness; though, as Biarni admitted, their course seemed somewhat foolish and hazardous, inasmuch as none of them had ever crossed the Greenland ocean. Nevertheless, after they had refitted their vessel they put to sea again, and soon were out of sight of land. A thick fog fell about them, and for many, many days they sped before a strong northeasterly wind, they knew not whither, seeing neither sun nor stars. At length, the light of day being once more visible, they were able to discern the face of heaven, and sailing one day farther they were gladdened by the sight of land. It was not mountainous, but covered with trees, and without glaciers or fiords, so Biarni knew it could not be Greenland. He turned his ship's prow northward again and sailed out to sea, though there was much

## PRECURSORS OF THE CABOTS

clamor from the crew, on account of leaving behind them such a fair and pleasant land. But Biarni would not tarry, even for wood and water, of which they were in great need; but kept on for ten or twelve days, at the end of which time he sighted the ice-covered promontory on or near which Herjulf, his father, dwelt. Then Biarni betook himself to his father's house, and having soon relinquished a seafaring life, he remained with his father as long as he lived, and after his death took possession of his estate.

It was during this cruise of Biarni, when the Icelander, driven out of his true course by the winds, several times approached the coast of a country far south of Greenland, that, in all probability, continental America was first sighted by white men, in or about the year 986. The Northmen did not apprehend the true significance of their discovery, nor indeed were they aware that they had made one; for of cosmographical knowledge they had very little, and respecting any portion of the world outside Europe they had no conception whatever. But Leif, son of Eirik, had his curiosity aroused by Biarni Herjulfson's report of the strange country, and bought his dragon-ship of him,

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with a view to sailing thither. Years passed away, however, before he undertook that voyage southward, and in the year 999 we find him at the court of King Olaf of Norway, by whom he was converted to Christianity. He and his pagan crew were baptized, and on their return to Greenland the next year took with them Christian preachers, who converted nearly all the people to their faith—all except old Eirek the Red, who remained a pagan to the end of his days, then not far away.

Soon after Leif had reached Greenland with his ship and crew, he projected the expedition to the land which Biarni had seen, and requested his father to become the leader. Old Eirek excused himself on the score of his age, saying that he could ill support the fatigues and dangers of a voyage; but finally yielded to his son's importunities, and rode down from his house, on horseback, to the shore, near which the vessel lay. On the way down his horse stumbled, and Eirek was thrown, thereby receiving an injury to one of his feet. This he took as a bad omen, and said: "Fortune will not permit me to discover more lands than this which we inhabit. I will proceed



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no farther with you." So he returned to the settlement, called Brattahlid, while Leif, with thirty-five companions, went on board their vessel. Among them, it was said, was a man known as a Turk, from a south country, who was probably a German.

They set sail and made directly for the country last seen by Biarni, where they cast anchor and put out a boat. It was a barren land, and may have been the coast of Labrador, for above them frowned frozen heights, between which and the sea were great flat rocks. Then said Leif: "We will not do as Biarni did, who never set foot on shore. I will give a name to this land, and will call it 'Helluland'—the region of broad stones." They put to sea again, and anon came to another land, which was low, level, and well covered with trees. On this account Leif the son of Eirek named it "Markland"—land of woods; and then re-embarked and sailed on again.

This last may have been either Newfoundland or Nova Scotia, or a land yet farther southward from their place of departure, as Cape Ann or Cape Cod (now so called); but after two days more of sailing, with a brisk northeast wind, they touched upon an island

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lying opposite to the northeasterly part of the main. Here they landed and found the air delightful, while the grass was so fragrant that the dew upon it was deliciously sweet to the taste. They did not stop here, but returning to the ship sailed through a bay which lay between the island and a promontory running towards the northeast, which they passed, directing their course westward. In this bay, when the tide was low, there were shallows left of great extent, and the water poured out as from a lake. When the tide rose the men took their small boat and rowed up the river and into the lake, on the shore of which they disembarked and erected temporary huts for habitations.

Having subsequently determined to remain here during the winter (of 1000-1001), they put up buildings of a more permanent character, and subsisted upon the salmon they found in the lake and river, which were abundant, and of greater size than any they had seen before. So great was the goodness of the land, they conceived that cattle would be able to find provender all winter, as no intense cold was experienced like that to which they were accustomed in their own

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country, the grass did not seem to wither much, and during the shortest days of winter the sun remained above the horizon from half-past seven in the morning till half-past four in the afternoon.

Various localities have been assigned as the site of this first camp, or temporary settlement, in North America by white men, but hardly any two agree; and in truth it would be idle to speculate upon this subject, since no authentic remains have been discovered by which it can be identified. The length of their shortest winter day was no criterion, since it might have applied to almost any locality between Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. Neither can any evidence be derived from the seasonal characteristics, for though the first winter the Northmen experienced on the eastern coast of North America was remarkably mild, the next one, in or near the same locality, was extremely severe.

Their dwellings completed, Leif said to his companions: "I propose that our company be divided into two parties, for I desire to explore the country; each one of these parties shall go exploring and remain at home alternately; but let neither party

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go so far that it cannot return the same evening; neither let its members separate one from another." It was so arranged, and Leif himself, on alternate days, went out exploring, and remained at home. He was a leader born, a strong man, of large stature, of dignified aspect, wise and moderate in all things.

It happened one evening that one of the company was missing, and this was Tyrker, the German, or south-country man. Leif felt much concerned, for Tyrker had lived with him and his father many years, and he had grown very fond of him. Wherefore Leif severely blamed his comrades, and went himself, with twelve others, to seek the man. When they had gone but a short distance from the dwellings, Tyrker met them, to their no small pleasure; but Leif soon perceived that he had not his usual manner. He was naturally of open countenance, his eyes constantly rolling, his face emaciated, his body spare, his stature short.

Then said Leif to him, "Why have you stayed out so late, my friend, and separated yourself from your companions?" For some time Tyrker gave no answer, except in German, but he rolled his eyes (as usual) and

twisted his mouth. His companions could not understand what he said, but after a time he spoke in the Norse tongue and said:

"I have not been very far, but I have something new to tell you; I have found vines and grapes!"

"Is this true?" asked Leif.

"Yes, indeed it is," answered Tyrker, "for I was brought up in a land where vines and grapes were in abundance."

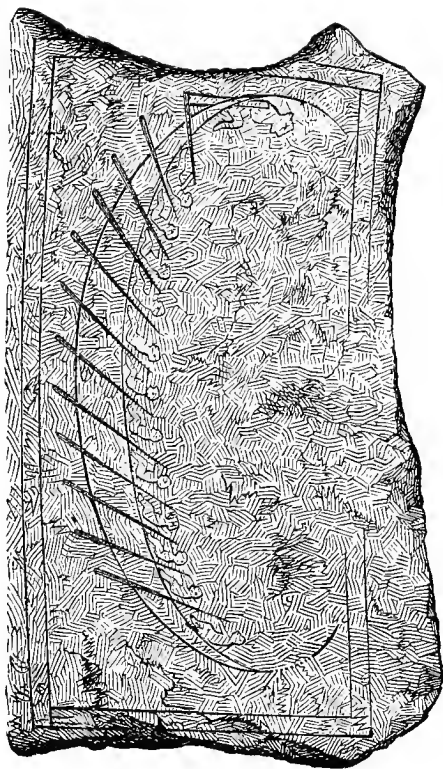
"Then there are two matters to be attended to on alternate days—to gather grapes and to fell timber, with which we may load the ship," said Leif; and the task was at once commenced. It is said that their long-boat was filled with grapes. And now, having felled timber to load their ship, and the spring coming on, they made ready for their departure. Before he left, Leif gave the land a name expressive of its good produce, calling it *Vinland*—land of wine.

The company then put to sea, having a fair wind, and at length came within sight of Greenland and its icy mountains. As they approached the coast one of the crew asked Lief, "Why do you steer the ship in that quarter, directly in the teeth of the wind?" Leif answered: "I guide the helm

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and look out at the same time. Tell me if you see anything." All denied that they saw anything of importance. Then said Leif, "I am not sure whether it is a ship or a rock which I see in the distance"; but they all presently saw it and pronounced it a rock. Leif, however, had so much sharper eyes than the others that he saw men upon the rock, and said, "I am desirous of striving even against the wind, so that we may reach those yonder; perchance they may have need of our assistance." So they made for the rock, furling their sails, cast anchor, and put out the small boat which they carried with them. When near to the rock Tyrker demanded who was the captain of the band of castaways, and one answered that his name was Thorer, and that he was by birth a Norwegian. He then asked, "What is the name of your captain," and Leif answered him. "Are you the son of Eirek the Red, of Brattahlid?" Leif told him that he was, and added, "I offer you all a place in my ship, and I will also take as much of your goods as my ship will carry," and they gratefully accepted his offer. The vessel then sailed up to Eireksfiord, until they reached Brattahlid, where

A VIKING WAR-SHIP ENGRAVED ON ROCK IN NORWAY







## PRECURSORS OF THE CABOTS

they disembarked. Then Leif offered to Thorer, his wife, and three of his men, a residence with him, and he showed hospitality to all the others, as well the sailors of Thorer as his own. There were fifteen persons thus preserved by Leif, and from that time forth he was known as "Leif the Lucky."

This expedition contributed both to the wealth and honor of Leif. In the following winter a disease attacked the company of Thorer, to which the man himself and many of his companions fell victims. Eirek the Red also died during that winter (which was probably that of 1001-1002). . . . There was much talk of Leif's expedition, and Thorvald, his brother, considered that the lands had been too little explored. Then said Leif to Thorvald, "Go, brother, take my ship to Vinland"; and Thorvald did so, taking with him thirty companions. They passed the winter (of 1002-1003) at Leifs-booths, the name given by them to the dwellings erected by Leif in Vinland, where, their vessel being drawn ashore, they supported themselves by catching fish.

In the ensuing spring and summer Thorvald coasted the western shores, but found

no habitations of men, except in an island far west, where was seen a single wooden shed. The next summer, Thorvald, with a portion of his company, coasted the eastern shore, and passed around the land to the northward. They were then driven by a storm against a neck of land, when the ship was stranded and the keel damaged. They remained here for some time to repair the ship, and Thorvald said to his companions: "Now let us fix up the keel on this neck of land, and call the place 'Kialarness'"—keel promontory. Having done this, they sailed along the coast, leaving that neck to the eastward, and entered the mouths of the neighboring bays, until they came to a certain promontory which was covered with wood. Here they cast anchor and went ashore. Then said Thorvald, "This is a pleasant place, and here should I like to fix my habitation."

They afterwards, having returned to their ship, perceived on the sandy shore of a bay within the promontory three small boats made of skins (that is, canoes) and under each one were three men. They seized all of these except one, who escaped with his canoe, and killed all those they captured.

## PRECURSORS OF THE CABOTS

Having returned to the promontory, they looked around and saw in the inner bay several elevations, which they considered to be habitations. They were soon afterwards overcome by such a heavy sleep that none of them was able to keep watch; but they were aroused by a loud voice, which said: "Awake, Thorvald, and all thy company, if you wish to preserve your lives; embark at once and make the best of your way from the land!"

Then an innumerable multitude of canoes was seen coming from the inner bay, by which Thorvald's party was immediately attacked. Then said Thorvald: "Let us raise bulwarks above the sides of the ship, and defend ourselves as well as we are able; though we can avail little against this multitude. So it was done. The Skraelings<sup>1</sup> cast their weapons at them for some time, then precipitously retired. Thorvald inquired what wounds his men had received. They denied that any of them had been wound-

<sup>1</sup> The *Skraelings* were, of course, the red savages—the first recorded as seen by white men in America. From the accurate description given of them, in the succeeding *saga*, it is inferred that they were Algonquins.

ed; but Thorvald said: "I have received a wound under my arm from an arrow, which, flying between the ship's side and the edge of my shield, fastened itself in my armpit. Here is the arrow. It will cause my death! Now it is my advice that you prepare to return home as quickly as possible; but me you shall carry to yonder promontory, which seems to me a pleasant place to dwell in. Perhaps the words which fell from my lips shall prove true, and I shall indeed abide there for a while. There bury me, and place a cross at my head and another at my feet, and call that place forever more *Krossaness*"—cross-promontory.

Then Thorvald expired. Everything was done according to his directions, and those who had gone with him on this expedition, having joined their companions at Leifs-booths, informed them of all that had happened. They passed the following winter [the third of their absence, 1003-1004] at this place and there prepared quantities of grapes to carry home. Early the following spring they set sail for Greenland, and arrived safely at Eireksfiord, having much melancholy intelligence to convey to Leif Erikson.

## II

### THE SAGA OF THORFINN

1006-1010

THE so-called *Saga of Thorfinn*, fragmentary as it is, and at times almost incoherent, having been made up, probably, from several narratives, in its salient features is a continuation of the preceding relation. Its value consists in bridging a space in our history that would otherwise be left a blank, as it takes up the thread of the narrative soon after the return of Thorvald's men to Eireksfiord. Old Eirek was dead, and his third son, Thorstein, was married to Gudrid, the widow of Thorer the Norwegian, whom Leif the Lucky had taken from the rock in the sea.

When the men who had sailed with Thorvald arrived with tidings of his death, Thorstein was for setting off at once in search of his body, that it might be given a Christian burial. Animated by this fraternal senti-

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

ment, he raised a crew and departed, with his bride, for the promontory of Krossaness; but after sailing and drifting about all the summer, he was obliged to return without having accomplished his purpose. It was so late in the season that he could not even reach Eireksfiord, but was compelled to winter at the western settlement of Greenland, where he and many of his men died of a pestilence. The beautiful Gudrid, again left a widow, returned to Eireksfiord, where she found a home with the family of Leif the Lucky. But she did not long remain a widow, for that summer there came to the settlement a wealthy Norwegian, who fell in love with and quickly wedded her. Thorfinn Kalsefni was his name, and his marriage with the lovely Gudrid was celebrated at Brattahlid early in the winter of 1006-1007, nine hundred years ago.

The twice-widowed Gudrid retained a lively recollection of the voyages she had made with her previous husbands, and during the long winter nights the conversation quite naturally turned to the discovery of "Vinland the Good," to which, she thought, an expedition might be made, with fair prospect of gain. At length she so won upon Thorfinn

## THE SAGA OF THORFINN

that he and another Greenlander, named Snorri, began preparations for an expedition to Vinland in the spring. When finally fitted out it consisted of three ships, with their equipment of small boats, and one hundred and sixty souls, of whom, including Gudrid, seven were women. Among the company were Biarni Grimolfson, Thorhall Gamalson, and Thorvard the husband of Freydis, only daughter of the late Eirek the Red. They took with them a complete equipment for a colony, including some live-stock, as they designed to form a settlement.

Thorfinn asked Leif to give him the dwellings which he had erected in Vinland, and was told that he could make use of them as much as he liked. After sailing several days towards the south, land was seen which was probably Labrador, as the explorers found there vast flat stones, many of which were twelve ells in breadth, and, like those before them, they called it "Helluland." They saw no human beings there, but a great number of foxes. Two days' sailing on a southerly course took them to "Markland," the wooded country, where they found many wild animals new to them, and on an island lying off the coast southeasterly killed a bear.

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

Two or three days farther they sailed, still in a southward direction, and arrived at a *ness*, or promontory, where they found the keel of a ship—in all probability the one that Thorvald had left there, from which circumstance he had named the spot “Kialarness.” But they called the shores “Furdustrandir,” because the coasting along them seemed so tiresome. They afterwards came to a bay, into which they directed their boats, and landed.

King Olaf Tryggvason (it is said) had given to Leif the Lucky, when he was in Norway and became a Christian, two Scots—a man named Haki, and a woman named Hekia—who were swifter of foot than many wild animals. These people Leif had loaned to Thorfinn, and they were then in his ship. When they landed in the bay, therefore, he put these Scots ashore, directing them to run over the country towards the southwest for three days, and then return. The ships lay to during their absence, and at the end of three days they returned, one of them bringing a bunch of grapes, and the other an ear of corn, or maize. They were lightly clad and were glad to get on board the ship.

Then the vessels proceeded on their course,



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until the land was intersected by another bay. Outward from this bay lay an island, which, as there was a very swift current on each side of it, they named "Straumey," or Isle of Currents. Here they found so many eider ducks, which bred there, that they could hardly walk without stepping on their eggs. Directing their course into this bay, which they called "Straumfiord," they disembarked and made preparations for remaining. They had taken with them several cattle, for which they found here abundant pasturage. The situation of this place was very pleasant and apparently well suited for a colony, so they erected huts and passed much time in exploring.

Here they passed the winter of 1007-1008 which was very severe, and as they had no great stores provided, provisions ran short, for they could neither hunt nor fish. So they passed over to an island, hoping there to find means of subsistence; but scarcely improved their condition, though their cattle were somewhat better off. Then they prayed to God that he would send them food; which prayer was not answered as soon as they desired. About this time Thorhall, the pagan and a hunter, was missing, and after

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a search lasting three days, was found lying on the top of a great rock. There he lay stretched out, with eyes wide open, blowing through his mouth and nose, and mumbling to himself. When they asked him why he had gone there, he answered that it was no business of theirs; that he was old enough to care for himself. When they requested him to return with them, he did so without protest, but would give them no explanation of his strange behavior.

A short time after a whale was cast ashore, and they all ran down eagerly to cut it up; but none knew what kind of a whale it was, not even Thorfinn, who was well acquainted with the denizens of the deep. The cooks dressed the whale and they all ate of it, but were taken ill immediately afterwards. Then said Thorhall: "Now you see that Thor is more ready to give aid than your Christ. This food is the reward of a hymn which I composed to Thor, my God, who has rarely forsaken me." When they heard this, none would eat any more, and so they threw away the remainder of the flesh from the rocks, commending themselves to God. After this the air became milder, and they were again able to go fishing. Nor from that time was

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there any lack of provisions, for there were abundance of wild animals to be hunted on the main-land, of eggs taken on the island, and of fish caught in the sea.

Thorhall was evidently in disfavor, as a pagan—perhaps the only one in the company; but he did not seem to care, and one day, as he was carrying water to his ship, he sang, in a vein of bravado, the following verses:

“I left the shores of Eireksfiord  
To seek, O cursed Vinland, thine;  
Each warrior pledging there his word  
That we should here quaff choicest wine.  
Great Odin, Warrior God, see how  
These water-pails I carry now;  
No wine my lips have touched, but low  
At humblest fountain I must bow.”

Soon after they began to dispute where they should go next, for Thorhall the hunter wished to go north, while Thorfinn desired to coast the shore to the southwest, considering it probable that there would be a more extensive country the farther south they went. It was decided, therefore, that each should explore separately, and Thorhall made preparations on the island. His whole company consisted of nine only, all the others joining with Thorfinn; but still he was not

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cast down, and when all was ready and they were about to sail, he mockingly sang:

“Now home our joyful course we'll take,  
Where friends untroubled winters lead;  
Now let our vessel swiftly make  
Her channel o'er the ocean's bed;  
And let the battle-loving crew  
Who here rejoice and praise the land—  
Let them catch whales, and eat them, too,  
And let them dwell in Furdustrand!”

Thorhall's party then sailed northward, round Furdustrandir and Kialarness; but when they desired to sail thence westward, they were met by an adverse tempest and driven off to the coast of Ireland, where they were beaten and made slaves. And there, as the merchants reported, died Thorhall the pagan.

Thorfinn, with Snorri Thorbrandson, Biarni Grimolfson, and all the rest of the company, sailed towards the southwest. They went on for some time until they came to a river which, flowing from the land, passed through a lake into the sea. They found sandy shoals there, so that they could not pass up the river except at high tide. Thorfinn and his company sailed up as far as the mouth of the river, and called the place Hóp.

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Having landed, they observed that where the land was low the corn grew wild, where it was higher vines were found, and there were self-sown fields of wheat [maize, or wild rice?]. Every river was full of fish. They dug pits in the sand where the tide rose highest, and at low tide there remained excellent fish in these pits. In the forest there were great numbers of wild beasts.

They passed half a month here carelessly, having brought their cattle with them. One morning, as they looked around, they saw a great number of canoes approaching, in which were poles, vibrating in the direction of the sun, and emitting a sound like reeds shaken by winds.

Then said Thorfinn, "What do you think this means?" Snorri Thorbrandson answered: "Perhaps it is a sign of peace; let us take a white shield and hold it out towards them." They did so, and then those in the canoes paddled towards them, seeming to wonder who they were, and landed. They were swarthy in complexion, short in stature, and savage in appearance, with coarse black hair, big eyes, and broad cheeks. When they had stayed for some time, after gazing at the strangers with astonishment,

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they departed peacefully, and retired beyond the promontory to the southwest.

Thorfinn and his companions erected dwellings at a little distance from the lake, and here they passed the winter comfortably, as no snow fell, and all their cattle lived unhoused. One morning in the following spring they saw again a great number of canoes approaching from beyond the promontory at the southwest. They were so numerous that the surface of the water looked as if sprinkled with cinders. As before, tall poles were suspended in the canoes. Thorfinn and his party held out shields, after which a barter of goods commenced between them. These people desired above all things to obtain some red cloth, in exchange for which they offered various kinds of skins. They were anxious also to purchase swords and spears; but this Thorfinn and Snorri forbade. For a narrow strip of red cloth they gave a whole skin, and tied the cloth about their heads. Thus they went on, bartering for some time. When the supply of cloth began to run short, Thorfinn's people cut it into pieces so small that they did not exceed a finger's breadth, and yet the Skraelings gave for

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them as much as, or even more than, before.

It happened that a bull, which Thorfinn had brought with him, came rushing from the woods, as this traffic was going on, and bellowed lustily. The Skraelings were terribly alarmed at this, and, running quickly down to their canoes, departed towards the southwest, whence they had come. They were not seen again for three weeks, but at the end of that time a vast number of their canoes came dancing over the water. They were filled with Skraelings, who howled fearfully, and all their poles were turned opposite to the sun. Thorfinn's party then raised the red war-shield; the Skraelings landed, and a fierce battle followed. There was a galling discharge of missile weapons, for the savages used slings, and suddenly they raised on a long pole a large globe, not unlike a sheep's belly, and almost of a blue color. They hurled this from the pole towards the party of Thorfinn, and as it fell it made a great noise. This excited great alarm among the followers of Thorfinn, so that they began immediately to fly along the course of the river, for they imagined themselves to be surrounded on all sides by

the Skraelings. They did not halt until they reached some rocks, where they turned about and fought desperately.

At this time Freydis, daughter of Eirek, coming out of the dwellings and seeing the followers of Thorfin flying, exclaimed: "Why do strong men like you run from such weak wretches, whom you ought to destroy like cattle? If I were armed, I believe I should fight more bravely than any of you!" They regarded not her words, but kept on running. Freydis endeavored to keep up with them, but was unable to do so, owing to the state of her health; yet she followed them as far as the neighboring wood, while the Skraelings pursued her. There she saw a man lying dead. This was Thorbrand, the son of Snorri, in whose head a sharp-edged stone was sticking. His sword lay naked at his side. This she seized and prepared to defend herself. As the Skraelings came up with her, she struck her breast with the naked sword, which so astonished the savages that they fled back to their canoes and rowed away as fast as possible. The followers of Thorfin, returning to her, extolled her courage. Two of their company had fallen, together with a vast number of the Skraelings.



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Then the followers of Thorfinn, having been so hard pressed by the mere number of the enemy, returned home and dressed their wounds. The Skraelings, in the course of the battle, found a dead man, and a battle-axe lying near him. One of them took up the axe and cut wood with it, then, one after the other, all did the same, thinking it an instrument of great value and very sharp. Presently one of them took it and struck it against a stone, so that the axe broke. Then, finding that it would not cut stone, they thought it useless and threw it away.

Thorfinn and his companions now considered it obvious that although the quality of the land was excellent, yet there would always be danger to be apprehended from the natives; they therefore prepared to depart and to return to their native country. They first sailed around the land to the northward, where they took captive near the shore five Skraelings, clothed in skins. They were sleeping, and had with them small boxes full of marrow mixed with blood. Thorfinn supposed them to have been exiled from their tribe, or country. He and his people killed them. They after-

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wards came to a promontory abounding in wild animals, as they judged from the foot-prints in the sand.

They then went to Straumfiord, where there were abundant supplies of all that they needed. Some say that Biarni and Gudrid remained here, with one hundred men, and that they never went any farther; that Thorfinn and Snorri went towards the southwest with forty men, and that they remained no longer at Hóp than barely two months, returning the same summer. Afterwards Thorfinn went with one ship to seek Thorhall the hunter, the rest remaining behind. Sailing northward around Kialarness, they went westward after passing that promontory, the land lying to their left hand. There they saw extensive forests, and when they had sailed for some time they came to a place where a river flowed from southeast to northwest. Having entered its mouth, they cast anchor on its southwestern bank.

One morning they saw in an open place in the wood something at a distance which glittered. When they all shouted it moved. This thing was a uniped, who immediately betook himself to the bank of the river where the ship lay. Thorvald Eirekson was

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sitting near the helm, and the uniped shot an arrow at him. Thorvald, having extracted the arrow, said: "We have found a rich land, but shall enjoy it little." After a short time he died of the wound. The uniped subsequently retired, and Thorfinn's crew pursued him. They presently saw him run into a near creek, and returning to their ship they drew off towards the northward; for, imagining that this was the land of the unipeds, they were unwilling to expose themselves to danger any longer. They passed the winter in Straumfiord. Snorri Thorfinnson had been born during the first autumn, and was in his third year when they left Vinland.

Setting sail from Vinland [in the spring of the year 1010], with a southerly wind, they touched at Markland, there finding five Skraelings, a grown man, two women, and two boys. Thorfinn's party seized the boys, the others escaping and hiding in caves. They took these two boys with them, taught them their language, and baptized them. The boys called their mother Vethildi, and their father Uvaege. They said that several chiefs ruled over the Skraelings, of whom one was Avalldania, the other Valldida;

that they had no houses, but lived in caverns and hollows of the rocks; that beyond their country was another, the inhabitants of which were clothed in white, and carried before them long poles with flags, and shouted with a loud voice. . . . Thorfinn's party afterwards reached in safety Eireksfiord in Greenland.

The foregoing are the main features of the famous *sagas* describing the colonizing of Greenland and the temporary settlement at Vinland. They bear internal evidence of being veracious chronicles, within the limitations of their writers, who belonged to a rude and unpolished age; though Iceland, at that time, was not without its literature. For example, the productions of the new country are given as they were found, and as they may be found to-day: the maize, wild grapes, the various animals, the fierce and uncouth Skraelings and their barbaric weapons. The Indian canoes were the same as those seen by later voyagers in historic times; the rude utensils and arms, the characteristic traits of the savages, are veraciously portrayed. What a touch of nature is that incident of the savages with their new discovery, the iron

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axe, which they imagined utterly worthless because it could not be made to cut through stone as well as wood and bone!

And that "large globe, not unlike a sheep's belly," borne on a pole, which was hurled at Thorfinn's party, falling in their midst with a tremendous noise, was the aboriginal *ballista*—a great round stone, wrapped in a hide, that shrank around it when dry, and which, attached to a pole and hurtled into a crowd of warriors, proved a most formidable projectile.

It must be remembered that the Northmen were scarcely better armed than the Skraelings. They had their sharp swords, to be sure, but, like the savages themselves, were unacquainted with the use of fire-arms. Hence the timidity of these Vikings and descendants of Vikings (whose very name had caused the world to tremble, in the East and in the West) when confronted with overwhelming numbers; hence the short-lived settlements of Vinland, surrounded as they were by savages, and the constant recurrence to Greenland, where the Skraelings had never been seen.

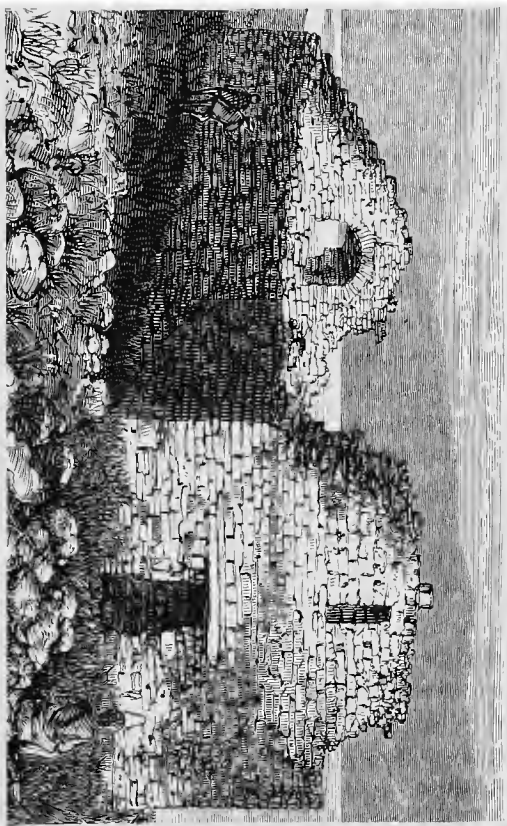
The Norse chroniclers were very temperate, it must be admitted, in their descriptions of

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adventures and of animals encountered by the Vikings of Vinland. They might have filled their pages with mythical yet ferocious dragons, with monsters of the deep and flying beasts of the air, such as even the fifteenth-century map-makers were prone to depict when they had a gap in the globe to fill or a vast area of waters to span. But, so far as we know, the only approach to a mythical monster mentioned by the Norsemen was that solitary uniped, which attacked Thorfinn's party, and slew unfortunate Thorvald—after he had been months in his grave! But the uniped, with its mixing up of the Thorvald and the Thorfinn expeditions, must be looked upon as an interpolation by some scribe, who probably considered the narrative too tame, and who inserted the incident without having informed himself as to preceding occurrences.

The colonization of Greenland by the Northmen, in the tenth century, says a high authority, "is as well established as any event that occurred in the Middle Ages"; and, it might be added, so is the attempted settlement of Vinland, at the very beginning of the eleventh century. But, while no authentic vestige of Vinland has been dis-

RUINS OF NORSE CHURCH AT KRAKORTOK, SOUTH GREENLAND







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covered, the boreal colony battled with the arctic snows for centuries, and when it perished left behind, in fertile spots around the heads of fiords, the ruins not only of numerous farmsteads, but of churches and a cathedral. The Brattahlid of Eirik the Red and Leif the Lucky, of Thorvald, Freydis, and Gudrid, may be identified to-day by its ruins; but the same can hardly be said of "Wineland the Good," it is feared. Its site, indeed, is a matter of conjecture, and has been variously located, in every attractive bay between Newfoundland and the southern coast of Massachusetts.

### III

#### INTERMEDIARY EXPLORATIONS

**M**ANY and pertinent are the questions that arise in connection with an inquiry into the colonization of Greenland and the attempted settlements at Vinland. Why did the northern colony flourish four hundred years, while the more southern, with its temperate climate and manifold advantages, exist for a short period only, then sink into obscurity?

The last voyage to Vinland of which there is any account was in or about the year 1221; but the Greenland settlements were occupied so late as the opening years of that century in which Columbus made his first voyage to what is now called America. The northern Skraelings, or Eskimos, invaded the southern shores of Greenland in the first decade of the fifteenth century, and swept the settlements into the sea. They had been seen by Norse voyagers

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many years before, but evidently were not feared, though it was on account of the total absence of natives inimical to white men that the inhospitable sites in Greenland had been occupied and retained even after better had been discovered farther south. That was one reason, but a second and more powerful was, probably, Greenland's proximity to the parent colony in Iceland. The dreaded "Sea of Darkness" was, between Iceland and Greenland, narrowed to scarcely more than a strait, less than three hundred miles in width; but below it expanded increasingly, the Vikings found, the farther south they ventured in their frail craft.

It is less strange that the Northmen should have abandoned Vinland and ceased to voyage thither at all, than that all knowledge of the country should have faded away, in the course of centuries, and have become but a tradition, until it was revived by the publication of the learned Torfaeus's book, in 1706. Without allowing ourselves to become involved in a mere labyrinth of explanations, by which we should be diverted from the high-road of our narrative, and perhaps emerge without any information

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worth the while, at least we should remember that the Northmen, though valiant, were extremely ignorant and unobservant. They had no conception of the globe as we now know it, and were unaware of what their voyages signified. Moreover, says a critical historian: "Nothing had been accomplished by these voyages which could properly be called a contribution to geographical knowledge. . . . Except for Greenland, which was supposed to be a part of the European world, America remained as much undiscovered after the eleventh century as before. In the midsummer of 1492, it needed to be discovered as much as if Leif Erikson, or the whole race of Northmen, had never existed!" Suffice it that, when it was finally rediscovered, towards the end of the fifteenth century, North America was practically unknown, for the record of Norse voyages had been lost, and was not brought to light until two centuries later.

The impulse for the actual discovery of America was a cumulative force from the East, from the shores of the Mediterranean. Southern Africa, like North America, had been discovered, it had even been circum-

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navigated—and forgotten. Prince Henry of Portugal reopened the ancient waterways. The equator was crossed, finally, but after his death; the Cape of Good Hope was doubled, by Bartholomew Dias, and the way opened by which Vasco da Gama sailed to India.

While the Portuguese were creeping southwardly along the African coast, and while, later, Christopher Columbus, for the Spaniards, was thrusting his ships boldly into the Atlantic, America remained unknown. But there was a man with Bartholomew Dias, when he doubled the Cape of Storms, in 1486, who was to assist in lifting the veil from that virgin continent. This man was Bartholomew Columbus, who, on his return from the African voyage, was sent to England by Christopher, his brother, to lay his schemes before Henry VII. He was to visit, also, the court of France; but his first objective seems to have been the port of Bristol, in England, where it is thought that, being a seafaring man, Bartholomew had some old shipmates or acquaintances. Both Christopher Columbus and Bartholomew had been on voyages to Iceland, it is declared on good authority, and probably to Bristol, which is a very ancient seaport, and during the

fifteenth century, at least, carried on a thriving smuggling trade with the isolated Icelanders.

The enterprising seamen of Bristol, many of them, were not only smugglers but buccaneers, as venturesome and valiant as the old Vikings themselves, though carrying on their operations in the guise of traders. Twelve years before Columbus accidentally arrived at the outlying islands of the West Indies (by which he gained the reputation of having discovered America), or in the year 1480, the Bristol men had sent out an expedition in quest of the isle of Brazil, known in Celtic traditions as O'Brasil, or "Isle of the Blest." Like the blessed St. Brandan's Isle, Atlantis, Antilla, Zipango, and a score of others that took refuge in the "Sea of Darkness" when pursued by the cartographers, O'Brasil was a mythical land, and has never been discovered. It was then as real, however, as was America before it was revealed, and not only Columbus, but Vespucci, went in search of it. The name became finally fixed to the country which now bears it: Brazil, in South America; but previously it wandered about like a veritable *ignis fatuus*, pursued by voyagers of every nationality and clime.

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An old chronicler gives this account: "In 1480, on July 15th [two ships] began a voyage from the port of Bristol . . . in search of the island of Brasylle, to the west of Ireland, Thylde, the most scientific mariner in all England being the pilot. News came to Bristol on the 18th September that the ships cruised about the sea for nearly nine months, without finding the island, but in consequence of tempests they returned to a port in Ireland, for the repose of the ships and the mariners."

Eighteen years later, or in 1498, the Spanish ambassador in London wrote to his sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella: "The people of Bristol have, for the last seven years, sent out every year two, three, or four caravels, in search of the island of Brasil and the Seven Cities."

From this it would appear that Columbus was not the only mariner who was bent upon faring forth upon the vasty deep in search of new lands and peoples; for, even though the Bristol voyage of 1480 be discredited, there can be little doubt as to that of 1491, the very year before America was discovered! It would seem that the great ventures and discoveries of that age—perhaps also of every

age—were made, not by the enlightened aid of the sovereigns, but in spite of them! How many years, for example, did Columbus importune the king of Portugal, and the king and queen of Spain, before the last-named finally sent him forth, so niggardly provided that it was scarcely less than miraculous that he and his motley crew safely accomplished the voyage?

But, if the Spanish and Portuguese sovereigns were penurious and mean, still more so was their royal brother in England, Henry VII., who happened to be seated on the throne when the stout-hearted Bristol men were making their ventures on the unknown ocean. Isabella and Ferdinand nearly lost the services of Columbus by their procrastination; King John of Portugal stigmatized himself as an unworthy successor to Prince Henry the Navigator, when he rejected them; Henry VII. of England joined his company when he dallied over and finally refused the proffer of Don Bartholomew. Christopher's noble brother was at Henry's court in 1488, as witness this entry in Hakluyt's *History*, made about one hundred years later:

“The offer of the discovery of the West Indies by Christopher Columbus to King



## INTERMEDIARY EXPLORATIONS

Henry the seventh, in the yeare 1488, the 13 of February; with the king's acceptation of the offer, and the cause whereupon hee was deprived of the same; recorded in the 13th chapter of the history of Don Fernando Columbus of the life and deeds of his father Christopher Columbus. . . . Wherefore, after that Bartholomew Columbus was departed for England his lucke was to fall into the hands of Pyrats, which spoyled him with the rest of them that were in the ship which he went in. Upon which occasion, and by reason of his pouerty and sicknesse which cruelly assaulted him, in a country so farre distant from his friends, he deferred his ambassage for a long while, until such time as he had gotten somewhat handsome about him with the making of sea cards [charts]. At length he began to deale with King Henry the seventh, unto whom he presented a mappe of the world, wherein these verses were written, which I found among his papers; and I will here set them downe, rather for their antiquity than for their goodnesse:

“Thou which desirest easily the coast of land to  
know,  
This comely mappe right learnedly the same to  
thee will shew;

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Which Strabo, Plinie, Ptolomey and Isodore main-  
taine;

Yet for all that they do not all in one accord  
remaine.

Here also is set downe the late discovered  
burning zone

By Portingals, unto the world which wilom was  
unknown,

Whereof the knowledge now at length thorow  
all the world is blown."

This "mappe of the world" which Bartholomew Columbus presented to the penurious king was probably a copy of that sent by Toscanelli, the Florentine, to Christopher, in 1474, and by which the last-named shaped his course on the first voyage across the Atlantic. As, it is believed, Amerigo Vespucci (then twenty-two years of age, and a Florentine) was in close touch with Toscanelli at that time, he also saw this map, and thus we have several great names closely linked together by this transaction: Christopher and Bartholomew Columbus, Vespucci, Toscanelli; to which will soon be added John and Sebastian Cabot, who may have been in England at the time.

It is not known that either of the Cabots ever met Christopher Columbus, nor did the

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latter ever see Toscanelli, the learned doctor who furnished him with the precious chart; but Amerigo Vespucci was intimately acquainted with the Genoese and the Florentine, and was succeeded by Sebastian Cabot, after his death, in the office of *piloto mayor*, or chief pilot, of Spain. This little world was smaller then than now—that is, the known and habitable portion—while men of real attainments were so few as to be conspicuous. As they were depended upon to supply brains for kings with empty pates—and these latter were relatively numerous—they could always be found among the hangers-on at royal courts.

King Henry listened, but not understandingly, to the plans proposed by Christopher Columbus through his brother Bartholomew. He is said to have promised his assistance in carrying them into execution; but, handicapped as he was by the delays which supervened through poverty, caused by the pirates, Don Bartholomew was compelled to depart from England without accomplishing anything at all.

If Christopher Columbus, instead of spending the best years of his life in servile attendance at royal courts, had cast off all

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dependence upon kings and courtiers, and placed his business in the hands of such men of affairs as the enterprising merchants of British Bristol, or Spanish Seville and Cadiz, he would have fared much better, and America might have been discovered the sooner. But he could not rid himself of the fetish of royalty, and fawned upon it until finally there was grudgingly granted him as a boon what he should have demanded as a right. The Spanish sovereigns, in 1492, after delaying their answer to his requests nearly seven years, reluctantly yielded their permission, with beggarly assistance, for a voyage—and that accomplished, England's opportunity was gone forever—for the New World had been found.

Don Bartholomew made the best of his way back to Spain, whence he was sent, in command of some vessels, to the West Indies, where he finally met his brother, at the newly founded settlement of Isabella, on the north coast of Hispaniola. There, says the old English chronicler quaintly, "Christopher Columbus being returned from the discovery of Cuba and Jamaica, found his brother Bartholomew, who before had been sent to intreat of an agreement with the king

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of England for the discovery of the Indies—as we sayd before.” But for the ignorance of a paltering king, in truth, the English might have had the glory of achieving this discovery; though they were hardly worthy that high honor, for they had not, says Robertson, in his *History of America*, at that period attained to such skill in navigation as qualified them for carrying it into execution.

“From the inconsiderate ambition of its monarchs, the nation had long wasted its genius and activity in pernicious and ineffectual efforts to conquer France. When this ill-directed ardor began to abate, the fatal contest between the houses of York and Lancaster turned the arms of one-half the kingdom against the other, and exhausted the vigor of both. During the course of two centuries, while industry and commerce were making gradual progress both in the south and north of Europe, the English continued so blind to the advantages of their own situation that they hardly began to bend their thoughts towards those objects and pursuits to which they were indebted for their present opulence and power. While the trading-vessels of Italy, Spain, and Port-

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ugal, as well as those of the Hans Towns, visited the most remote ports of Europe, and carried on an active intercourse with its various nations, the English did little more than creep along their own coasts in small barks, which conveyed the productions of one country to another. Their commerce was almost wholly passive. Their wants were supplied by strangers; and whatever necessary or luxury of life their own country did not yield was imported in foreign bottoms. The cross of St. George was seldom displayed beyond the precincts of the narrow seas. Hardly had any English ship traded with Spain or Portugal before the beginning of the fifteenth century; and half a century more elapsed before the English mariners became so adventurous as to enter the Mediterranean."

"In this infancy of navigation," continues the historian, "Henry could not commit the conduct of an armament destined to explore unknown regions to his own subjects. He invested one Giovanni Gabotto, a Venetian adventurer who had settled in Bristol, with the chief command, and issued a commission to him and his three sons, empowering them to sail, under the banner of England, towards

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the east, north, or west, in order to discover countries unoccupied by any other Christian state; to take possession of them in his name, and to carry on an exclusive trade with the inhabitants.”

## IV

### FIRST VOYAGE OF THE CABOTS

1497

IS it still debatable, who discovered America? Shall we deny the Northmen credit for the discovery merely because they did not "enter their claim," but let it lapse and allowed it to be pre-empted by Columbus?

How strangely, almost inextricably, interwoven are the threads of tradition and history, which connect the earliest mention of America with the men who dragged it forth from obscurity and set it among the known countries of the world. Leaving out of the question even the Northmen and their settlements, still there are three claimants for the honor of having been the first to set foot on continental America: Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and John Cabot. The first-named, by his own account, voyaged to *Ultima Thule*, or Iceland, long before he set out for America, and when there may



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have obtained knowledge of the sagas, from which we have quoted in preceding chapters. Availing himself of that knowledge, he may have made his great "discovery" merely by crossing the Atlantic at a more southern parallel of latitude—as he availed himself of Toscanelli's chart in his first transatlantic voyage.

Columbus, as we know, discovered only islands—those now known as the West Indies—in his first two voyages, of 1492 and 1493; and it was not until 1498 that he had his first glimpse of a continent, at the northeast coast of South America. On July 31, 1498, he sighted the great island Trinidad, and a little later Paria, a projection of the continent (as, anciently, the geologists tell us, was Trinidad itself). But if we may believe the narrative of Vespucci, he was on that coast as early as June 10, 1497; which date, again, is just two weeks earlier than John Cabot first sighted the coast of North America, off Newfoundland or Labrador. Historian Richard Hakluyt has it thus: "*Anno Dom.* 1497, John Cabot, a Venetian, and his sonne Sebastian (with an English fleet set out from Bristol), discovered that land which no man before that time had

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attempted, on the 24th of June, about five of the clocke, early in the morning. This land he called *Prima Vista*, that is to say, First Seene, because as I suppose it was that part whereof they had the first sight from the sea."

Grave doubts attach to the so-called "1497 voyage" of Vespucci, which, it is claimed with much reason, should have been dated two years later, as he certainly was on the coast of South America in the year 1499. The question arises: Did he purposely falsify the date of his first voyage in order to deprive both Columbus and Cabot of the honor of the achievement? His claim was not made until seven years after the alleged voyage had taken place; but Columbus was then alive, and also Sebastian Cabot, who always showed himself jealous of his own, if not of his honored father's fame.

"Whether, in the first sight of the mainland," says one who writes with an air of authority. . . . "Vespucci did not take precedence of the Cabots and Columbus, has been a disputed question for nearly [quite] four hundred years; and it will probably never be satisfactorily settled, should it con-

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tinue in dispute for four hundred years longer." That is, there will always be champions of the one and of the others, so long as the matter is in doubt, which promises to be forever.<sup>1</sup>

But again, leaving the question of precedence in South America to be argued by whomsoever will take the trouble, we shall note that there is now no doubt as to the date on which John Cabot made his landfall on the coast of North America. That continent—speaking particularly of the northern land-mass of the western hemisphere—belongs to him by right of discovery, and no one has sought to take that honor from him save his son Sebastian. In his old age, and while residing in Seville, as pilot major of Spain, Sebastian Cabot is said to have discoursed as follows to the pope's legate at the Spanish court: . . . "When my father [John Cabot] departed from Venice many yeeres since to dwell in England, to follow the trade of marchandises, hee tooke mee with him to the citie of London, while I was very yong, yet hauing neuertheless some knowledge of letters, of humanitie, and of the

<sup>1</sup> See *The Life of Amerigo Vespucci*, in *Heroes of American History*—"The Debatable Voyage."

Sphere. And when my father died, in that time when newes were brought that Don Christopher Colonus Genuese [Columbus, Genoese] had discovered the coasts of India, whereof was great talke in all the court of king Henry the VII., who then raigned, insomuch that all men, with great admiration, affirmed it to be a thing more diuine than humane, to saile by the West into the East where spices growe, by a way that was neuer knownen before—by this fame and report there increased in my heart a great flame of desire to attempt some notable thing.

“And vnderstanding by reason of the Sphere, that if I should saile by way of the Northwest I should by a shorter tract come into India, I thereupon caused the king to be aduertised of my deuise, who immediately caused two carauels to be furnished with all things appertayning to the voyage, which was, as farre as I remember, in the yeere 1496, in the beginning of sommer. I began therefore to saile towards the Northwest, not thinking to finde any other land than that of Cathay, and from thence to turne towards India; but after certaine dayes I found that the land ranne towards the North, which was to mee a great displeasure. Neuertheless,

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saying along by the coast to see if I could finde any gulfe that turned, I found the lande still a continent to the 56 degree vnder our Pole. And seeing that there the coast turned towards the East, despairing to finde the passage, I turned backe again and sailed downe by the coast of that lande which is nowe called Florida, where, my victuals failing, I departed from thence and returned into England, where I found great tumults among the people, and preparation for warres in Scotland; by reason whereof there was no more consideration had to this voyage."

If it were not that nearly all the "discourses" of Sebastian Cabot (after he had placed a goodly distance between himself and the scenes of his alleged adventures) were of this boastful tenor, we might infer that the aforesaid "legate of the pope" had incorrectly reported this narration; but, unfortunately, no such conclusion can be reached. The statement is in direct contravention of the truth, for it was John Cabot, and not Sebastian, his son, who directed the first ships from England to North America. This fact has been established, though labored efforts have been made to show the contrary. As Robertson, in the preceding

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chapter, rather loosely says: The "commission for discovery was issued to John Cabot and his three sons; but he held chief command."

How, then, could Sebastian lay claim to the discovery without being open to the charge that he, too, as well as Amerigo Vespucci, had falsified the records? As already mentioned, no log was made of the voyage by those most interested. Unlike Columbus and Vespucci, who both kept journals of their voyages (the former consistently advertising himself and his doings from the beginning of the first voyage almost to the day of his death). John Cabot left not a line, so far as can be discovered, at the time or later.<sup>1</sup> And it was not until long after that his son, impressed by the importance of his father's achievement, which loomed great by comparison with other lauded discoveries, seems to have resolved to gather the laurels which Cabot the senior had failed to grasp!

<sup>1</sup> "In 1502 Columbus caused several attested copies of his letters patent and other privileges to be made and distributed amongst different custodians," as the governor of the bank of St. George, in Genoa, etc. And, adds Winsor, "One wishes he could have had a like solicitude for the exactness of his own statements."

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That acute critic, Justin Winsor, truthfully says: "Unlike the enterprises of Columbus, Vespucci, and many other navigators who wrote accounts of their voyages and discoveries, at the time of their occurrence, which by the aid of the press were published to the world, the exploits of the Cabots were [contemporaneously] unchronicled. . . . Although the fact of their voyage [as we shall later see] had been reported by jealous and watchful liegers at the English court to the principal cabinets of the continent, and the map of their discoveries had been made known — and thus had its influence in leading other expeditions to the northern shores of North America—the historical literature relating to the discovery of America, as preserved in print, is, for nearly twenty years after the event took place, silent as to the enterprises, and even the names of the Cabots!

"Scarcely anything has come down to us from these navigators themselves, and for what we know we have hitherto been chiefly indebted to the uncertain reports, in foreign languages, of conversations originally held with Sebastian Cabot, many years afterwards, and sometimes related at second and

third hands. Even the year in which the [first] voyage took place is misstated." This last line refers to the legend on a map attributed to Sebastian Cabot in 1544, which reads: "This country [Newfoundland] was discovered by John Cabot, Venetian, and Sebastian Cabot his son, in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, MCCCCXCIIII."; which should have been given as MCCCCXCVII., by joining the first two Is, and thus making a V.

Having cleared away the brushwood, as it were, we proceed to consider next the letters patent under which the first Cabotian voyage was made, granted in 1496 by King Henry VIIth, "vnto Iohn Cabot and his three sonnes, Lewis, Sebastian, and Santius, for the discoverie of new and vnknown lands." It is contained in Hakluyt's *Principall Navigations, Voyages and Discoveries of the English Nation*, published more than ninety years after the voyage took place.

*"Henry, by the grace of God king of England and France, and lord of Ireland, to all to whom these presents shall come:*

"GREETING.—Be it known that we haue giuen and granted, and by these presents do giue and grant for vs and our heires, to our well-beloued Iohn Cabot,



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citizen of Venice, to Lewis, Sebastian, and Santius, sonnes of the sayd Iohn, and to the heires of them and euery of them, and their deputies, full and free authority, leaue, and power, to saile to all parts, countreys, and seas of the East, of the West, and of the North, vnder our banners and ensigns, with fise ships of what burthen or quantity soeuer they be, and as many mariners or men as they will haue with them in the sayd ships, Vpon their own proper costs and charges, to seeke out, discouer, and finde whatsoeuer isles, countreys, regions, or prouinces of the heathen and infidels whatsoeuer they be, and in what part of the world whatsoeuer they be, which before this time haue been vnknownen to all Christians: we haue granted to them, and also to euery of them, the heires of them, and euery of them, and their deputies, and haue giuen them licence to set vp our banners and ensigns in euery village, towne, castle, isle, or maine land of them newly found.

“And that the aforesayd Iohn and his sonnes, or their heires and assignes may subdue, occupy, and possesse all such townes, cities, castles, and isles of them found, which they can subdue, occupy, and possess, as our vassals and lieutenants, getting vnto vs the rule, title, and jurisdiction of the same villages, townes, castles, & firme land so found.

“Yet so that the aforesayd Iohn, and his sonnes and heires, and their deputies, be holden and bounden of all the fruits, profits, gaines, and commodities growing out of such nauigation, for euery their voyage, as often as they shall arriue at our

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port of Bristoll (at the which port they shall be bound and holden onely to arriue) all maner of necessary costs and charges by them made being deducted, to pay vnto vs in wares or money the fift part of the capitall gaine so gotten. We giuing and granting vnto them, and to their heires and deputies, that they shall be free from all paying of customes of all and singuler such merchandize as they shall bring with them from those places so newly found.

“And moreouer, we haue giuen and granted to them, their heires and deputies, that all the firme lands, isles, villages, townes, castles, and places whatsoever they be that they shall chance to finde, may not of any other of our subjects be frequented or visited without the licence of the aforesayd Iohn and his sonnes, and their deputies, vnder paine of forfeiture—as well of their shippes as of all and singuler goods of all of them that shall presume to saile to those places so found. Willing, and most straightly commanding all and singuler our subjects as well on land as on sea, to giue good assistance to the aforesayd Iohn and his sonnes and deputies, and that as well in arming and furnishing their shippes or vessels, as in prouision of food, and in buying of victuals for their money, and all other things by them to be prouided necessary for the sayd nauigation, they do giue them all their help and fauour. In witnesse whereof we haue caused to be made these our Letters patents. Witnesse our selfe at Westminister the fift day of March, in the eleuenth yeere of our reignc.”

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The royal letters patent were issued in response to a petition, received by the king a short time previously, which has been called by an English historian, G. E. Weare, "so far as we know up to the present time, the earliest document which in any way relates to the discovery of North America by John Cabot." It is without date, and as follows:

*"To the Kyng our souvereigne Lord:*

"Please it your highnes, of your most noble and haboundant grace, to graunt vnto Iohn Cabotto, Citizen of Venice, Lewes, Sebastyan, and Sancto his sonnys, your gracious letters patentes vnder your grete seale in due forme to be made according to the tenour hereafter ensuyng. And they shall during their lyves pray to God for the prosperous continuance of your most noble and royall astate long to enduer."

All the evidence goes to show that the petition was promptly acted upon, for King Henry was probably by this time convinced that, if he desired to obtain any share of the New World, then being apportioned between his royal brothers of Spain and Portugal, he had no time to lose. By a bull of May 4, 1493, less than four years previously, Pope Alexander VI. had established the

dividing-line between the prospective possessions of the Spanish and Portuguese in that New World at one hundred leagues west of the Azores, running from pole to pole. By the treaty of Tordesillas, the next year, this imaginary line was shifted to a point three hundred and seventy leagues westward of the Cape Verde islands. East of that line of demarcation, Portugal was to have and to hold all she had found, and might in the future discover, while Spain was confirmed in equal privileges to the westward. This edict was to go into effect on June 20, 1494; but the bull confirming it was not issued until several years thereafter, or in 1506. This, however, did not matter to the kings of Spain and Portugal, for the sanction of the Holy Father was merely *pro forma*. They had already agreed to divide the world between them; but the pope's co-operation was such a shameless transaction that it aroused the wrath of other monarchs, notably that of the king of France, who at one time, when Spain had protested against his invasion of the southern seas, demanded indignantly to be shown the will of Father Adam, by which the two sovereigns were to be made sole heirs to the universe!

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Whether Henry protested is not certainly known; but at least he manifested a disregard of the tripartite compact, when he sent out his ships to explore. It will be noticed, however, that he was careful to stipulate that Cabot was to sail only to the seas and countries of the *East*, the *West*, and the *North*, which before that time were "unknown to all Christians." By thus instructing his captain, though he showed a tacit disregard of the papal bull of partition, he manifested a regard for the Spanish and Portuguese discoveries, all of which had been in the south.

King Henry's fears may have been aroused by the Spanish ambassador to the English court, Ruy Gonzales de Puebla, who was keenly watching the sovereign in the interests of King Ferdinand, whom he had evidently informed of Cabot's intended voyage, for under date of March 28, 1496, their "Catholic Majesties" wrote him:

"You write that a person like Columbus has come to England for the purpose of persuading the king into an undertaking similar to that of the Indies, without prejudice to Spain and Portugal. He is quite at liberty. But we believe that this under-

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taking was thrown in the way of the King of England by the King of France, with the premeditated intention of distracting him from his other business. Take care that the King of England be not deceived. The French will try hard to lead him into such undertakings; but they are very unpleasant, and must not be gone into at present. Besides, they cannot be executed *without prejudice to us and to the King of Portugal.*"

It was evidently intended that this letter, or the purport of it, should be communicated to King Henry; and that the wily ambassador, Puebla, found means for carrying out the intention, is hardly to be doubted. We shall see something of Puebla later; or, rather, we shall have opportunity to read some of his letters, by which it will be seen that he was ever alert, always watchful of his sovereign's interests, and better informed as to King Henry's intentions than any other man in the kingdom save the sovereign himself. It is to him, and to other foreigners then residing in London, as merchants and diplomatists, that we are solely indebted for contemporary information of John Cabot's voyage to North America.

## V

IN THE GOOD SHIP *MATHEW*

1497

ONE morning in May, 1497, a diminutive craft, the *Mathew*, sailed down the Bristol channel, on its way to the sea. It was commanded by the Venetian, Giovanni Caboto, since known to history as John Cabot, and he had with him only eighteen men. Whether his three sons, Sebastian, Lewis, and Santius, were with him, or whether they had remained at home with John's Venetian wife, as an ancient narration intimates, nobody to-day can tell. A single small vessel, hardly large enough to be called a "shippe," but more probably a caravel, or brigantine, comprised the "fleet of five" which, in the grandiloquent language of the letters patent, he was permitted to take, and eighteen Bristol sailors his crew. To these pitiful dimensions had his expedition shrunk, and as more than a year had

passed since the royal sanction had been obtained, it must be inferred that the public response to his appeal had not been enthusiastic.

But little more than four years had passed since the return of Columbus to Palos with the tidings of his great discovery, but the stolid Britons were evidently not greatly moved thereby, even if they were fully informed as to what the great discovery meant. These sailors of old Bristol knew only—if they knew aught, in truth, of what the voyage imported—that Christopher Columbus had sailed from Spain and the Canaries westerly, and kept on sailing, until he had revealed islands never seen by men of Europe before. This, they understood, was what their commander, Messer Caboto, intended to do, and as he had their sovereign's gracious permission to do so, and as they were to receive their wages, without doubt, and provend for the voyage, let it be long or short, they were content to keep on sailing into unknown waters, like their predecessors, the Northmen. Indeed, it is stated by some that Captain Caboto first laid his course for Iceland, home of the ancient Norsemen, between which and Bris-





ST. JOHN'S CHURCH, BRISTOL, SHOWING GATEWAY OF THE CITY—A LANDMARK CONTEMPORARY WITH CABOT'S RESIDENCE



tol there had been commercial intercourse for centuries, in order to put the crew in spirits for the voyage and get them accustomed to sailing out of sight of land. But it is more probable that Ireland was meant, from the southern extremity of which, after having obtained his "bearings," he sailed along a certain degree of latitude—after the manner of the navigators of his time—until he came to land. He probably followed along that parallel as directly as possible across the ocean, at the end making land in about the latitude of the port from which he originally sailed.

This, however, is somewhat conjectural, for, as already stated, no log-book was kept on the voyage (or if kept was not preserved), and no letters are in existence, or were ever found, from Cabot to any of his contemporaries. They "sailed happily," Sebastian Cabot said afterwards, referring to the voyage he took to America; but he is equally vague as to whether it was the first one or the second. Any voyage that is not tempestuous, or marred by accident, is likely to be referred to by a sailor as a happy one, so, it may well be believed, was this, which began the first week in May, and ended in

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the discovery of land on a transatlantic continent, June 24, 1497.

From the little that has been preserved relative to that voyage, it must have been one of the stupidest and least eventful, *per se*, of any that ever took place. Poor Captain Caboto had no congenial spirits aboard, or in company, as had his great prototype, Columbus, in Martin Alonzo Pinzon, Juan de la Cosa, and a score of others whose birth and education had fitted them for elevated society. In fact, the Spaniards of those days seem to have been far in advance of the insular Britons, whether we take cognizance of royalty, of the aristocracy, or of the commonalty.

Be that as it may—though this is not an entirely gratuitous reflection—Captain John Cabot, so far as we know, was in splendid isolation on board the *Mathew*—unless he had the companionship of his sons, which is doubtful. The only basis for an inference that they were with him is to be found in the fact that they are mentioned in the letters patent conjointly with himself. But this may have been owing to a fond parent's desire that they should share in his achievement, or at least benefit by the royal per-

mission, perchance he himself might die. They are not mentioned further in any reference to that first voyage, until long after it was accomplished, and then only one is named: Sebastian, the second son, who at that time was probably about twenty-three years of age. His two brothers disappear shortly after, and also (as we shall see in another chapter) his father, whom several biographers have endeavored to suppress entirely as a factor in the discovery, in order to bring forward more conspicuously the figure of Sebastian.

Of the event "which pre-empted North America for the English-speaking race, and probably settled for all time the question whether the Anglo-Saxon or the Spaniard should be the possessor of that continent"—the actual discovery and landing on the coast—no account was written at the time, or, if written, has been found. "No record has been left of what took place on board when the magic moment arrived and the vistas of the long-wished-for shores were revealed. As yet more and more of the littoral landscape gradually opened to their view, as the little vessel silently closed in the distance between her and the waters of

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the coast, as further developments of the natural scenery became more distinctly visible to their anxious eyes, we are only faintly able to conceive the impressions of the beholders, and words can only feebly translate their emotions.

“Were their dreams of the pleasant western lands satisfied by the realities which they saw before them? Little is told of what they did. They went ashore, and realized that the land was inhabited, from seeing certain snares which had been laid to catch animals. Not fear, but prudence, perhaps, caused their speedy return: a prudent desire to make known the discovery in Bristol. Whatever there was to be disclosed to view by an inland exploration was left for the future. But, by the irony of fate, generations were destined to elapse ere the importance of the discovery was fully comprehended, either in its substantial reality or its fruitful possibility. It was not realized until long afterwards that the planting of the flag of England upon that coast was the event from which should be evolved the whole future history of North America.”

While we have no authentic statement of the discovery by the chief participator

therein, still, there have been discovered by delvers in ancient archives, in times comparatively recent, letters from people who saw and conversed with Captain Cabot immediately after his return. Fortunately for the historian, there were, as already intimated, watchful foreigners in London, who, jealous of England's initiative, reported to their governments every movement made by the king and his navigators. One of these was a Venetian, Lorenzo Pasqualigo, who has the honor of having written (so far as we know) the first letter referring to John Cabot's voyage. Under date of August 23, 1497, he writes from London to his brothers in Venice, whose names were Alvise and Francesco, an interesting account of the discovery.

"Our Venetian," he says, "who went with a small ship from Bristol to find new islands, has come back, and reports he has discovered, seven hundred leagues off, the mainland of the country of the Gran Cam [Grand Khan, for whom, also, Columbus was ever searching], and that he coasted along it for three hundred leagues, and landed, but did not see any person. But he has brought here to the king certain snares spread to

take game, and a needle for making nets, and he found some notched trees, from which he judged that there were inhabitants. Being in doubt, he came back to the ship. He has been away three months on the voyage, which is certain, and, in returning, he saw two islands to the right; but he did not wish to land lest he should lose time, for he was in want of provisions. He says that the tides are slack, and do not make currents as they do here.

“The king has been much pleased. He has promised for another time ten armed ships, as he desires, and has given him all the prisoners, except such as are confined for high treason, to go with him, as he has requested; and has granted him money to amuse himself till then. Meanwhile, he is with his Venetian wife and his sons at Bristol. His name is Zuam Calbot: he is called the ‘admiral,’ high honor being paid him, and he goes dressed in silk. The English are ready to go with him, and so are our rascals. The discoverer of these things has planted a large cross in the ground, with a banner of England, and one of St. Mark, as he is a Venetian; so that our flag has been hoisted very far afield.”



Here is confirmatory evidence, of a high degree of credibility, that John Cabot did discover land in North America, which was about seven hundred leagues, or two thousand miles, distant from his port of departure. Another foreigner then in London, Raimondo di Soncino, envoy of the Duke of Milan, got the news about the same time, for a day later, or on August 24th, he writes from London: "Some months ago his Majesty [Henry VII.] sent out a Venetian, who is a very good mariner, and has much skill, and he has returned safe, and has found two very large and fertile islands; having likewise discovered the 'Seven Cities,' four hundred leagues from England, on the western passage. This next spring his Majesty means to send him back with fifteen or twenty vessels."

Nearly four months later, after the first furor had passed away, and the details of the voyage had been learned, Soncino writes to the duke (on December 18, 1497):

"Perhaps amidst so many occupations, your Excellency will not be unwilling to be informed how his Majesty [Henry VII.] has acquired a part of Asia [which it was supposed to be then, the intervening continent of America not having

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been dreamed of, even] without a stroke of his sword.

“In this kingdom there is a Venetian named Zoanne Caboto, of gentle breeding and great ability as a navigator, who, seeing that the most serene kings of Portugal and Spain had occupied unknown islands, meditated a similar acquisition for the said Majesty. Having obtained royal privileges securing to himself the use of the dominions he might discover, the sovereignty being reserved to the crown, he entrusted his fortune to a small vessel with a crew of eighteen persons, and set out from Bristol, a port in the western part of this kingdom. Having passed Ibernia [Ireland], which is still farther to the west, and then shaped a northerly course, he began to navigate the eastern part of the ocean. Leaving the north-star on the right hand, and having wandered thus for a long time, he at length hit upon land, where he planted the royal banner, took possession for his Highness, and having obtained various proofs of his discovery, he returned.

“The said Messer Zoanne, being a foreigner and poor, would not have been believed if the crew, who are nearly all Englishmen and from Bristol, had not testified that what he said was the truth. This Messer Zoanne has the description of the world on a chart, and also on a solid sphere which he has constructed, and on which he shows where he has been. And they say that the land is excellent, the climate temperate, suggesting that Brazil [wood] and silk grow there. They also affirm that the sea is full of fish, which are not only

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taken with a net, but also with a basket, a stone being fastened to it in order to make it sink in the water; and this I have heard stated by the said Messer Zoanne.

“The aforesaid Englishmen, his partners, say that they can bring so many fish that this kingdom will no longer have need of Iceland. But Messer Zoanne has set his mind on greater undertakings, for he thinks that, when that place has been occupied, he will keep on still farther towards the East, until he is opposite to an island called *Zipango*, situated in the equinoctial region, where he believes that all the spices of the world, as well as the jewels, are found. He further says that he was once at Mecca, whither the spices are brought by caravan from distant countries; and having inquired of those carrying them whence they were brought, and where they grow, they answered that they did not know, but that such merchandise was brought from remote countries by other caravans to their homes, and that the same information was repeated by those who brought the spices in turn to them.

“Thus he adduced this argument: that if the eastern people tell those in the south that these things come from a far distance from them, presupposing the rotundity of the earth, it must be that the last turn would be *by the north towards the west*; and it is said that the route would not cost more than it costs now, and I also believe it. And what is more, his Majesty, who is frugal and not prodigal, reposes such trust in him, because of what he has already achieved, that he gives

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him a good maintenance, as Messer Zoanne has himself told me. And it is said that before long his Majesty will arm some ships for him, and will give him all the malefactors to go to that country and form a colony, so that they hope to make of London a greater place for spices than Alexandria.

“The principal people in the enterprise belong to Bristol. They are great seamen, and now that they know where to go, they say that the voyage thither will not occupy more than fifteen days, after leaving Ibernia. I have also spoken with a Burgundian, who was a companion of Messer Zoanne, who affirms all this, and who wishes to return, because the admiral (for so Messer Zoanne is entitled) has given him an island. And he has given another to his barber, who is a Genoese, and they both look upon themselves as counts; nor do they look upon my lord the admiral as less than a prince! I also believe that some poor Italian friars are going on this voyage, who have all had bishoprics promised them; and if I had but made friends with the admiral when he was about to sail, I should have got an archbishopric at least; but I have thought that the benefits reserved for me by your Excellency will be more secure. . . . Your Excellency’s most humble servant,

“RAIMUNDUS.”

Thus we have positive proof, in these letters cited, first, that there was a voyage to America in the year 1497; second, that

## IN THE GOOD SHIP *MATHEW*

the ship in which it was made was commanded by John Cabot; and third, that his landfall was on our northeast coast, probably between Labrador and Nova Scotia.

## VI

### THE SECOND VOYAGE

1498

THE home-coming of Captain Cabota and his crew was a great event for ancient Bristol, and made the most of by the mariners; albeit the discovery was a barren one, so far as substantial reminders of the new region's products were concerned. No inhabitants had been seen, nor specimens of their handiwork, save a few paltry snares and needles, such as might have been made by men in the lowest stages of savagery. Yet both the king and Cabot seemed to be satisfied, for the miserly monarch took from his treasury the sum of ten pounds and gave it to "hym that founde the new Isle," with the injunction to go and amuse himself with it. This munificent gift, coming from one who has been styled the "most unscrupulous money-grabber" that ever sat a throne, made a deep impression upon the discoverer,

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and, some think, "went to his head," moving him to bestow islands upon his sailors, and indulge in reckless extravagances.

There is no direct evidence to show that King Henry made any large contribution towards the expenses of the voyage, either in fitting out the vessel or paying the seamen's wages. But his subjects were accustomed to his parsimony, for he had been squeezing them many years, increasing the store of gold in his treasury at their expense, in order, as he expressed it, that they should not be vain and proud on account of their wealth.

The king may have possessed the perspicacity to see that, even if the new country was barren, the seas contiguous, full of fish as they were, might prove a source of profit to the crown in the near future. Iceland and Norway, at that time, are said to have almost subsisted upon the trade they carried on with England in their fish, without which, indeed, they would have been reduced to sorry straits. By possessing a sea of his own, so abundantly stocked—according to the reports of the sailors—that vessels could hardly force their way through the water, King Henry would become independent of

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the northern nations and be able to supply others, perhaps, with a food product which his people then imported in immense amounts.

Some mighty impulse must have moved the penurious king (though his subsequent acts do not show that he appreciated the potentialities of the great discovery) for in December, 1497, he granted an annuity to John Cabot of twenty pounds sterling per annum. The document is dated December 13, 1497, in which this annuity is made incumbent upon the port charges of Bristol, and reads as follows:

“Henry, by the grace of God King of England and of France, and Lord of Ireland—to the most reverened father in God, John, Cardinal Archbishop of Canterbury, primate of all England and of the apostolic see legate, our chancellor, greeting: We late you wite that for certaine consideracions us specially mouing have giuen and granted vnto Welbiloued Iohn Calbot of the parties of Venice an anuitie or anuel rent of twenty pounds sterling.

To be had and yerely perceyued from the feast of the annunciation of our Lady last past [March 25, 1497] during our pleasur, of our custumes and subsidies comyng and



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growing in our poort of Bristowe, by the hands of our custums ther for the tyme beyng, at Michelmas and Easter, by even portions. Wherfor, we will and charge you that vnder our grete seal ye do make heruppon our lettres patent in good and effectuall forme.

“Giuen vnder our Pryue Seal at our Paloyes of Westminster, the xiiijth day of Decembre, the xiiijth yere of our Reigne.”

The popular superstition that the number thirteen is an unlucky one would seem to receive confirmation by the experience of Messrs Cabota in collecting his pension, authority for which was granted the “xiiijth of December, in the xiiijth year of our reign,” since he had such trouble in doing so that another warrant was issued, on February 22, 1498, on account of “the said Iohn Cabote, who is delaied of his payement.” It is doubtful if he received the full twenty pounds sterling, by the king’s document granted him; but that he was paid half the sum, or up to and inclusive of March 25, 1498, appears from the sworn report of the Bristol collectors for that year, in which, after giving the sum total of receipts, they add: . . . “£10 paid by them to Iohn Calbot, a Venetian, late of the said town of

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Bristol, for his annuity of £20 a year, granted to him by the said lord the king, by his letters patent, to be taken at two terms of the year, out of the customs and subsidies forthcoming and growing in the said port of the town of Bristol, . . . by an acquittance of the said Iohn, to be shown thereof upon this view, and remaining in possession of the said collectors.”

Messer Caboto obtained a portion of his pension, but it is believed that this payment was the last, for soon after he slipped out of sight, not only of the king, but of all men who ever knew him. He was determined to accomplish another voyage, and the month previous, or in February, 1498, in response to a petition similar to the first, King Henry issued the second letters patent in his favor. In it, as may be seen, no mention is made of Cabot's sons, nor allusion to the previous patent by which John, his sons, and their deputies were authorized to discover and explore.

*“To all Men to whom theis Presentis shall come  
send greeting:*

“Knowe ye that we of our Grace especiall, and for divers causes us mouing, We haue giuen and graunten and by theis Presentis giue and graunte,

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to our well-beloved Iohn Kabotto, Venician, sufficiente auctorite and power, that he, by hym his deputie or deputies sufficient, may take at his pleasure VI Englishshe shippes in any porte or portes, or other place within this our Realme of England, and if the said shippes be of the bourdeyn of CC tonnes or vnder, with their appareil requisite and necessarie for the safe conduct of the said shippes, and theym convey and lede to the Lande and Iles of late founde by the seid Iohn in oure name and by oure commandemente, paying for them and every of them as and if we should do in or for oure owen cause paye and noon otherwise.

“And that the seid Iohn by hym his deputie or deputies sufficiente maye take and receyve into the seid shippes and every of theyme all suche maisters, maryners, pages, and our subjects, as of theyr owen free wille woll go and passe with hym in the same shippes to the seid Lande or Iles withoute any impedymente, lett, or perturbatione of any of officeis or ministres or subjectes whatsoever they be by them to the seid subjectes or any of theyme passing with the seid Iohn in the seid shippes to the seid Lande or Iles to be doon or suffer to be doon or attempted. Yeving in commaundement to all and every our officers, ministres and subjectes seyng or heryng their our lettres patents, without anye ferther commaundement by vs to theym or any of theym to be gevyn, to perfourme and socour the seid Iohn, his deputie and all our seid subjectes to passynge with hym according to the tenour of this our lettres patentis. Any Statute, acte or

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ordenaunce to the contrarye made or to be made in any wise notwithstanding."

Is it at all strange that, with such a "patent" for exploration, obscure as to its meaning, and involved as to its phraseology—with such a paper only as their guide—the biographers of the Cabots should have been at odds as to the part taken by King Henry in this enterprise? Some have held that he generously granted all that his subject asked, furnished the ships, and paid all the bills; but others, having in mind the king's penuriousness, deny this. A great English historian has written of him: "Avarice was, on the whole, his ruling passion; and he remains an instance, almost singular, of a man placed in high station, and possessed of talents for great affairs, in whom passion predominated above ambition. . . . By all these arts of accumulation, joined to a rigid frugality in his expense, he so filled his coffers that he is said to have possessed in ready money the sum of one million eight hundred thousand pounds; a treasure almost incredible, if we consider the scarcity of money in those times."

"It may be well to recall here," says one

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of Cabot's biographers, Francesco Tarducci, "that when John Cabot had roused the whole people of England to enthusiasm by his discovery, and was generally believed to have opened to them a new era of incalculable wealth, King Henry, in token of the royal participation in the general rejoicing, and of his munificent recognition of so great an event, sent him a present of ten pounds sterling! What wonder is it that this miserly disposition, which on every grave occasion had often induced him to forget all regard for the majesty of his throne and his own personal decorum, should make him loath to draw out of his securely locked coffers the gold he had sought and guarded with such industry and care, to venture it on an uncertain undertaking like that which Cabot was preparing for? It must also be borne in mind that he was in constant necessity of money for combating external and internal enemies who kept him in trouble more or less during the whole of his long reign, and obliged him to incur fresh expenses at the very time when this expedition was fitting out.

"Henry VII., hesitating between the avarice and necessity which held him back, and

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

the advantage which urged him on, did as such characters usually do under such circumstances. He made a show of acting, and urging others, turned the merit of their movement in his favor, remaining meanwhile in the comfort of his own repose."

Whether the expenses were borne by King Henry VII., by the merchants of Bristol, or by Cabot himself, in whole or in part, it is beyond doubt that the voyage was made. It is thought that five ships sailed in company, two alone comprising the expedition proper, and three others furnished by Bristol merchants. Hakluyt says: "The king, vpon the third of February, in the 13th yeere of his reigne, gaue licence to Iohn Cabot to take five English ships in any hauen or hauens of the realme of England, being of the burden of 200 tunnes or vnder, with all necessary furniture, and to take, also, into said ships all such masters, mariners and subjects of the king as willingly will go with him."

From an ancient chronicle which, in Hakluyt's time, was "in the custodie of Mr. Iohn Stow, a diligent preseruer of antiquities" this reference to the voyage is found: "In the 13. yeere of K. Henry the 7. (by means of one Iohn Cabot, a Venetian, which



HENRY VII  
Picture in National Portrait Gallery





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made himself very expert and cunning in knowledge of the circuit of the world and Ilands of the same, as by a sea card and other demonstrations reasonable he shewed) the King caused to man and victuall a ship at Bristow, to search for an Iland which he said hee knew well was rich and replenished with great commodities: Which ship thus manned and victualled at the king's cost, diuers marchants of London ventured in her small stocks, being in her as chief patron the said Venetian. And in the company of said ship sailed also out of Bristow three or foure small ships fraught with sleight and grosse marchandizes, as course cloth, caps, laces, points, and other trifles. And so departed from Bristow in the beginning of May."

This account might appear to refer to the first, rather than to the second voyage, except for the statement that it took place in the thirteenth year of King Henry's reign, which coincided with the year 1498. But there are other witnesses yet to be summoned. One of them is the same Spaniard, Ruy Gonzales de Puebla, whom we have already quoted. On July 25, 1498, writing to the court of Spain, he says: "The King of England sent five armed ships, with *an-*

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*other Genoese like Columbus*, to search for the island of Brasil, and others near it. They were victualled for a year, and are expected back in September. By the direction they take, the land they seek must be the possession of your Highnesses. The King has sometimes spoken to me about it, and seems to take a very great interest in it. I believe that the distance from here is not 400 leagues.”

On the same date, in a long despatch to the court, Puebla's colleague, Don Pedro de Ayala, also ambassador from Spain, conveyed the following information respecting the sailing of Cabot's fleet:

“*July 25, 1498.*”

“I well believe that your Highnesses have heard how the King of England has equipped a fleet to discover certain islands and mainland that certain persons who set out last year for the same have testified to finding. I have seen the chart which the discoverer has drawn, who is another Genoese like Columbus, and has been in Seville and in Lisbon, seeking to find those who would help him in this enterprise. It is seven years since those of Bristol used to send out, every year, a fleet of two, three, or four caravels, to go and seek for the isle of Brasil and the seven cities, according to the fancy of this Genoese. The king determined to despatch an expedition, *because he had the cer-*

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*tainty that they had found land last year. The fleet consisted of five ships provisioned for one year. News has come that one, on board of which there was one friar Buil, has returned to Ireland in great distress, having been driven back by a great storm.*

“The Genoese, however, went on his course. I, having seen the course and distance he takes, think that the land they have found or seek is that which your Highnesses possess, for it is at the end of that which belongs to your Highnesses by the convention with Portugal. It is hoped that they will return by September. . . . The King has spoken to me about it several times, and I told him I thought they were the islands discovered by your Highnesses, and I even gave him a reason; but he would not hear of it. As I believe that your Highnesses now have intelligence of all, as well as the chart or mappemonde that this Genoese has made, I do not send it now, though I have it here; and to me it seems very false, to give out that they are not the said islands.”

This was a courtier's letter, as is apparent on the face of it, written with the intent of showing his sovereigns how very alert he was to detect any infraction of their rights and infringement of their territory. But, doubtless, the information was correct, for the ambassador was very near the king, at times, and, together with Puebla, used to dine with him quite frequently. The chart,

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however, which he says was made by Cabot and exhibited in proof of his voyage having been taken to an unknown country, has never been seen in modern times. Chart, log-book, and journals (if there were any), have disappeared, together with the maker of them, from whom nothing was ever heard after he sailed out of Bristol harbor, at the commencement of his second voyage, in 1498.

## VII

### THAT "FIRST-SEEN" LAND

1497-1498

THE land discovered by the Cabots (assuming father and son to have sailed together, on one voyage or the other) is, and has been for nearly four hundred years, as dim and shadowy as their own personalities. In attempting to fix the position, even approximately, of the "Prima Vista," or land "First Seene," we shall be obliged to grope our way carefully, as the first voyagers sailed along the mist-hidden coasts of the newly discovered country. We, too, must sail through mists—of misinformation, feel our way through fogs, and beware lest we strike upon some rock—of prejudice.

Honestly desirous as we are of ascertaining the truth, we can hardly claim to have determined more than this: That a voyage was made in 1497, which may have been followed by another in 1498; that the vessel

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in which it was made was commanded by one John Cabot, a Venetian; that a safe return was accomplished, and a vague report rendered which, in its barrenness of detail, would have been considered discreditable, at the present day, to the most ignorant sailor that ever ploughed the main. A second voyage was projected and actually begun; but whither, or what became of the vessels engaged, their crews and commander, remains a mystery yet unsolved. "From the date of the sailing of that expedition, down to the present time," says one patient investigator, "the fate of John Cabot and his coadventurers has been enshrouded in mystery. Even his name does not appear as the discoverer of North America until quite a late period. It is true that it is found associated with that of his son Sebastian in connection with that discovery; but the accounts in the various historical works have merely served the purpose of glorifying the memory of the son. John Cabot had a narrow escape from complete suppression. It was the fortunate preservation of the Milanese, Spanish, and Venetian correspondence [already cited] which has given a firm basis to his reputation."

If the sturdy navigator, John Cabot,

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neglected to prepare a written report of his voyage, with chart or map, he fully deserves the immersion he received into the deeps of oblivion; but it is believed, by those who were good enough to rescue him, that he was more thoughtful of posterity than on the surface appears. Doubtless there were papers prepared; and as to a chart, we have the testimony of the Spanish ambassador, Don Pedro de Ayala, that one was not only seen by him, but in his possession. So, probably, there were copies made; and that at least one was sent to Spain we have good reason for assuming. Our reason is this: that in the year 1500 Juan de la Cosa, that gallant mariner who sailed with Columbus on his first voyage, in 1492 (for he owned the flag-ship, the *Santa Maria*, and was the foremost pilot of his day), made a chart, on which the discoveries of the Cabots were depicted. This is the proper word—depicted—for it was a gorgeous map, resplendent in colors of the rainbow and spangled with gold. On this map, which was drawn on an ox-hide (and may be seen in the naval museum at Madrid, for which it was bought at a cost of one thousand dollars), the discoveries of Spain were represented by the banner of Castile,

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and those of *Inglaterra*, or England, by the flag of St. George. Honest La Cosa was accurate, so far as he went, and although it must have been a distasteful task, to set down a discovery by Englishmen on the coast of a country claimed (by right of the *Tordesillas* treaty) for his royal master and mistress, King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, yet he faithfully performed it. He was rather vague, as the cartographers of his time were prone to be, and his map would hardly answer as a sailing-chart for the coast of North America. But there is the evidence: *Cavo de Ynglaterra*, or "England's Cape," somewhere in the latitude of southern Newfoundland, with four English flags adorning the coast, half-way from that point to Florida.

The Florida of the fifteenth century was a vaster region than it is to-day, extending up the Atlantic coast indefinitely, and away westward as far as the imagination could wander; so it was very strange that La Cosa should have conceded to England title to a country based on hearsay. He probably had some secret source of information, and perhaps the Spanish ambassadors in London furnished it.



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As to the English records: it would appear that the second voyage was a bitter disappointment, almost as barren in results as the first; but many years after, when Sebastian Cabot could view it in perspective, it blossomed into a wonderful thing indeed. Sebastian, son of John, was then pilot-major of Spain, with a large salary from the Spanish crown, and enjoying a life of comparative ease and luxury in Seville. He was a frequent visitor at the house of the famous Peter Martyr, none other than the great historiographer of Spain—his intimate friend, in fact—and to him he told the story. He told it in English or Spanish, but it was "written in the Latin tounge by Peter Martyr of Angleria, and translated into English by Richard Eden, Anno 1555." Sebastian Cabot was then living, and in England, so that if there were errors in the original narrative he may be supposed to have seen them, as Eden was his friend also.

According to the sixth chapter of Martyr's *Decades of the New World*, as rendered into English by Eden: "These North Seas haue bene searched by one Sebastian Cabot, a Venetian borne, whom being yet but in a maner an infant, his parents carried with

them into England, hauing occasion to resort thither for trade of marchandise, as is the maner of the Venetians to leaue no part of the world unsearched to obtaine riches.

“Hee therefore furnished two ships in England, at his owne charge, and first with three hundred men directed his course so farre to the North Pole that, euen in the moneth of Iuly, he found monstrous heapes of ice swimming on the sea, and in a maner continuall daylight, yet saw hee the land in that tract free from ice, which had bene molten by the heat of the sunne. Thus seeing such heapes of ice before him, hee was forced to turne his sailes and follow the West, so coasting still by the shore that hee was thereby brought so farre into the South, by reason of the land bending so much that way, that it was there almost equal in latitude with the sea cauled *Fretum Herculeum* [Straits of Gibraltar], hauing the North Pole eleuate in maner in the same degree. He sayled lykewise in this tracte so farre towards the West, that hee had the island of Cuba on his left hand, in maner in the same degree of longitude.

“As he traueyled by the coastes of this great land (which hee named *Baccalaos*), he saith that hee found the like course of the wa-

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ters towards the West, but the same to runne more softly and gently than the swift waters which the Spanyardes-found in their nauigations southeward. Wherefore, it is not onely more like to be trewe, but ought also of necessitie to be concluded, that betweene both the lands hitherto vnknown, there should bee certaine great open places whereby the waters should thus continually passe from the Easte vnto the West: which waters I suppose to bee druyen about the globe of the earth by the uncessant mouing and impulsion of the heauens, and not to bee swallowed vp and cast vp againe by the breatheing of Demogorgon—as some haue imagined, bycause they see the seas by increase and decrease to flowe and reflowe.

“Sebastian Cabot himselfe named those lands *Baccalaos* [lands of codfish], bycause that in the seas thereabout hee found so great a multitude of certaine bigge fysshes, much lyke vnto tunies (which the inhabitants called *baccalaos*), that they sometymes stayed his shippes. He found also the people of those regions couered with beastes skinnes; yet not without the use of reason [on account of the cold]. Hee also sayth there is great plentie of Beares in those regions, which vse

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to eat fysshe: for, plungeing themselues in ye water, where they perceiue a multitude of these fysshes to lye, they fasten theyr clawes in theyr scales, and so drawe them to lande and eat them; so that (as he saith) the Beares beinge thus satisfied with fysshe, are not noysom to man. Hee declareth further, that in many places of these regions hee saw great plentie of copper among the inhabitants.

“Cabot is my very friend, whom I vse familiarly, and delight to haue him in my owne house. For, being called out of England, by the commaundement of the Catholique King of Castile, after the death of King Henry the seuenth of that name, King of England, he was made one of our council and assistants, as touching the affaires of the new Indies; looking for shippes dayly to be furnished for him to discover this hid secret of Nature.”

A more concise narration, but probably quoted from Martyr also, is that of Gomara, given in his *History of the Indies*, who says: “He which brought the most certaine news of the countrey & people of *Baccalaos* was Sebastian Cabote, a Venetian, which rigged vp two shippes at the cost of K. Henry the VII.

## THAT "FIRST-SEEN" LAND

of England, hauing great desire to traffique for the spices, as the Portingals did. He carried with him three hundred men, and tooke the way towards Island [Iceland?] from beyond the Cape of Labrador, vntill he found himselfe in fifty-eight degrees and better. He made relation that in the moneth of Iuly it was so cold and the ice was so great, thet he durst not passe any further: that the days were very long, in a maner without any night, and for that short night that they had, it was very cleare. Cabot, feeling the cold, turned towards the West, refreshing himselfe at Baccalaos; and afterwards he sayled along the coast vnto thirty-eight degrees, and from thence he shaped his course to returne into England."

Before concluding these Cabotian chronicles in old English of the black-letter period, in all fairness to the subject of them should be mentioned the "three Sauages, which Cabot brought home and presented vnto the king, in the 14th yeere of his reigne, as followeth:

"This yeere also were brought vnto the king three men taken in the Newfound Island that before I spake of: These were clothed in beasts' skins & did eat raw flesh, and spake

such speach that no man could vnderstand them, and in their demeanour like to brute beastes, whom the king kept a time after. Of the which vpon two yeeres after, I saw these two appaierled after the maner of Englishmen, in Westminster pallace, which that time I could not discerne from Englishmen, til I was learned what they were; but as for speach, I heard none of them vtter one word."

It will be remembered that Sebastian Cabot, in the relation to the pope's legate, stated that he sailed as far north as the fifty-sixth degree; thus there is a discrepancy of eleven degrees in the two narratives. This may mean either that his hearers misunderstood him, or else his memory was at fault. These two voyages, indeed, have been most unaccountably mingled, as witness the following, "taken out of the map of Sebastian Cabot, concerning his discouery of the West Indies [which he did not discover], which is to be seene in her Maiesties priue gallerie at Westminster, and in many other ancient marchants' houses.

"In the yeere of our Lord 1497 Iohn Cabot, a Venetian, and his sonne Sebastian [as already quoted, page 99] discovered that land

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which no man before that time had attempted. . . . The inhabitants of this island vse to weare beastes skinnes and haue them in great estimation, as we haue our finest garments. In their warres they vse bowes, arrowes, pikes, darts, wooden clubbes and slings. The soile is barren in some places, & yeeldeth little fruit; but it is full of white Beares, and stagges farre greater than ours. It yeeldeth plenty of fysshe, and those very great, as seales, and those which commonly we call salmons; there are also soles aboue a yard in length; but especially there is great abundance of that kind of fysshe which the Sauages call *baccalaos*. In the same island also there breed haukes, but they are so blacke that they are very like to rauens, as also their partridges, and egles, which are in like sort blacke."

Now we will revert to the question with which this chapter opened: Where was, or where is, that *Prima Vista*, so named by John Cabot, or the "First-seen" Land, of his voyage in 1497? The Scottish historian, Robertson, who may be said to reflect, in his *History of America*, the opinions of the time in which he wrote, has this anent the discoverer and his discovery: "As in that age

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the most eminent navigators, formed by the instructions of Columbus, or animated by his example, were guided by his superior knowledge and experience, Cabot had adopted the system of that great man, concerning the probability of opening a new and shorter passage to the East Indies, by holding a western course. The opinion which Columbus had formed with respect to the islands he had discovered was universally received. They were supposed to lie contiguous to the great continent of India, and to constitute a part of the vast countries comprehended under that general name. Cabot accordingly deemed it probable that, by steering to the northwest, he might reach India by a shorter course than that which Columbus had taken, and hoped to fall in with the coast of Cathay, or China, of whose fertility and opulence the descriptions of Marco Polo had excited high ideas.

“After sailing for some weeks due west, and nearly on the parallel of the port from which he took his departure, he discovered a large island, which he called *Prima Vista*, and his sailors *Newfoundland*; and in a few days he descried a smaller isle, to which he gave the name of St. John. He landed on



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both these, made some observations on their soil and productions, and brought off three of the natives. Continuing his course westward, he soon reached the continent of North America, and sailed along it from the fifty-sixth to the thirty-eighth degree of [north] latitude, or from the coast of Labrador to that of Virginia. As his chief object was to discover some inlet that might open a passage to the west, it does not appear that he landed anywhere during this extensive run; and he returned to England, without attempting either settlement or conquest in any part of that continent."

In this account, as the reader cannot fail to remark, the eighteenth century historian has combined the two voyages, of 1497 and 1498, and accepted without question the narrative in Peter Martyr's *Decades*, as given in Eden's translation, and later by Hakluyt. Since his time several notable discoveries have been made of valuable manuscripts, chiefly in the archives of Spain, Venice, and Milan, which have enabled discerning historians to differentiate the two voyages, and separate the achievements of the Cabots, father and son. We have already perused these documents, as transcribed and trans-

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lated by indefatigable students, and have also read the various state papers relating to the inception and equipping of the expeditions.

Still, with all the illuminating data afforded by these various papers, it must be admitted that the landfall of John Cabot, in his first voyage of 1497, has not been exactly determined. On the planisphere ascribed to Sebastian Cabot, bearing date 1544, the *Prima Vista* is indicated as nearly as can be at the island of Cape Breton; but the Canadian board appointed in 1895 to investigate this matter in its relation to the then forthcoming commemoration of 1897, made this report: "While the committee are of opinion that the greatly preponderating weight of evidence points to the easternmost cape of Cape Breton as the landfall of John Cabot, in 1497, they would observe that the commemoration now proposed will not commit the Royal Society of Canada, as a whole, to the definite acceptance of that theory."

On the other hand, an eminent Canadian, Dr. S. E. Dawson, who has exhaustively investigated the subject, leans towards the *Cavo (or Cabo) Descubierta* (the "Discovered

Cape") on La Cosa's map of 1500, as representing the landfall, or first land seen. "There was," he says, "no other meaning to the name than the 'discovered cape'; and as this map of La Cosa's was, beyond reasonable doubt, based on John Cabot's own map, which Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish ambassador, had from him, and promised, in July, 1498, to send to King Ferdinand, we have here John Cabot indicating his own landfall in a Spanish translation."

Further, he says: "The *Cabo de Ynglaterra* [on the La Cosa map] cannot be taken for any other than that characteristic headland of northeast America, which for almost [quite] four hundred years has appeared on the maps under one name in the various forms of Cape Raz, Rase, Razzo, or Race—a name derived from the Latin *rasus*, smooth, shaven, or flat."

The citation above shows how easily one may be led astray by a false or imperfect premise, for, in the first place, the learned author assumes that La Cosa actually did see and use John Cabot's map—which has never been proved; and in the second, that the delineation is cartographically accurate—which is far from the truth.

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

To the writer it seems, after scanning the La Cosa map, that, while *Cabo Descubierta* may possibly represent the landfall, and also be identical with Cape Race, *Cabo Ynglaterra*, which is set down much farther north, may stand for the northern limit of English voyaging at that time. As to the landfall of the second voyage, there is little, if any, doubt that it was somewhere on the coast of Labrador. Neither landfall is a matter of great import, so long as it can be shown that there was one on a June day in 1497, which fact gave John Cabot priority over Christopher Columbus, in his discovery of the continent, by nearly a year!

## VIII

### JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

1498

WHILE it has been established, we think beyond doubt, that John Cabot discovered North America, it is not known, and probably never will be known, who discovered John Cabot! He was doubtless an entity; for some while he figured as a personage of distinction; but as to his origin and his ending little, if anything, is absolutely known. Out of obscurity he emerged, into obscurity he vanished, and no one can tell whence he came or whither he went. He is one of the most unsatisfactory personages that history has had to deal with, as to his antecedents not only, but his origin. He seems not to have had any ancestors, nor even, so far as we are informed, any parents or other relatives, near or distant—at least, there is no record of such connections.

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Even his contemporaries were in doubt whether he was a Genoese or a Venetian. The Spanish ambassadors in London (to whom we have referred in previous pages), Don Ruy Gonzales de Puebla and Don Pedro de Ayala, allude to him as "another Genoese like Columbus"; but they may have been speaking generally of any native of the Italian states, without giving thought to one in particular. Ayala's letter to King Ferdinand, in which this allusion occurs, was a duplicate of his colleague's, so there is but one authority for this expression—"another Genoese like Columbus." It was copied, however, by historians of a later period, and thus became fixed in the minds of those who gave this subject any thought whatever—and they were very few.

What mattered it, anyway, whether he were Genoese or Venetian, so long as he sailed in English ships and made his discovery beneath the British flag? It was no concern of his contemporaries, save a few, who would fain claim him as their countryman, and thus add to the glory of their nation. Animated by this purpose, doubtless, Lorenzo Pasqualigo wrote (as we have already noted): "This Venetian of ours is

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returned, . . . and has planted on the lands he discovered a great cross, with an English standard, and one of St. Mark, he being a *Venetian*; so that our ensign has been carried far."

Pasqualigo was a Venetian merchant then residing in London, or Bristol, and was writing to his brothers at home; but in the official letter sent by Raimondo Soncino to the Duke of Milan, "Zoanne Caboto" is also alluded to as a "popular Venetian," upon whom the king and the people were lavishing applause as discoverer of new islands. In the petitions, also, made to King Henry VII., Cabot calls himself a citizen of Venice, as he is likewise styled in the letters patent issued in consonance with those requests. The only evidence entitled to confidence seems to be in favor of his being a Venetian, for it comes from the same foreigners residing in England at the time of his discovery to whom we are indebted for the only information on that subject. English records of the event are non-existent (according to the best-informed writers), and, says one of them: "The English chroniclers of the first half of the sixteenth century never mention the name of Cabot, as neither, for that

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matter, do they mention the name of Christopher Columbus or Amerigo Vespucci!" Not until more than half a century after John Cabot had passed away was any mention made in print, by Englishmen, of his voyages, and then Sebastian seems to have obtained the credit for them. This may have been on account of his long residence in England, as well as his reputation as a maker of charts and one-time chief-pilot of Spain. In the *Epitome of Chronicles*, published in 1559, Sebastian is mentioned as "an Englishman born in Bristow, but a Genoways sonne."

Allusion has been made already to an English "preserver of antiquities," one John Stow, from whom the diligent Hakluyt quoted, in his *Divers Voyages touching the Discoverie of America*: "This yeere [1498] the King, by meanes of a Venitian, caused to man and victuall a shippe," etc. Twenty years later, Hakluyt amended the quotation to read: "By meanes of one Iohn Caboto, Venetian"; but it is averred that in Stow's original it was "One Sebastian Gavoto, a Genoa's sonne, borne in Bristow." The several discrepancies might seem inexplicable, if we did not know that the erudite



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Hakluyt was a student, and the antiquary, Stow, a man of little education, who had a mania for collecting, but no critical acumen. Hakluyt, with his full knowledge of historical events, gained by perusal of all that had up to his time been written and published, in English, Latin, and Spanish, simply changed Stow's reference from "Genoa's" to Venetian, in accordance with the facts as he had ascertained them.

Antiquary Stow was a self-made scholar, who, though born to poverty and early apprenticed to a tailor, wrought a reputation for himself that has survived to the present time. He was, as described by Hakluyt, a diligent preserver of antiquities, and to his self-sacrificing industry is due the conserving of many invaluable facts of history. He lived to the age of eighty, and when his years were half told, or at forty, he abandoned his tailoring and devoted himself to the collecting of old documents. He was so poor that he had to travel on foot, in this manner taking long journeys, searching out material in monasteries and libraries that had long been neglected, copying such papers as he could not beg or borrow, comparing and annotating, until his collection

became truly invaluable. He gave himself so unreservedly to his self-imposed task, that when at last incapacitated from old age, at the age of eighty, he was obliged to crave of the king permission to wear the garb of a beggar, and ask for alms at doors of churches. He was not subjected to this ignominy long, however, for a few months later he died—died a beggar—this man who had rescued from oblivion inestimable treasures of English history! Although an indefatigable collector, poor Stow had not the means for deciding points of controversy, nor the faculty of perception, perhaps, that would lead him to discriminate between the elder Cabot and his son; and as the latter was his contemporary, whom, indeed, he may have met and held converse with, he received the honors rightfully belonging to his father.

We may say, in the language of another: "There are no authentic proofs extant, so far as can be ascertained at present, as to John Cabot's birthplace." Like that of his great rival and immediate predecessor in discovery, Christopher Columbus, it is involved in doubt. But, as to his having been a citizen of Venice, there is abundant proof. On March 28, 1476, according to an entry

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in the Venetian archives, the Senate conferred upon John Caboto the privilege of citizenship, "within and without," in consequence of a residence of fifteen years. In explanation of these terms, "within and without"—*de intus* and *de extra*—it may be said that they relate to privileges within and without the dominions of the republic. A citizen *de extra* was entitled to all the privileges which the commercial rights of Venice in foreign lands conveyed. This included the privilege of sailing under the flag of St. Mark, and hence we have found John Cabot raising it beside that of England, his adoptive country, on the occasion of the first discovery. At least, it was claimed that he did so, and, if true, this act would signify that he still held his native land in tender remembrance.

When John Cabot lived in Venice, her illustrious voyagers, such as Marco Polo and the Zeno brothers, were still revered, and the republic had not entirely lost its prestige on land and sea. It was a centre of commerce; its sails whitened the Mediterranean; its commercial caravans traversed the deserts to and from the Orient; and we have evidence that Cabot himself was, at least once,

in Mecca. There he became inspired with the desire, after conversing with the Eastern merchants, to find a new route to the land "where the spices grew." His famous countryman, Marco Polo, had shown Europe the way to the Orient by an eastern route, or, rather, the way to Cathay and the farther East; but John fell to speculating upon the possibilities of reaching that region by way of the *west*. Whether he thought of this before Columbus or after is not known; nor are we positively informed if he had full knowledge of the Columbian voyage to America.

It was not long after Columbus became confirmed in his belief that the voyage he had in mind would be feasible that John Cabot left Venice for England. The last previous information of this extremely vague individual pertained to his combined sea and caravan journey to Arabia, whence, with great facility, he sped to England, the farthest west of countries then in communication with Venice. How he went, and why he went, we know not. He probably went by sea, and, according to his son Sebastian, writing long after, he was then a merchant adventurer. This seems probable, in view

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of his journey to Arabia, for in his time there was no travelling for pleasure, and one must have been a soldier, a sailor, or a trader who ventured far from native home and land. Cabot was without doubt a sailor, and he may have done a little "marchandising" on his own account, in view of which his voyage to the British isles seems reasonable.

Foreign adventurers were flocking to various countries, some of them aimlessly, some with commercial prospects in view, and they chiefly wandered from the East towards the West. At first it was Genoa that attracted the floating population of Europe, then Venice, then Portugal, then Spain, and last of all England, depending upon which state or nation was foremost in exploration or navigation. England had not then attained to an advanced position, but its commerce was becoming valuable, and there was a resident foreign population of considerable strength.

"Every year," writes a Venetian author, "as soon as spring brought back the favorable season, an immense caravan of ships and merchants, partly on state and partly on private account, sailed from Venice to spread

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over the east and the west, and everywhere they found their own consuls, privileges, and warehouses, even in Siam and Cambodia. On their arrival they found the wares and products of other peoples and other lands ready and waiting to be embarked on the ships of the Venetians, with and by them to be distributed among the nations. Thus the commerce of every people passed through the hands of Venice; she furnished all the markets; to her flowed in the wealth of all nations. . . .

“ There was in England a flourishing colony [of Venetians] governed in a republican form by its own consuls and a council of merchants, among whom were many patricians of great houses; whence it often happens that in reading Venetian documents we find patricians designated ‘as of London.’ The loading of ships was done at the city of Bristol, then the first port of the island. In this city we again find John Cabot, not as a mere commercial navigator, presented to history, but as the discoverer of new countries. He had settled in England, as his son relates, bringing all his family with him from Venice. In what year this was is unknown, but from some dates in the life of his son

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Sebastian it may be settled that it was about 1477.”<sup>1</sup>

We have no description of the outward man John Cabot, nor testimony as to his character, except of a negative kind. It certainly speaks well for the Venetian mariner that no ill-word was said of him, and that everybody rejoiced at his good-fortune when he sailed into Bristol harbor with the news of discovery. His generosity may be inferred from the gifts he made of newly discovered isles to his companions; though, of course, it may be objected that these islands cost him nothing, and that there is no evidence that the sailors ever took possession—unless they were among the “three hundred” who sailed on the second voyage, in 1498. This expedition left Bristol in the spring of 1498, and, by the latest documentary mention of it, had not returned the succeeding October. So far as the world knows (from official sources) it never returned, with John Cabot in command. “As for John Cabot,” says an authority, “Sebastian said he died, which is *one of the few undisputed facts in the discussion*”; but whether he died

<sup>1</sup> *John and Sebastian Cabot*, by F. Tarducci, translated by H. F. Browning. Detroit, 1893.

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on land or at sea, and where his remains were buried, no man knows.

That the son succeeded to the father in command has been generally accepted as the truth; but why he should have been chosen in preference to his brothers, Lewis or Santius, one of whom was his senior, has never been explained. The father and two of the sons drop out of sight immediately after the sailing of the second expedition, and only Sebastian remains to represent the family. Also his mother, who at one time was reported as living with his father at Bristol, disappears, without leaving a trace of her existence, except that, long years after, Sebastian filed a claim with the Venetian Council of Ten for some property once in her possession.

Respecting the birthplace of Sebastian, as well as that of his father, there is a variety of conflicting testimony. According to Richard Eden (to whom reference has been made in previous chapters), he was born an Englishman, for he wrote, in his translation of the *Decades of Peter Martyr*, as a marginal note: "Sebastian Cabote tould me that he was borne in Bristowe [Bristol], and that at III yeare ould he was carried with his father



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to Venice, and so returned agayne into England with his father after certayne yeares, whereby he was thought to have been borne in Venice."

Peter Martyr himself says that Sebastian Cabot was by birth a Venetian, but taken to England by his parents while scarcely more than an infant; so here is a question of veracity for those who came after these two historians to settle. Shall we believe Eden, who claims England as Sebastian's birth-place, or Peter Martyr, who gives the honor to Venice? As for Sebastian himself, he is said to have told the Venetian ambassador, Gaspare Contarini, who held a conversation with him in 1522, that he was not English born. "Sir Ambassador," he was reported by the Venetian to have said, "to tell you the whole truth, I was born in Venice, but brought up in England."

These are the witnesses who testify that they had the information from Sebastian's own lips: one an Englishman of undoubted veracity; another, Peter Martyr, Italian born, but then living in Spain, where he held a high position under the government, and equally to be credited; the third an ambassador, who was writing to the Council of Ten, on Sebas-

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tian's account, and who, presumably, would scorn to tell a lie. That somebody told one is quite evident, and others repeated it for many years thereafter. Those who state that Sebastian Cabot was born in Venice are Bacon, Martyr, Contarini, Gomara, and Ramusio; those who held that he was born in England are Eden, Stow, Hakluyt, and Herrera; all men of reputation. Those who professed to have had the statement from his own lips, however, are but three in number—Martyr, Eden, and Contarini.

When Sebastian Cabot gave the information respecting his birthplace to Martyr, he was a guest in the latter's house, or at least a frequent visitor. The historian was preparing his great life-work and glad enough to get such interesting information as Cabot could give, at first hand. That he did not possess full knowledge respecting the Cabotian voyage is shown by the fact that he knew of, or at least mentions, only one voyage, and that voyage, Sebastian told him, was made by himself. No mention is made of his father; but the real discoverer, as represented to Peter Martyr, the historiographer, is Sebastian Cabot, his informant. We know this to be an untruth, for we know that

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John Cabot was the "organizer, equipper, and leader" of both voyages. Hence arises the query: If Sebastian Cabot was capable of suppressing the truth respecting his father's acts, and not only of refraining from enlightening the historian as to John Cabot's great discovery, but of putting himself in his place, would he hesitate to convey misinformation regarding his birthplace?

This might seem a simple matter to him, and were he an unknown individual it would not matter to what country he belonged. When he told Martyr and the ambassador he was a Venetian, he was conversing with men who desired to believe that he was, on account of the lustre his name and deeds would reflect upon their country—for both were Italians. Moreover, he had every reason for establishing his nativity at Venice, because at that time he was in negotiation with the Council respecting a matter which will be alluded to further on. It appears, indeed, that when with Englishmen he gave out that he was born in Bristol; when with Venetians, that his native place was Venice. He had his own reasons, at the time, as he may have thought himself justified in claiming the discovery his father really made; but

the verdict of impartial history has been in favor of the father rather than of the son.

“The son had a gift of reticence concerning others, including his father and brothers, which in these latter days has been the cause of much wearisome research to scholars,” writes Dr. Dawson. “During the whole of the first voyage John Cabot was the commander; on the second he sailed in command; but who brought the expedition home, and when it returned, are not recorded. It is not known how or when John Cabot died, and although the letters patent for the second voyage were addressed to him alone, his son Sebastian during forty-five years took the whole credit, in every subsequent mention, of the discovery of America. This antithesis may throw light upon the suppression of his father’s name in all the statements attributed to, or made by, Sebastian Cabot.

“He was marvellously reticent about his father. The only mention which occurs is on the map seen by Hakluyt, and on one supposed, somewhat rashly, to be a transcript of it. There the discovery is attributed to John Cabot and to Sebastian his son, and that has reference to the first voyage. . . . He never once alluded to his two brothers,

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who were associated in the first patent, and the preceding slight notice of his father is all that can be traced to him; although contemporary records of unquestionable authority indicate John Cabot as the moving spirit, and do not mention the son."

"If," says Tarducci, "the expedition of 1498 was led by the son, it was still unquestionably prepared, set forward, and for a time conducted by the father. Not then in the second rank—still less lower—is the place that belongs to John Cabot in the glorious phalanx of discoverers; but he must be hailed among the highest, very near the supreme chief that led them all—Christopher Columbus!"

## IX

### SOME FACTS ABOUT SEBASTIAN

1512

THE first thirty-five or forty years of Sebastian Cabot's life constitute a period of obscurity scarce irradiated by a gleam of light from contemporary sources. The same cannot be said of the latter part of his father's life, for we have the evidence of several undoubted authorities that he was not only in existence, but accomplished voyages between Bristol and distant lands. This we should not forget: That all the evidence of Sebastian's alleged voyages in the fifteenth century is *ex post facto*, unsustained by a single authoritative statement made at the time, so far as we can learn.

How can we explain this hiatus in his life-history, except by the assumption that he was so obscure that his deeds were not considered worthy of mention? Together with his two brothers, Lewis and Santius, he is

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mentioned in the letters patent of 1496; then the three disappear utterly for nearly a score of years, when Sebastian alone emerges, and declares himself the chief factor in the great discovery. Even his father is relegated to comparative obscurity, while the fame of the second son, Sebastian, like the smoke-cloud from the Afrite's jar, mounts to the skies and overspreads the earth.

“So far as we have proceeded with the narrative,” says Mr. G. E. Weare, “the name of Sebastian Cabot appears only in the first grant of letters patent, in common with those of his two brothers. It may be desirable to repeat here, that if we are to assume that Sebastian sailed with his father in 1497, simply because his name appears in the letters patent, then we must assume that all three sons were with their father in the voyage made by him in the *Mathew*. And if the presence of their names in the letters patent is to be accepted as evidence of their presence in the first voyage, then, by parity of reasoning, the absence of the names in the second letters patent must be equally conclusive of their absence in the second expedition. But surely, so far as the evidence goes, the presence or absence of any of the sons must be treated as pure conjecture.”

And yet, writing upon the mere assumption that the second son took the place of his father in the second voyage, the author of still another *Life of Sebastian Cabot*, Mr. Hayward, says: "Shortly after the date of this patent, John Cabot died, and Sebastian determined to prosecute alone the voyage, of which he had ever, in reality, the direction. Aside from his adventurous spirit, the heavy expenses of the first voyage had been requited only by his claims in the new country. Neither was he ready to relinquish what he had so hardly won, now that public favor was on his side. What the royal interest was in this second expedition it is impossible to state; it extended, however, to one or two ships and a considerable amount of funds. . . . But for the grossest neglect, we might have learned the particulars of these memorable voyages from Cabot himself. A series of his papers, with suitable maps, descriptive of these adventures, was left nearly ready for publication. Carelessness, however, suffered them to be mislaid, and now time has hidden them forever. How delightful as well as remarkable was the modesty which made no boast of such achievements; committing merit to the keeping of



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a few hasty manuscripts and the gratitude of posterity; that gratitude which has suffered such a man to be forgotten, because he forbore to proclaim his own praises!"

Had the foregoing been written of the father, instead of the son, it might be considered peculiarly applicable; but the evidence goes to show that Sebastian Cabot has not suffered "because he forbore to proclaim his own praises"—that is, he has not suffered for lack of appreciation. On the contrary, he neglected no opportunity to trumpet forth his deeds, when, years after, he found himself far distant from the lands in which they were alleged to have happened, and all, or nearly all, those said to have been concerned with him had passed away.

The first, or foundation account, as it may be called, of the ascription of Sebastian Cabot as the discoverer of North America was that by Peter Martyr (Pietro Martire d'Anghiera), author of the great historical work, *De Orbe Novo*. He was born in Milan in 1455, and died in Granada, Spain, 1526. Ten or eleven years previous to his death, in 1515 or 1516, Sebastian Cabot was in his house as a guest, and from his own lips,

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probably, he obtained the account to which reference has already been made: "These north seas have been searched by one Sebastian Cabot, a Venetian born," etc. The account was substantially repeated by Antonio Galvao, in 1550, and by Gomara, in his *Historia General de las Indias*, published in 1552. It was translated into English (as we have seen) by Eden, in 1555, and used by Hakluyt in both editions of his *Principall Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation*—1589, 1598.

Peter Martyr appears to have given credence to Sebastian's story; but he also records (as by his allegiance to the Spanish sovereigns he was bound to do): "Some of the Spaniards deny that Cabot was the first finder of the land of Bacalaos [the Codfish Country], and affirm that he went not so far westward." If, however, the learned historian had searched the Spanish archives of the century previous, he might possibly have discovered the letters sent to the court by Ayala and Puebla, in 1496 and 1498, which convincingly established the fact that a Cabot had voyaged that far to the westward—but John, and not Sebastian!

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Having in his company, however, one who affirmed that he had made the voyage, and was the real discoverer, Martyr sets down his statement for what it is worth, courteously professing faith in his guest, without seeking to verify his statements by investigating the records. Alluding to this claim made by Sebastian Cabot, M. HARRISSE, a learned and persevering investigator, says: "The belief rests exclusively upon statements from his own lips, made at a time, under circumstances, in a form and with details, which render them very suspicious."

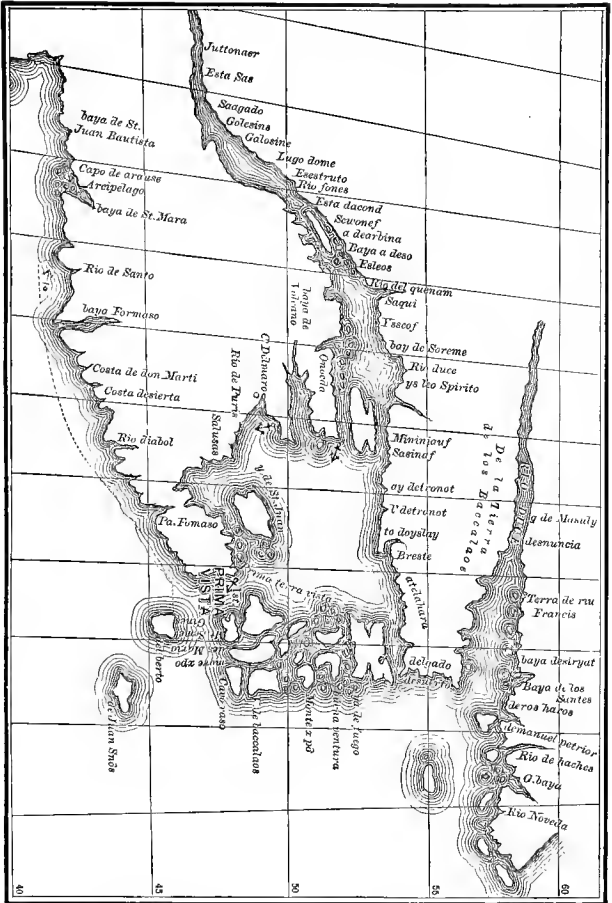
In this connection we should not omit more particular reference to the map of the world, or planisphere, ascribed to Sebastian Cabot, and which, if admitted to be genuine, would prove a powerful corroborative of the statement made by him to the learned Peter Martyr. Hakluyt published an extract from what purported to be a copy of this map, which then "hung up in the privy gallery at Whitehall," but which is not, "so far as can be ascertained, at present in existence." A similar map was discovered in Bavaria, which was purchased in 1844 by the French government, and is now preserved in the national library at Paris. It bears date

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1544, and is inscribed with various legends in Spanish, one of which: "*Esta tierra fue descubierta por Ioan Caboto, Veneciano y Sebastian Caboto, su hijo*"—this land was discovered by John Cabot, a Venetian, and Sebastian Cabot, his son, etc.—has already been quoted, substantially, on a previous page.

In the year 1594 (according to a paper communicated to the "Society of Antiquaries" by Mr. R. H. Major, F.S.A.) a wandering German named Kochhaff published a work containing, amongst other historical matter, several legends which he professed to have copied from a map he saw at Oxford, England. There were nineteen of these inscriptions, including the legend mentioned above, one of which read: "Sebastian Cabot, captain and pilot of his Sacred Imperial Catholic Majesty the Emperor Charles, fifth of that name and King of Spain, put upon me the finishing hand and, projecting me after this form, delineated me in a plane figure, in the year of redemption and nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, 1549; who has described me according to the latitude and longitude of degrees, the position of the winds, so learnedly and so faithfully in the fashion of a sailing-chart—following the

MAP BY SEBASTIAN CABOT (1544)





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authority of the geographer Ptolemy and the belief of the more skilled Portuguese, and also from the experience and practice of long sea-service of the most excellent John Cabot, a Venetian by nation, and the author, Sebastian, his son, the most learned of all men in knowledge of the stars and the art of navigation, who have discovered a certain part of the globe for a long time hidden from our people. . . . Sebastian Cabot, sailing into the western ocean, reached a certain sea and region where the lily of the compass-needle pointed due north, at one quarter north-northeast. For which reasons, and by the safest nautical experience, it is most clearly evident that defects and variations of the compass frequently occur with observation of the north."

Two things particularly claim our attention herewith. One is that the date, 1549, would infer a copy from some original unknown, differing as it does from the date, 1544, on the Paris map; the other is that the (inferential) discovery of the variation of the compass is ostensibly claimed by Cabot, when said variation, or declination, was observed as long previous as the first voyage of Columbus, in 1492. The question

arises, however, whether or not Sebastian Cabot was the real author of the maps ascribed to him—the maps bearing date 1544 and 1549. Did he produce them, or was somebody trading upon his reputation? If he was the author of the map of 1549 and its legends, then the remarks anent the variation of the compass-needle were misleading, to say the least. For he must have known that this was no new discovery—that Columbus reported the result of his own observations respecting it upon his return to Spain in 1493.

But in justice to Sebastian it should be remarked that there is at present a general disbelief among authorities in his authorship of map or legends. Says that critical investigator, M. HARRISSE: "Considered as a graphic exposition of geographical positions and forms, this planisphere must rank as the most imperfect of all the Spanish maps of the sixteenth century which have reached us. . . . As regards the New World, we are surprised to find how inferior its position and outlines are, when compared with those of the Weimar maps, for instance, although these were constructed fifteen years previous. Labrador and northern Canada, which, natu-



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rally, should be much more exact than in the other charts of the time, are particularly defective." This critic also might have added that the map of Juan de la Cosa surpassed it in approximate accuracy, though made forty or fifty years before—accepting the dates of the Cabot map as genuine.

In another respect, also, Sebastian Cabot (if this be his map) has sinned grievously—for example, in introducing into regions he should have known and delineated with care, the figures of bears, pumas, and nondescript animals, which conveniently hide large tracts of coast and inland territory. This might have been permissible in the map-makers of pre-Columbian times, but not in those who were presumed to have had the results of numerous voyages and the testimony of many explorers as to the relative positions of the continents. "It would appear to be incredible," says Dr. J. G. Kohl, "that a distinguished mariner and mathematician like Cabot should not have been shocked by this rough and stupid proceeding. . . . This may suffice for the present in considering the question how far Sebastian Cabot may be regarded as having made this map; or, rather, it may serve to show how utterly

improbable it is that it was originally drawn by him, or executed under his direction or superintendence. . . . Whenever he is mentioned in the inscriptions, it is with some pompous description like this: 'In the art of navigation and astronomy the most experienced man'; or, . . . 'Of all men the most learned in astronomy' and in the art of navigation.' . . . Such also is the following complimentary expression connected with the above, which runs thus: 'Therefore you may use this hydrographical chart as the most faithful and the most learned mistress, in sailing to any part of the ocean wherever you should have the mind to sail.'"

It is very certain that any mariner who placed his trust in that planisphere as a sailing-chart would have been sadly disappointed, if, indeed, he would not have lost his vessel. The learned doctor adds: "I cannot but concur in the opinion both of Mr. Bancroft and Mr. Charles Deane, 'that Cabot himself evidently did not write these inscriptions.'" That accurate scholar, Dr. Justin Winsor, says with reference to them: "These inscriptions are further enigmas; for while Sebastian Cabot must necessarily have been the source from which some of the

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statements are drawn, there are parts of the legends which it is impossible to believe represent such knowledge as he must be supposed to have had."

"All the important questions which have been raised with regard to the map," says Mr. Weare, in his *Discovery of North America*, "its authenticity, etc., etc., are summarized in the following:

"1. It may or may not be Sebastian Cabot's map; at present, there exists no authentic evidence to prove affirmatively that it was ever issued with his authority; he never (presumptively) said he was its author; and it seems almost certain that he never had a hand in its revision. There is [then] no certainty that he ever saw the planisphere of 1544.

"2. There is a probability, but no actual proof, that some portion of the contents of the map may have been originally derived either from a map made by Sebastian, or from information supplied by him.

"3. Until it is proved beyond doubt that Sebastian Cabot was with his father in the voyage of discovery in the year 1497, the map appears to have no bearing on the question at issue—that is, as to the com-

parative agency of John and Sebastian Cabot.

“4. Having regard to the many admitted errors and absurdities which appear upon the map, coupled with the absence of any reliable evidence to prove the agency of Sebastian therewith, it is suggested that it would be unjust to connect him with it, so far as it purports to be a publication by him, or one issued with his authority.”

These citations of eminent authorities show us how involved in obscurity, how completely obfuscated, are the deeds of Sebastian Cabot, which are alleged to have been great and meritorious, for it cannot be proved that he ever made a voyage with independent command before he went to Spain in 1512. In view of this fact, and in view of the testimony of a contemporary, Diego Garcia, given in a court of law, that “this navigation Sebastian Cabot did not know enough to make, with all his astronomy,” the query naturally arises: Did Sebastian Cabot ever discover anything? Did he explore, in the true sense of the word? Did he contribute anything of importance to the then existing knowledge of the world?

The answer must be, judging from the

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evidence, or rather the lack of it, that he never held an independent command previous to his going to Spain; that he made no discoveries of his own initiative; that the world would have known just as much of North America if he had never existed!

Then was he, in the language of M. Harrisse, "only an unmitigated charlatan, a mendacious and unfilial boaster"? We will suspend judgment until we have examined further into his history, meanwhile keeping in mind the fact that the world appears never to have heard of him, never differentiated him from the other sons of John Cabot, until after he was forty years of age. As he was born in or before the year 1474—but as to whether in Venice or Bristol, the evidence from his own lips is conflicting—he must have been about thirty-eight years old when he left England and entered into the service of Spain.

It would be rather ambiguous to say that little was heard of him during the years between 1498 and 1512, for he has scarcely, as yet, established himself as a real personality. He was born; he arrived at the age of discretion, or of maturity, without attracting attention at the time he is said to have been

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performing great deeds; and if he had survived but the ordinary span of man's existence, his fame would have been posthumous only. Perhaps it would not have been even that, for it is to him we are indebted for the only accounts that make him out a great discoverer. Taking him at his face value, the eulogists of Sebastian Cabot have bestowed much sympathy upon his conjectural sufferings when he returned to England from his conjectural voyage. "The news of the bad result of the enterprise," says Tarducci, "*must have been* most unpleasant for the English, and their dejection upon its return equal to the enthusiasm on its departure the year before [1498]. It was like passing suddenly from the brightness of the noonday sun to midnight darkness. What a load of criticism, ridicule, and invective *must have been* heaped on the young Sebastian, who had succeeded his father in the command of the expedition. For, without doubt, those who had promoted and aided the expedition threw the blame of its want of success on the too great want of age and experience on the part of its leader. There *must have been* great lament for the loss of John, whose bravery and experience would, in their opin-

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ion, have secured a happy issue of the undertaking. From this general feeling the poor young man *must have* received a blow that caused him to disappear wholly from view, and fourteen years passed before he reappears openly shining in the light of day."

This is the language, such are the wholly hypothetical arguments, used by most of Sebastian Cabot's biographers in speaking of that supposititious discoverer. The English, of course, "must have been" greatly exercised over the disasters attendant upon the voyage, and there "must have been" great lament over the loss of gallant seamen; but, in view of the fact that it is not known whether John Cabot ever returned from that voyage, or whether his son was in command when the return was made—if there were a return—the assumptions of the biographer might seem purely gratuitous.

During those fourteen years, however, it is thought that Sebastian must have done something to distinguish himself; though why it was necessary for him to do so, any more than for his brothers, who are never heard of more, does not appear. His most ardent champion, Mr. Biddle, quotes from an old Bristol almanac of 1499 the following

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paragraph, to show that Sebastian was yet "up and doing," and not quite crushed by his defeat: "This yeare Sebastian Cabot, borne in Bristol, proffered his service to King Henry for discovering new countries; which had noe great or favorable entertainment of the king; but he with no extraordinary preparation set forth from Bristol, and made greate discoveries."

If he did so, Sebastian Cabot was strangely neglectful of his future, for these "great discoveries" are not recorded anywhere on earth. "About this time," however, as the almanacs say, it is supposed, by those who wish to account for his whereabouts, that he was somewhere off the coast of South America. That hare-brained adventurer, Alonzo de Ojeda, one-time companion of Columbus and Vespucci, beneficiary and comrade of Juan de la Cosa, reported that, in his voyage of 1499, when off the coast of Venezuela, he had discovered a vessel containing Englishmen. It is not stated what he did to them, or said to them; but it was not in the nature of Alonzo de Ojeda to allow any invaders of his sovereign's territory to pass unchallenged. In truth, they were fortunate to escape with their lives, for the fiery Ojeda



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was not only well armed and equipped, with a large force at his back, but he had the disposition to promptly make way with all, especially foreigners, who stood in his path.

There is no record that he did this, and nothing more was ever heard of those mysterious, perhaps mythical, Englishmen, who were said to be the first to invade the Caribbean Sea. Nothing more was heard of them, either there or in England, hence, the enthusiastic Tarducci argues: "They must have been led by Sebastian Cabot! This supposition," he says, "corresponds very well with what Navarrete relates of Ojeda: 'It is certain that on his first voyage he found some Englishmen in the vicinity of Coquibacoa [coast of Maracaibo].'"

Then the ardent Tarducci at once connects these Englishmen with Cabot, by the following absurd chain of reasoning: "Ojeda sailed from Spain May 25, 1499, and was absent only one year. Therefore, the dates of Cabot's departure from Bristol [if he departed then], and Ojeda's from Spain, would very well permit the meeting of the English and the Spaniards! If Navarrete's information is correct, there is every probability that these English were led by Sebastian

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Cabot, as the only man in England at that time who was capable of conducting such an expedition. This is so true that when, two years later, a new expedition was planned, the Portuguese were called on to direct it."

Now, if it were true that Sebastian Cabot was the "only man in England capable of conducting such an expedition," why was it that, two years later, when another was prepared, it was given to some Portuguese? The truth is, that nothing definite is known of Cabot's movements at that time; and, moreover, nothing need have been known of him, for, in common with his two brothers, he was merely the "son of his father"—and the father was dead. Another biographer invents a voyage for 1508, in order to account for the "hopeless confusion, which, perhaps, may be disentangled by applying certain of these narrations to a venture of that date." But does it not naturally suggest itself that this "hopeless confusion" would not have occurred if Sebastian Cabot, disinclined to bask in the radiance of his father's glory, had not undertaken to appropriate that glory for himself?

## X

### SEBASTIAN GOES TO SPAIN

1512

WHAT doubts, what perplexities assail the historian when he endeavors to trace the wanderings (if he had any) of Sebastian Cabot during the first decade of the sixteenth century. He still refuses to emerge from his cave of obscurity, except that, like the mythical "Flying Dutchman," he makes mysterious voyages hither and yon; but voyages preserved only in posthumous chronicles. It was mentioned in the previous chapter that he was deprived of one venture by ambitious Portuguese, who were John Gonzalvez, and two brothers named Fernandes, natives of the Azores. Associating themselves with three merchants of Bristol, Thomas Ashurst, Richard Warde, and John Thomas, they obtained a patent from King Henry dated March 19, 1501, and in all probability sailing and returning that year.

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On December 9, 1502, the same Portuguese gentlemen secured a patent in their favor, in connection with Thomas Ashurst and Hugh Elliot; while in 1503, 1504, and 1505 Henry made small gifts of a few pounds to Bristol merchants who had been engaged in similar adventures into the northern ocean. These are quaintly set forth as follows: "1502, Jan. 7, to men of Bristoll that founde the isle; 1503, Sept. 30, to the merchants of Bristoll that have been in the Newfounde Lande; 1503, Nov. 17, to one that brought hawkes from the New-founded Island; 1504, April 8, to a preste [priest] that goeth to the new Ilande." And finally: "1505, Sept. 25, To portyngales [Portuguese] that brought popyngais [popinjays] and catts of the mountaigne [probably wild-cats] with other Stuf, to the Kinges grace."

Mention having been made of all these ventures, why, then, was nothing said of Sebastian Cabot, who was probably pining for employment, and, according to his eulogists, of all men the best fitted to navigate and explore? No answer can be given to this question; but, in order to find employment for energies so supereminent, some of

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his biographers have made him sail on a voyage in search of Cathay, in the year 1508. He sailed, they say, into the north until his progress was arrested by icebergs and field ice, between 58 and 60 degrees north latitude, and then was forced to turn back and keep on westerly, until he reached a coast-line which he followed southward a long distance.

This voyage, doubtless, is the one he, or his father, made in 1498, for the description of what he saw tallies with that. The Venetian author, Giovanni Ramusio (1485–1557), who corresponded with Cabot—but whose information on the subject of his voyages is considered unreliable—gives a long description of his experiences, mainly compiled from Martyr's *Decades*. Writing in 1553, he says: "We are not yet sure whether that land [New France, or Canada] is joined on to the main-land of the province of New Spain, or is all divided into islands. And if by that way it were possible to go to Cathay, as was written by Signor Sebastian Cabot, our Venetian, a man of great experience and rare in the art of navigation and science of cosmography—he had sailed above this land of New France, at the expense of King Henry VII. of England. And he told

me that having gone a long distance towards the west and a quarter to the northwest behind these islands situated along the said land, as far as sixty-seven and a half degrees under our pole, he firmly believed he could pass by that way towards eastern Cathay, and would have done so if the malice of the master and insurgent mariners had not forced him to turn back."

This reference to a mutiny on the part of Cabot's crew carries us forward to a voyage that is said to have taken place in 1517, during the reign of Henry VIII., instead of in that of his father, Henry VII. It was under the command of Sir Thomas Pert, "whose faint heart," says Richard Eden, "was the cause that the voyage took none effect." Whatever happened, and whenever the voyage was made, Sebastian Cabot blamed Pert for its failure, owing to his cowardice and lack of energy. Whether Cabot the younger, then or at a previous date, penetrated as far north as latitude  $67^{\circ}$  or  $68^{\circ}$ , and discovered Hudson Bay, in his search for a northwest passage to Cathay, is still a moot question. As has been remarked, if he had but kept a journal of his voyages, or had communicated some of his adventures and alleged dis-

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coveries to some one living at the time, posterity might have been so much the richer; whereas, for generations it has been doubtful whether to accept or reject the treasure which, in his old age, Sebastian Cabot pretended to have garnered from his earlier days.

In the year 1512, however, Sebastian Cabot stands forth revealed as one who, by sterling worth or high emprise, must have won the attention of his sovereign. He went to Spain, that year, as a member of that famous expedition sent by Henry VIII. to aid his brother monarch, King Ferdinand, against Louis XII. of France. Henry had then been three years on the throne, and had shown himself the direct opposite of his father, the penurious Henry VII., whose hoarded treasures he was already dissipating with a lavish hand. Having entered into the Holy League formed by Pope Julius II. and Ferdinand against King Louis, he, by a treaty signed November 7, 1511, agreed to furnish six thousand troops, which were to be embarked in Spanish ships. Early the following spring, the fleet, forty sail in all, arrived at Southampton, and the soldiers sailed for Port Passage, near San Sebastian, where they

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disembarked in June. They proved faithless to the trust imposed in them, for they mutinied before they had struck a single effective blow, either for Henry or his ally King Ferdinand.

This may not have been so very displeasing to Henry, who, though he was a son-in-law of Ferdinand (having married his brother Arthur's widow, Catherine of Aragon), had no great relish for the alliance. He would like to be known as "Most Christian King," and doubtless his Spanish wife egged him on to join with her father, dangling the tempting bait before his eyes; but he was ease-loving rather than valiant. By the invasion of France the following year he partially effaced the impression made upon Europe by the disgraceful action of his troops in Spain, but was glad enough to get back to England again, where tidings of new victories awaited him.

It is not, however, with Henry VIII. that we have to do, but with his subject, Sebastian Cabot, who, in the train of Lord Willoughby, one of the generals of the Spanish expedition, went with him to that country. In what capacity we know not, but certainly not in that of a soldier; nor, so far as



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we know, was he engaged as a navigator on this voyage, which was but a short one, and over a route well known. There is nothing to show that Henry VIII. held Cabot in esteem; though as to that, even if he had been worthy above all men, the base Henry could not have appreciated him at his value. If, as recorded, King Ferdinand sent for him, desiring to avail of his knowledge as navigator and explorer, Henry's suspicions would not thereby have been aroused, for his mind was not great enough to grasp the full meaning of that knowledge. He let him go without demur, therefore, and thus King Ferdinand acquired the services of one who had the reputation of being *muy sabio*, or very wise, as to matters of seafaring.

From the Port of Pasage, Sebastian went to the city of Burgos, where, it is said, he had a conference with the secretary of "Juana Loca," Ferdinand's afflicted daughter, by whom he was introduced to the bishop of Palencia, who was empowered to arrange with him as to his service under the king. Sebastian must have been reckoned as of consequence, it would seem, for shortly after Lord Willoughby had landed on Spanish soil he was written to in the name

of the king, who requested that he come to him at once. He wished to consult with him about some matters relating to his new duties, and probably desired to ascertain the exact amount of his knowledge respecting the great country lying northward from his dominions, in North America. From Burgos, therefore, Sebastian went by the king's command to Castile, where he was satisfactorily received by the sovereign and obtained royal sanction to the agreement already concluded with the bishop of Palencia. He may have resided near the court all that summer, for, though King Ferdinand had shown great celerity in drawing him within his sphere of personal influence, it was not until the next October that an official decree was issued respecting the Anglo-Venetian navigator.

By a decree of October 20, 1512, his Catholic Majesty, King Ferdinand of Spain, conferred upon Sebastian Caboto the rank of a sea-captain in his service, with an annual salary of fifty thousand *maravedis*. This might seem an immense amount of money; but as the <sup>m</sup>maravedi was worth about a quarter of a cent only, being the smallest coin current in Spain, it will be

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seen that the salary was not so very large, even for those times. Still, to a poor mariner like Sebastian Cabot, who had for years, in all probability, relied for his support upon the making of charts that were not in high esteem or great demand, it must have appeared munificent. His duties were not arduous; in fact, merely nominal, for it appears that King Ferdinand cared more for getting Sebastian into his service than for any real labor he might perform. He had noted, perhaps, that he possessed information of value which his English son-in-law, Henry VIII., might turn to account in his own employ, unless checked in time. There were few eminent navigators and cosmographers then living, for Columbus, Vespucci, and La Cosa had passed away, and scarcely any had arisen to take their places.

Soon after his arrival at Castile, Sebastian found himself domiciled in Seville, where a house was assigned him, in which he lived at ease, in the enjoyment of his salary of fifty thousand maravedis. This was paid him promptly; and, in truth, it is only from the records of these schedules of payments, by the king's orders, that we can inform ourselves as to his movements at this time.

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By means of these records we are enabled to account for him during the years 1512 to 1515, in which, according to the receipts he signed, he received payments quarterly. On March 6th, for instance, there was paid to "Sebast. Caboto, *Ingles* [Englishman], fifty ducats on account of his salary, and advanced him for going to court to consult with His Majesty about the voyage of discovery which he was about to undertake." On the 26th of that month he received the balance of the year's salary due "from the time he had come [probably to Spain] up to the present."

In April, 1514, it is shown by the schedules that he received an advance of 44,250 maravedis from Don Luis Carros, ambassador at London, for expenses incurred by a return to England for the purpose of closing up affairs and bringing away his wife. This is the first intimation that Sebastian Cabot had a wife, of whom, as in the case of his mother, casual mention only is made. She was a native of Spain, it is related, and her name was Catharine Medrano; but nobody knows whether Sebastian met and won her in England or in Spain. It is most probable that he met her while living in Seville, as his

predecessor, Amerigo Vespucci, met the lady who became his wife, and who, after his death, received a pension from the Spanish government, part of which was a charge against Cabot's salary as chief pilot. Catharine Medrano seems to have held no more prominent position in the scheme of her husband's life-work than the wife of Columbus or of Vespucci; for, like them, she merely makes her appearance once or twice, courtesies to posterity, then disappears, never to be seen or heard of again. Such was the fate of great men's wives at the period of which we are writing—to live in obscurity, while their husbands were crowning themselves with imperishable glory. They shared their trials, their poverty, their disappointments, but were denied participation in their triumphs.

In the year 1515, relying upon the account kept by Dr. Sancho de Matrenzo, treasurer of the *Casa de Contratacion* in Seville, the pilots of his majesty on salary were: Sebastian Cabot, Andres de San Martin, Juan Vespucci, Juan Serrano, Andres Garcia de Niño, Francisco Coto, Francisco de Torres, and Vasco Gallego. Sebastian's name appears first in the list, and this is significant,

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when we reflect upon his situation in Spain, surrounded by rivals in the race for promotion to the high office of chief pilot. All the rest, judging from their names, were Spaniards; all save Juan Vespucci, the since-famous Amerigo's favorite nephew, who was by birth a Florentine.

We have already mentioned the dispersion of Italy's sons in search of employment under foreign flags, and the great assistance they rendered to Spain in exploration and discovery. "It cannot but be remarked," says an historian, "how Italy, in Columbus, Cabot, and Vespucci, not to name others, led in opening the way to a new stage in the world's progress, which, by making the Atlantic the highway of a commerce that had mainly nurtured Italy on the Mediterranean, conduced to start her republics on that decline which the Turk, sweeping through that inland sea, confirmed and accelerated."

Juan Vespucci was one of those who abandoned his native land at the commencement of her decline, and, in company with his uncle Amerigo, swept the seas in search of new isles and continents for Spain. He was trained under the eye of the man

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after whom America was named, and became an expert cosmographer and pilot. It is a matter of wonder that, when his uncle died, in 1512, he was not appointed his successor in the office of chief pilot; and it may not be considered strange if he had some heart-burnings on account of this oversight. Still, it does not appear that he was other than friendly to Cabot, who had already distanced him; but the same cannot be said of some others, former companions of Columbus, who regarded the Anglo-Venetian as a usurper, who had gained his precedence unfairly. When, in 1515, Sebastian was appointed a member of a commission charged with revising and correcting all the maps and charts used in Spanish navigation, "a duty of the greatest importance and delicacy, at a time when the principal activity of Spain was directed to navigation and discovery"—when this came about, the Spanish pilots were greatly incensed.

## XI

### CABOT AS "PILOTO MAYOR"

1518

THE office of *Piloto Mayor*, or Chief Pilot, was not created for Sebastian Cabot, as some have assumed, but was first filled by that eminent Florentine, Amerigo Vespucci. He died in 1512, leaving a widow, whose pension was made a charge upon the office he held, so that the magnificent sum of one hundred and twenty-five thousand maravedis per year, attached to it as the salary of its occupant, was somewhat reduced in consequence. After Vespucci came the venturesome navigator Juan de Solis, who immortalized his name by the discovery of the Rio de la Plata. He held the position about three years, but in 1515 set out on the voyage which proved to be his last, for he was killed by Indians while exploring the river he had found.

Three years later, by a royal ordinance



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dated at Valladolid, February 5, 1518, Sebastian Cabot was made chief pilot, without whose approval no navigator could sail a vessel to the Indies. He was the third to be thus honored by the king for his great knowledge of navigation, and at the time he took office ten years had elapsed since it was first occupied by Vespucci. At the time of its creation a letter describing the duties of *Piloto Mayor* was written by order of the king, which letter may be found in the *Life of Amerigo Vespucci*, a volume of this series.

The chief pilot resided at Seville, near the great West India House—the *Casa de Contratacion*—which had oversight of all fleets sailing to the new countries and seas, and which was presided over for so many years by Bishop Fonseca, the one-time enemy of Christopher Columbus. Neither the street nor the house in which Sebastian Cabot lived at the time he was chief pilot is known to-day, though Seville was for years his place of residence. He never made a voyage to the Indies, but stayed at home and attended to the duties of his office, which, as he had several assistants, were hardly more than nominal.

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We can imagine him, surrounded by the navigators newly arrived from the West Indies and the coast of South America, explaining to them the charts he had prepared and which had been left him by his predecessors, Solis and Vespucci. Never having made a voyage by means of them himself, it cannot be considered at all strange if the pilots who were compelled to go to him for instruction should murmur at the injustice of their king in forcing them to sit at the feet of this foreigner. Many of them knew the seas better than he did, many had made the voyage southward, to the isles of the Antilles, without the aid of the charts, and had returned in safety; and why they should be thus humiliated passed their comprehension. Still, they submitted, as perforce they had to submit, for it was by the king's orders, and no one could sail to any point without Sebastian Cabot's permission.

In treating of this period of his life we are on secure ground, because of the official papers confirming his appointment and authorizing the payments on his salary. But now and then the king's pilot disappears from view, and at such times his biographers

give out that he has sailed for England, there to make another voyage in the service of King Henry. Such a trip (confirming which, however, there is no direct evidence), it is claimed by some, he took between the years 1516 and 1518, allusion to which was made in the last chapter. It was at a time when Spanish affairs were in considerable confusion, owing to the demise of Ferdinand the Catholic, the succession of "Crazy Jane" and Philip her consort, and finally the accession of Charles, their son.

Availing himself of the laxity prevailing in public affairs, it is said, Sebastian slipped off to England and made another attempt to discover something, somewhere, on the northeast coast of America. Why he did not essay something for the only real patron he ever had, hitherto, and make a voyage into the waters and beyond, which were within Spanish jurisdiction, constitutes one of the numerous mysteries of his life. It is not known that he went to England, but assumed, merely, in order to account for another hiatus in his life—or, rather, a period of inactivity—when he does not appear prominently enough to suit his ardent eu-logists.

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It is given out that he was constantly seeking a northwest passage to Cathay, and this was the will-o'-the-wisp that so often allured him from the delights of his official position of honor and emolument. But, not long after he went to Spain, the necessity for discovering a northwest passage no longer existed, since Balboa had rendered it unnecessary by finding a way across the isthmus of Darien. Attention was then directed to the southwest, instead, with the ultimate result that, in 1520, Magellan made his memorable voyage through the strait now named after him, and for the first time crossed the Pacific.

It is possible that an expedition was planned by King Ferdinand in consultation with Cabot, and that his death in 1516 upset all their calculations. "All preparations were checked," narrates a credulous biographer; "public well-wishers and ambitious speculators were disappointed; but Cabot had more cause than any other to regret the loss of his patron. Charles V., who was to be his successor, had lately been acknowledged emperor in the Netherlands, and remained some time in Brussels before assuming the Spanish crown—a peri-

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od of dissension and much confusion among the Spaniards, who, by means of his minister, Chievres, employed every intriguing art to find favor with the young sovereign.

"Ferdinand's kindness to Sebastian had incensed his jealous subjects, who were indignant that the king should have raised a foreigner to his confidence, and availed themselves of his death to manifest their resentment. They insinuated that the voyage of 1497 had accomplished nothing, that Cabot was a foreign impostor, and that under their new king affairs should take a different turn. Cardinal Ximenes was too aged to govern with severity during the interregnum, and when Charles had arrived in Spain, at only sixteen years of age, intriguers and misrepresenters had given an undue bias to his mind. Even Fonseca, the notorious calumniator of Columbus, was in office. Cabot could catch no glimmer of hope in all this darkness, and, that he might avoid undeserved obloquy, he returned once more to England.

"After a short residence in England, our navigator succeeded in fitting out the expedition which the death of Ferdinand had delayed. Henry VIII., probably not dis-

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pleased at his return, 'furnished certen shippes,' says Richard Eden, with some funds, and appointed one Sir Thomas Pert first in command under Cabot, whose weakness, as we shall see, rendered the affair a failure. They sailed from England in 1517. Concerning their exact destination many disputes have arisen. Several historians say that they went on a trading voyage to the West Indies; but these accounts are so confused that we find them at one time off the coast of Labrador, and shortly after that as far south as Florida. The point is interesting, because, if Cabot really undertook a trading voyage, he must have relinquished, in a moment of pique, his hopes of discovering the northwest passage. The trading voyage, which, by a confusion of dates, is assigned to 1517, actually took place ten years after, in 1527. So that Cabot was neither so inconsistent, nor so ungrateful to the memory of his late patron, as to interfere with a trade to which the Spanish government laid an exclusive claim."

Neither was Sebastian Cabot so unwise as to attempt to trade, under English colors, with islands owned by Spain! The truth is, probably, that he did not leave Spain for

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England at all, for many years after his arrival there in 1512. The treatment he received at the hands of the two Henrys (the one penurious, the other a rake and a spendthrift of mean capacity) had not been such as to encourage him to return. Neither had given him permanent employment, as had the king of Spain; neither had honored him in any manner whatever; so what had he to gain by going to England?

But the self-blinded biographer goes on to say: "Contemporary and subsequent accounts represent Sir Thomas Pert as totally unfit to be second in command in such an expedition. His cowardice was sufficient to render his commander's energy ineffectual. They penetrated to about the 67th degree of north latitude and, entering Hudson's bay [now so called], gave English names to various places in the vicinity, when, as previously, doubts of success arose among the crew. The severity of the climate and many privations increased their eagerness to return, while Pert, a man of high command and influence, favored their remonstrances. Under such circumstances, it was impossible to quell the mutiny by force, and, the pilots [Why 'pilots,' when Cabot himself was there?]

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

being unable to convince the understandings of the crew, Cabot turned homeward. Although he had confessedly failed, he must have gained credit in England by his resolution, while Sir Thomas Pert seems to have been recognized as the cause of the miscarriage."

Alas, poor Sir Thomas Pert! To be afflicted with such a name, and to have it maligned, besides—passed down to posterity with a stigma attached to it by Sebastian Cabot! Proceeding in this apologetic vein as relates to Cabot, the biographer says: "Neither the merchants interested in the late unfortunate expedition, nor the king, who was then engaged on the continent, were disposed to renew an attempt to discover the long-desired passage. Moreover, a frightful disease known as the sweating-sickness prevailed in England in 1517, and prevented the people from thinking of an expensive and unpromising enterprise. Fortunately for Cabot affairs in Spain were in a better condition. Soon after his accession, Charles V., examining into the unsettled expedition of 1516 [which is purely conjectural, by the way], was surprised at the sudden disappearance of Cabot. He already knew something of his



## CABOT AS "PILOTO MAYOR"

character, and the state records bore ample testimony of Ferdinand's high regard for him. These facts sufficiently exposed the jealousy and intrigues of the Spaniards, and Charles, anxious to atone for past injustice, appointed Cabot to the honorable office of pilot major of Spain."

It is related as a rumor (confirmed by Sebastian Cabot) that the third year following his appointment as chief pilot he might have been found in England once more, having been lured thither, he averred, by Henry VIII.'s prime-minister, Cardinal Wolsey, who "made him great offers if he would re-enter the service of England and make new expeditions and discoveries for her." Such is the statement of Cabot; but it is manifestly untrue, coming so soon after an alleged expedition, which, as all admit, was so disastrous as to cool the ardor of both the king and the people. One might be led to think, from the frequency with which the Chief Pilot of Spain is said to have laid aside the cares of office and hied away to England, on the most frivolous pretexts, that he had not only little to do, but possessed the unlimited confidence of a government which was not prone to look upon such levity with in-

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dulgence. Spain was an exacting mistress, and would not have disregarded these frequent lapses of allegiance in one standing so high in official rank as Sebastian Cabot.

In the year 1521, two members of Henry VIII.'s council, Sir Wolston Brown and Sir Robert Wynnfeld, urged the merchants of London to furnish five vessels for an expedition which was to be placed under command of "one man called, as understood, Sebastyan." He had, apparently, convinced the king—this man Sebastyan [Cabot]—that said expedition would result greatly to his advantage; but the merchants' wardens, being cautious men, and withal having knowledge of the king's craftiness, demurred. They questioned whether the king and his council were duly informed as to the purposed expedition; and further, why credible reports had not been obtained of "maisters and mariners naturally born within this realm of England." And they add: "We think it were too sore a venture to jepord V shippes, with men and goods, unto the said Island, upon the singular trust of one man, called, as we understand, 'Sebastyan,' which Sebastyan, as we here say, *was never in that land hymself*, all if [although] he makes report of many things

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*as he hath heard his father and other men speke in tymes past."*

The hard-headed men of business, whose money would have to pay for the venture, were naturally against the proposition, though the king, having nothing to lose, might be in favor of it. But the merchants of London were unnecessarily exercised over the prospect of losing their ships and their capital, for, in all probability, Sebastian Cabot had no serious thought of making a voyage in the king of England's service. In truth, how could he, being a subsidized servant of Spain, and holding so conspicuous a position that his dereliction would be noticed at once? It is beyond belief that the haughty monarch, Charles V., would have allowed his pilot major to sail on a voyage for any other sovereign, in any capacity whatever.

## XII

### AN INTRIGUE WITH VENICE

1522

THE further doings of Sebastian Cabot seem to throw light upon what would otherwise appear to be an unaccountable transaction. It would appear, in fact, that the pilot major of Spain was capable of "playing" one government against the other, in order to enhance his reputation with both. Notwithstanding that he had excused himself to Cardinal Wolsey on the ground that he could not accept a commission under English colors without the permission of King Charles of Spain, he himself states that he wrote to the king requesting his recall, as great pressure was being brought to bear upon him to re-enter England's service as an explorer, etc.

He thus makes himself out the one great navigator whose services two powerful nations are very anxious to obtain; but even

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this does not satisfy his vanity, for the next year he may be found intriguing with Venice, to whose ruling power, the "Council of Ten," he represented himself as acquainted with a northwest passage to the Indies. He informed them that "Cardinal Wolsey had made great efforts to induce him to take command of an important expedition for the discovery of new countries, having actually provided 30,000 ducats for the furnishing of a fleet."

His imagination, we may note, was kinder to him than the merchants of London, who had refused to advance the funds, upon the ground that the proposed commander, "one Sebastyan," was a foreigner, and acquainted with the islands to be sought only by hearsay. But Venice did not know of this, and his astounding proposition, to sail in her service, was respectfully entertained by the Council of Ten. Its members were versed in all the wiles of diplomacy, and maintained spies in every capital of Europe; yet for a time Sebastian Cabot succeeded in mystifying them completely as to his motive, or motives, in conducting an intrigue with Venice, while holding a responsible and an honorable position under the government of

Spain. His cunning was eventually out-matched, for he had no dull-witted Britons to deal with now, but the keenest, subtlest politicians that the land of Machiavelli could boast.

On a day in 1522 the Venetian ambassador Signor Caspar Contarini, a man of great and varied accomplishments, who represented his government at the Spanish court, received a letter of which the following is the substance:

*“September 27th.*

*“To our Orator near the Cæsarean and Catholic Majesty:*

“Not long ago, one Don Hierolamo de Marin de Bucignolo, a Ragusan, who came into the presence of the chiefs of our Council of Ten, said that he was sent by one Sebastian Cabotto, who declares that he belongs to this our city, and now resides in Seville, where he has the appointment from the Cæsarean and Catholic Majesty as his chief pilot for the discovery and navigation of new regions. And, in his name, he referred to an accompanying disposition as his credential, touching which, although we do not see that we can place much trust in it, yet as it may be of some importance, we have not thought fit to

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reject the offer of the said Sebastian to come into our presence and say what he has in his mind respecting this matter. . . . We therefore desire, and we, the said Heads of our Council of Ten, instruct you that, with all diligence, but with due caution, you shall take means to find out if the aforesaid Sebastian is in the court, or about to come there shortly, in which case you are to procure that he shall come to you, and you are to deliver to him a letter written by the said Hierolamo, which we have arranged to send by another way to your very faithful servant, that it may reach you presently.

“You should endeavor to find out something of the matter in hand, in the event of his being disposed to be open with you, in which case we are well content to leave it to you to ascertain his sentiments. When you see him you should move him with sound reasoning and encourage him to come here; for we are not only desirous, but anxious, that he should come to us securely. If he should not be at court, nor about to come, but returned to Seville, take care to send all letters by a safe channel, so that they may reach him. Let him know by whom they are sent—that they come from his own friends here, and

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under any circumstances report everything to the said Heads of the Council of Ten."

It seems that Sebastian had met and contracted a close friendship with the Ragusan, Hierolamo, to whom he had confided, under a pledge of secrecy, his desire to communicate with the Council of Ten, and inform them of the knowledge he possessed as to a north-western passage to the Indies. The Ragusan soon after went to Venice and delivered his message, with the result as shown above. A letter purporting to have been written by him was sent to the ambassador, informing Sebastian that it would give the Council of Ten great pleasure to receive him. The ambassador was to pretend ignorance of its contents, though he had already been informed by the Council, but he was to have an interview with Sebastian and try to draw him out as to his schemes. The artful plan succeeded perfectly, and perhaps it cannot be better shown than by the letter written by the ambassador on the last day of December, 1522.

*"Most serene Prince and most Excellent Lords:*

*"On the third vigil of the nativity, with*



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due reverence, I received the letter from your Lordships dated the 27th September, by which is explained to me the proposal of Hierolamo the Ragusan, in the name of Sebastian Caboto. In order to execute these instructions, I dexterously ascertained whether he was at court, and this being so, I sent to say that my secretary had to deliver a letter sent by a friend of his, and that if he wished to receive it he should come to my lodgings.

“He understood this from my servant who went to him, and came on Christmas eve, at the hour of dinner. I withdrew with him, and gave him the letter, which he read, and when he read turned pale. Having read it he put it in his pocket without speaking, and looked frightened and amazed. I then said to him that, when he should desire to answer that letter, he should tell me what he wished, and I would write to those who had sent it, for that I should be prompt in making the business end well. Having been reassured he spoke to me thus:

““I had already spoken to the ambassador of the most illustrious seigneury in England, owing to the affection I have for the fatherland, when those newly found lands could be made of such great utility to my country;

and now, as regards what has been written to me, you ought to know all; but I pray you that it may be kept secret, for it is a matter on which my life depends.’

“I then told him that I knew about it very well; but, as some gentlemen were coming to dine with me, it was not convenient to discuss the business matter further at that time. It would be better if he would return in the afternoon, when we might confer more fully. He then went away and returned at night, when I received him alone in my room. He said to me: ‘My Lord Ambassador, to tell you all, I was *born in Venice*, but was brought up in England, and afterwards entered the service of Spain and was made captain by King Ferdinand, with a salary of 50,000 maravedis. I was then made chief pilot by this king [Charles] with another 50,000 maravedis, and to help my expenses was given 25,000 more, making in all 125,000 maravedis, which may be reckoned at nearly 300 ducats.

““Having returned to England three years ago, that most reverend Cardinal wished that I would undertake the command of a fleet of his to discover new countries, which fleet was nearly ready, he being prepared to expend

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upon it 30,000 ducats. I replied that, being in the service of this Majesty, I was not able to undertake it without his permission. At that time, conversing with a Venetian friar, named Stragliano Collona, with whom I had a great friendship, he said to me: "Messer Sebastian, you are very anxious to do great things for foreigners, why do you not remember *your own country*? Is it not possible that you might also be useful to it?"

"I felt this in my heart at the time and replied that I would think it over. On the following day I said to him that I had a way by which the city of Venice might participate in these voyages, and I showed him a way which would be of great utility. As by serving the King of England I should not be able to serve my country, I wrote to the Cæsarean Majesty that he should not, on any account, give me permission to serve the King of England, because there would result great injury to his service; but that he should recall me. Having returned to Seville, I formed a great friendship with this Ragusan, who now writes, telling me that I ought to transfer my services to Venice. I have opened myself to him, and chargèd him that the affair should not be made known to any-

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one but the Heads of the Ten, and he swore this to me on the sacrament.'

"I answered him first by praising his affection for his native land and then said that the time was come for him to present himself before your most excellent chief lords, and that he must therefore proceed to Venice. He replied that it would first be necessary to obtain permission from the Emperor, on the plea that he wished to recover the dowry of his mother, on which affair he would speak to the Bishop of Burgos, if I would write in his favor to your Serenity."

In the encounter between Sebastian Cabot and the Venetians, the advantage was with his opponents from the first. He had handicapped himself with false statements, and they, knowing this, pressed him to the wall with demands for a motive. They fell in with his plan to obtain permission from the Emperor for a visit to Venice, on the plea that in no other way could he collect his mother's dowry. There was no dowry, of course, nor did the Council of Ten see any possible way of utilizing Cabot's services, even were he to separate from Spain and lay his talents at their feet; but they wished to in-

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volve this servant of King Charles in a net of his own weaving, and they were successful in their endeavors.

“I answered,” said the ambassador, “that, as he wished to go to Venice, I commended the way in which he proposed to obtain leave. As I did not wish to expose his scheme, however, I thought it well to say this much: that in any deliberation he ought to consider two things—one was, that the proposal should be useful; and the other that its utility should be secured. But with regard to the possibility of such an issue”—continues the ambassador in confidence to his superiors—“I am doubtful, for I have some slight knowledge of geography [he was, in fact, very well read] and, considering the position of Venice, I see no way whatever by which she can undertake these voyages. It would be necessary to sail in vessels built at Venice, or else they must be built outside the strait. If they are built at Venice, they will have to pass the Straits of Gibraltar to reach the ocean, which would not be possible in face of the opposition of the kings of Portugal and Spain. If they are not built at Venice, they can only be built on the shore of the western ocean, for they cannot

be constructed in the Red Sea without infinite trouble. First, it would be necessary to make an agreement with the Turk; and secondly, the scarcity of timber would make it impossible. Even if they were built, the forts and armed vessels of the Portuguese would make it impossible to continue that navigation. Nor can I see any possibility of building ships on the western ocean, Germany being subject to the Emperor [Charles V.]; so that I can perceive no way by which merchandise could be brought to Venice from those ships, or from the ships to Venice; but, he being an expert in these matters, I merely made these observations, I said, in deference to him.

“He replied that there was much in what I said, and that truly nothing could be done with vessels built at Venice or in the Red Sea. But there was another way, which was not only possible but easy, by which ships might be built, and merchandise carried from the port of Venice, and from Venice to the port, as well as gold and other things. He added: ‘I know, because I have navigated to all those countries, and am familiar with them all. I told you I would not undertake the voyage for the

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King of England, because that enterprise would in no way benefit Venice.'

"I shrugged my shoulders, and, although the thing appeared to me impossible, I would not dissuade him further, so as not to discourage him from presenting himself to your Highnesses; and I considered that the possibilities are much more ample than is often believed, for the man has great renown. We parted for the present, but on the evening of St. John's Day he came to see me, . . . and reasoning with him on the principal business, I dexterously repeated my objections; but he repeated that the way was easy. 'I will go to Venice at my own expense,' he said; 'they will hear me and be pleased with the plan I have devised; I will return at my own expense'; and he urged me to keep the matter secret. Such is the arrangement I have made. Your Serenity shall hear, and your wisdom will decide on what shall appear to be the best."

"VALLADOLID, SPAIN, *December, 31, 1522.*"

On March 7, 1523, the ambassador wrote, somewhat contemptuously: "That Sebastian Cabot, with whom your Excellencies instructed me to speak on the subject of the spice

countries, and respecting whom I reported, has been to me several times, always giving me to understand that his wish is to go to Venice, and to work in the interests of your Highnesses in that matter of the spiceries. At length he sought me to say that he could not now seek permission to go, as he doubted whether it might not be suspected that he wished to go to England, and that he would be absent three months. After that he would throw himself at the feet of your most illustrious Lordships; praying that meanwhile a letter might be written in the form of the other that was sent, asking him to come to Venice to expedite his private affairs. Thus leave could be more easily obtained. I write to your Highnesses to report what this Sebastian has said, respecting which steps will be taken as seems desirable."

In accordance with the ambassador's suggestion, at Sebastian's request, a letter was forged, with reference to the fictitious property in Venice; and here it is, under date of April 28, 1523:

*"Respectable Master Sebastian:*

"It is some months since I came to Venice, and I wrote you an account of what I had done to enquire where your goods are to be found, that I



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received good words on all hands, and was given hope that I should recover the dower of your mother, so that I have no doubt that if you could come, you would obtain all your desires. For the love I bear you, and for your own welfare and benefit, I exhort you not to be false to yourself, but to come here to Venice, where, I doubt not, you will obtain everything. So do not delay, for your aunt is very old, and, failing her, there will be very great trouble in recovering your property. Set out as soon as possible; so no more at present from,

“Yours always,

“HIERONIMO MARINO.”

And that precious document was the upshot of all this visiting, corresponding, intriguing, lying, for nothing more ever came of it. The only outcome was that Sebastian Cabot convicted himself of deceiving the king of Spain, frustrating the plans of England's cardinal—lying to both; of duplicity in the matter of his birthplace, calling himself an Englishman in England, but a Venetian when desirous of securing the confidence of people of that nationality. He also created distrust in the minds of the ambassador and the Council of Ten as to the knowledge which he professed respecting the northwest passage and navigation in general.

On the other hand, though the Venetians

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had been deceived by him, it cannot be said that they did not enjoy the game and had not profited by their experience. Anything that savored of mystery and duplicity they relished most zestfully; and, again, they had accumulated a body of evidence against the grand pilot of Spain which might sometime serve them well. He had sought to aggrandize himself (at least to amplify his pretensions and consequence) by representing himself possessed of information which, he assumed, the Venetians might desire to acquire; but throughout all the interviews and correspondence they had held him in his place, with many a slight to his dignity and self-importance. He was outwitted, humiliated, and forced to assume the defensive, with a possible threat hanging over his head that sometime the king of Spain might be informed of his outrageous perfidy.

## XIII

### A REAL VOYAGE AT LAST

1526

SEBASTIAN CABOT gained nothing by his double-dealing, by his repeated attempts to convince the world that he was a greater man than his father—a greater than any other since the days of Columbus. He had fame of a certain sort, he had honor, he had credit for possessing a knowledge of navigation far in excess of his real acquirements; yet he was not content. He gained nothing by his duplicity, but, on the contrary, he lost prestige, especially with the Council of Ten and in England.

We seek in vain an adequate reason for his actions, though it has been suggested that perhaps he was in pecuniary difficulties and hoped by attracting the attention of rival nations to secure a more remunerative position. That vaunted salary of one hundred and twenty-five thousand maravedis could

hardly have sufficed for his maintenance in the city of Seville, where, in all probability, demands upon his purse must have been many, coming from disappointed mariners returning from the isles of the southern sea. It may have been in the hope of receiving a more liberal stipend that Sebastian persisted in thrusting his great acquirements forth for Spain's rivals to view. Still, he could not have expected much from the already decrepit Venice, cut off as she was from the Orient by the Turks, and from the Atlantic by the Spanish and Portuguese. Contarini had correctly stated the situation in his letter to the Ten, making it clear that there were obstacles insuperable; but, though Sebastian knew this, he pretended he could overcome them all. He had a plan, he said, by which the "Queen of the Adriatic" might become mistress of the ocean—but he never divulged that plan. He did not go to Venice, and it appears that he never intended to go. After what had been divulged, showing that the artful machinations of the Venetians had enmeshed him, he did not dare to go. Having no plan, in reality, by which Venetian vessels could effect an entrance into the Atlantic, and having no

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secret information relating to the northwest passage, in very truth, he could not have faced the Council of Ten without having the mask stripped from his face.

The information acquired by Contarini and the Council was probably carefully pigeon-holed, for it was found several centuries later, by a diligent investigator, through whose intelligent endeavors we are enabled to throw some light upon the murky character of Sebastian Cabot. The Venetians evidently did not promulgate what they had learned respecting the self-stultified pilot, for the esteem in which he was held in Spain does not seem to have abated. In the year 1524, for example, he was appointed one of a council of geographers and cosmographers called together by King Charles to decide whether Spain or Portugal should hold sovereignty over the Moluccas. The committee met in April, but as the Portuguese prolonged the discussion to an unwarrantable length, the Spanish delegates cut it short by curtly declaring Spain's right to the islands, together with their reasons therefor, and adjourning forthwith. The first signature on the paper to which they set their names in affirmation was

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that of Fernando, son of Christopher Columbus. The year previous, under date of November 16, 1523, we find Sebastian Cabot's name associated with that of another discoverer in a peculiar way. It was when, according to contract, 10,000 maravedis were deducted from his salary as *piloto mayor*, on account of the pension paid to Maria Cerezo, the widow of Amerigo Vespucci. Thus he was painfully reminded of his predecessor, whose fame as a navigator excelled his own, but whose posthumous glory was exaggerated far beyond his deserts.

The council which Sebastian Cabot attended, in the year 1524, was held at Badajoz and lasted a month. It was on May 31st that the declaration was made that the Moluccas fell within the Spanish limits by at least twenty degrees, and, as the Portuguese delegates could not gainsay this, they retired full of chagrin and muttering threats of reprisal. These threats took shape the following year, when the first of the expeditions to follow in the great Magellan's wake was fitted out. Ferdinand Magellan, Portuguese navigator, who, having vainly offered to serve his sovereign in the highest capacity

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as explorer, finally set out on that voyage which carried the flag of Spain around the world, probably met Sebastian Cabot when he was outfitting his fleet, in 1519. No mention is made of the fact, but it is impossible that the pilot major of Spain and the man who commanded the first expedition to find the secret strait and cross the Pacific should not have had converse together. Magellan's pilots were compelled to consult with Cabot as to their proficiency in the use of the astrolabe, the quadrant, and the theory of navigation reduced to practice. Seville, in which Cabot resided, was the resort of all who had to do with voyages of discovery, the home city of the great "India House," and all expeditions practically took their departure from there, no matter from what port they finally sailed. So it is quite impossible that Magellan and Cabot should not have met, and, having met, of course they held long and earnest conversations on the topic in which both were intensely interested. Magellan's fleet departed from Spain September 20, 1519. It consisted of five ships, containing 265 men; but three years later only a single vessel returned to Spain, with eighteen men on

board, after having made the first great voyage around the world.

Sebastian Cabot was in Seville when Magellan took his departure; he was also there (as may be proved by referring to the Contarini correspondence) when the battered *Victoria* sailed into the Guadalquivir with her wonderful news. She had circumnavigated the globe; but the losses had been terrible, including the commander of the fleet, Magellan, and all his men save the eighteen survivors. Then Spain, as well as Portugal, was on fire with a great desire to follow after the pioneers in the Pacific and reap the golden harvest that was promised in the Islands of Spices. Preparations were made for another fleet to the Moluccas, to sail swiftly and clinch the hold that Spain had obtained in the East. But Portugal, through her king, sent remonstrances and prayers, finally threats of vengeance deep, in her efforts to stay the Spanish movement towards the Orient by way of the strait. Portugal, it will, of course, be recalled, had possessed herself of the Oriental trade (formerly conducted by caravan and Arabian ships) through the voyage of Vasco da Gama, in 1497. She had been swift to take



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advantage of the rights bestowed upon her by the treaty of Tordesillas, when, by papal bull, she alone had the privilege of sailing to the Indies by way of the Cape of Good Hope. She had established a remunerative trade between Lisbon and the Orient, which promised to be a strict monopoly, until Magellan discovered the southwest passage through South America. Then all was changed, for Portugal no longer had a monopoly in the East—unless she might be able to thwart Spain in her endeavors to establish a route to the Spice Islands *via* the Strait of Magellan and the Pacific.

The first result of her futile efforts at restraint of Spain's traffic was the Council of Badajos, at which she lost her case, while Spain won. This failure wrought the Portuguese to such a pitch of rage that they hesitated at nothing short of open attack upon Spain's fleets to prevent her from sending an expedition to the Pacific. Secure in possession of the route by way of southern Africa, Portugal should have been content to allow Spain to proceed by the South American track; but no, she wished to control all highways to the Orient. The southwest passage, however, was Spain's, and it

is about the time that the return of Magellan's men in the *Victoria* informed Spain of its existence that we find Sebastian Cabot prating of a *northwest passage* to the Venetian ambassador and the Council of Ten. It is stated, on the authority of Cabot, that he went to England with a proposition to find the northwest passage as early as 1517, and may well be doubted; but, as we have seen, it is beyond all doubt that he did make the proposition to Venice in the year 1522. He and Magellan may have talked the subject over many times, as both were in Spain together several years; but it is only when the passage has been proved to exist that Cabot begins to advocate another, in the northwest, by which Cathay and the Indies might be reached.

That passage was not achieved until more than three hundred years after Sebastian Cabot had passed away; but it did not lead to Cathay, and, owing to its barriers of ice, can never prove of practical utility. Sebastian assumed there ought to be a passage in the northwest, because there had been found a passage in the southwest; but of his own knowledge he knew nothing respecting either. He never essayed the northwest

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passage, but in the year 1525 accepted the command of an expedition that was to penetrate the southwest strait discovered by Magellan. He seems never to have discovered anything whatever, of his own initiative; but he was quick to appropriate the results of other men's efforts as his own. This trait appears in an account given by the pope's legate, who, years later, "seeking his acquaintance, found him a very gentle person, who entertained him friendly, and shewed him many things, and among others a large mappe of the world, with certain particular nauigations, as well of the Portugals, as of the Spanyards, and that he spake further vnto him, to this effect: . . . 'Where-upon I went into Spain, to the Catholique King and Queene Elizabeth, which advertised what I had done, entertained me, and at their charge furnished certain shippes, wherewith they caused me to saile to discover the coastes of Brazil, where I found an exceeding great and large river, named at this present the Rio de la Plata—that is, the River of Silver—into the which I sayled. . . . After this I made many other voyages, which I now pretermit, and waxing olde I giue myselfe to rest from such travels, be-

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cause there are nowe many yong and lustie Pilots and Mariners of good experience, by whose forwardnesse I doe rejoyce in the fruit of my labours, and rest with charge of this office, as you see.' ”

He was then, as he had been for many years, “called *Piloto Mayor*—that is, Grand Pilot, being an expert man in that science, and one that coulde make cardes [charts] for the sea with his owne hand.” But he was mistaken in saying that he had come into Spain during the reign of Elizabeth [Isabella], for she had been eight years in her grave when he first entered the service of Ferdinand, formerly her consort. Also, he made a misstatement in his own favor, when he said he was sent to discover the coasts of Brazil, and found the Rio de la Plata; for both the country and the river were made known years before. It may be truly said, even at the risk of reiteration, that Sebastian Cabot never discovered anything of value; that he never made a successful voyage; and, moreover, that he made but one voyage of which there is a record that cannot be impeached.

Notwithstanding the protests of the Portuguese, Spain made ready to garner the

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fruits of her discoveries in the Pacific, and a commercial expedition was organized by the merchants of Seville, the command of which was offered to their respected *piloto mayor*, Sebastian Cabot. He appeared well pleased with the proffer, and, having secured the consent of the India council, proceeded to interest the king and the court. While he may have been flattered by the appointment as commander of a commercial fleet, he still desired to give to the enterprise a wider scope and strove to enlist the government. In this he was quite successful, and was promptly granted the use of three ships, with the privilege of increasing the number to six, if found desirable. The "capitulation," or agreement with the government, was signed on March 4, 1525, and its conditions were somewhat as follows: He was to sail by Magellan's Strait to the Moluccas and other spice islands of the Orient. From there he was to go in search of the islands of Tarshish and Ophir (it is said) of Eastern Cathay, and of Cipango, lading his ships at each of these places, and others that he might discover on his voyage, with all the gold, silver, precious gems, pearls, etc., that could be obtained by barter or in other

ways. On his return he was to sail along the entire southern coast of the newly discovered continent, America, and, entering the Atlantic, reach Spain by the route he followed on the outward voyage.

Few voyagers have had a greater opportunity than this for acquiring fame and enriching themselves at the expense of others; but the intention of the voyage miscarried from the very beginning. In the first place, the merchants were exceedingly vexed at the turn by which the voyage was to be converted into one of discovery, as well as profit. The Moluccas, they knew, contained a wealth of spices, while there was good reason to expect to find vast quantities of gold and gems. As they bore the major portion of the expense, they reasonably expected to be consulted in the outfitting of the fleet, especially the manning of it with men of their own selection, whom they could trust to carry out their views.

In the controversy that ensued between the commander of the expedition and the merchants of Seville, we obtain a glimpse of the true Sebastian Cabot—and a further revelation of his character. Hitherto, it

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must be confessed, he has proved elusive, resembling a creature of the imagination, for whom we groped in the dark, and could hardly force to reveal himself; but with the preparations for that expedition to the Moluccas he assumes substantial proportions. He suddenly becomes invested with some human attributes, and one trait he strongly presents is that of obstinacy—a belief in the infallibility of Sebastian Cabot. He had selected as his lieutenant one Michael de Rufis, because, as he said, he had contributed a caravel to the expedition; but the merchants desired him to give that position of importance to Martin Mendez, one of the few survivors of the Magellan voyage. He had been commissary of subsistence on that expedition, had borne himself with credit, and was now honored and respected as one of the eighteen survivors who came back in the *Victoria*.

Cabot stood by his man until he was commanded by the king himself to give Mendez the position, and then he reluctantly yielded, saying that to take as his lieutenant a creature of his opponents, was like hanging a stick between his legs to impede his journey. Mendez himself, feeling that a

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slight had been put upon him, carried the matter to the Council of the Indies; but he was finally pacified and sailed with the expedition. In an accusation brought by his mother, after the return of the fleet, it was charged that Cabot's wife, Catharine Medrano, who possessed great influence over her husband, had conceived a bitter hatred for Martin Mendez, and hired a person to assassinate him; but this was not proved—to her credit we are bound to say it.



## XIV

### UNDER SEALED ORDERS

1526

THERE was a very general opinion in Seville that the Portuguese were at the bottom of the troubles attending the expedition fitted out in 1525 for the Moluccas. They had fought Spain at every step of the proceedings looking towards a voyage to the Orient by way of the strait; they had cried fraud at the decision respecting Spanish jurisdiction in the Spice Islands; and they had tried to excite an insurrection in Seville. It was not unlikely that the discomfited Portuguese, when they discovered Spain's intention of sending, not one expedition, merely, for conquest, but another for commercial exploitation, should have endeavored to stay the latter by resort to violence.

One thing is certain: the dissensions between the merchants and Sebastian Cabot delayed the expedition until the following

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year, and eventually brought it to an inglorious termination. It should have started in August, in order to avail of the best weather prevailing in the tropics after crossing the line, but was delayed until April, 1526, on the 3d of which month the fleet sailed out of San Lucar de Barrameda. Sebastian Cabot, who had for years been fretting against the chains that held him to the routine of office on dry land, was at last afloat upon the sea which he had charted for others but himself had never sailed.

He commanded the flag-ship of the fleet, containing three vessels and two hundred men, with the title of captain-general. He left Spain in the confidence of the government, but at variance with the merchants, who had supplied all the funds for commercial purposes, and had staked them upon a successful voyage to the far-distant Moluccas. Failing to make that voyage, the captain-general would cause those merchants great losses, to some of them bring ruin and disaster; and this fact may partially account for their hostility to him at the outset, for some of them held grave doubts as to his ability to accomplish the undertaking. Their animosity was intense, but

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not greater than that of the various officers serving under Cabot, who leagued themselves together against him, it was said, before the sailing of the fleet. According to testimony taken after the expedition had returned, Martin Mendez, Rojas, captain of the *Trinidad* (a ship of the fleet), and other chief officers, held a secret meeting in St. Paul's church, Seville, where and when they bound themselves by solemn oaths to unite on every occasion "for the purpose of depriving Cabot of the command, and putting Rojas in his place." The removal of Cabot was decided upon before the fleet left Spain; and as there was but one way to effect that removal, when at sea, it was, doubtless, murder that the conspirators intended.

As if to further the nefarious scheme, the government had furnished each ship with sealed orders, in triplicate, which were to be opened after the fleet was at sea. They must have been given without Cabot's knowledge, for, as one of his admirers remarks, "It would be difficult to imagine a scheme better fitted to nurse disaffection. . . . Cabot's death, or his retirement, for whatever cause, from command of the fleet, must ever stand as an attractive

prospect before the fancy of the privileged persons whose names were inscribed on that list."

In case of Cabot's death, the chief command was to devolve upon one of eleven persons named in the orders; and in case of their deaths, on the one chosen by a general vote, provided that, on an equality of votes, the candidate himself should cast lots. The first person named in the list was Francisco de Rojas, captain of the *Trinidad*; the second, Michael de Rodas, who was without position, but had accompanied the fleet by the king's orders; and so on.

Taking together the internal evidence afforded by this paper, and the secret meeting at the church, a deep and dastardly plot seems to have been concocted by the enemies of Sebastian Cabot for his undoing. Its promoters included, not only officers and sailors of the fleet, but Spanish officials high in authority. If Cabot had received any intimation of the manner in which he was to be treated, he would have been justified in resigning his position; but it is probable that he had no inkling of it, and, having haggled so long over the minor appointments under him, was anxious to be away at any cost.

## UNDER SEALED ORDERS

The route from Spain to South America was open, and easy to sail, after Columbus, Vespucci, Da Gama, and Pinzon had shown the way. First the navigators shaped their course for the Canaries, thence sailing to the Cape de Verde, and from them stretching across the comparatively narrow neck of the Atlantic that separates Africa and South America. Any navigator of experience could sail the course and make no mistakes, the men of Cabot's fleet averred; yet their commander showed a woful lack of knowledge respecting the proper route, and especially the conflicting currents. The chief complaint, however, comes from one who was charged with having been sent by the Portuguese as a spy upon his movements, and must be taken with a grain of allowance. Speaking of the adverse currents flowing from the Gulf of Guinea, he says: "Sebastian Cabot did not know how to take them, for he was not a sailor, and *did not know how to navigate.*" He also charged him with sailing from Spain at the wrong season. "Every navigator and pilot," he says, "who wants to sail to these parts, must know enough to sail at the time when the sun makes summer there, . . . and

'Sebastian Cabot, with all his astrology, did not know enough for that.'

But knowing, as we do, that the sailing of his fleet was a matter beyond his control, having been delayed by the controversy with the merchants, we must acquit the unfortunate Sebastian of blame, so far as that is concerned. True it is, he should have known sufficient of meteorological conditions—having the observations of mariners during more than thirty years to guide him—to make the start at the right time, and have used his influence to that end.

We now know that Sebastian's nature was stubborn, that he was opinionated, self-conceited, and inflexible of purpose. He started out with the intention of having his way, and he had it, so far as he was able to control things, to the last. He made no pretence of conciliating the disaffected aboard ship, and, long after he must have discovered that the majority of officers and crew were scheming to cause his overthrow, he held to his course against Martin Mendez. He set him aside altogether, as if he were not a member of the company, neither giving him orders nor asking his advice. When the fleet was at Palmas, in the Canaries, Mendez pre-

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pared a letter to the king, informing him of the manner in which Cabot was conducting the expedition; but this letter was intercepted by the captain-general, and never reached its destination. At Palmas, also, the conspirators met openly, in the house of one Santa Cruz, for the purpose of perfecting their scheme against the commander; but, though he was probably aware that something dire was threatening, he took no cognizance of the proceedings. Thus the crews were emboldened by his apparent carelessness, and as the coast of South America was reached began to complain. The captain-general had not laid in sufficient stores at Palmas and the Cape, they said, and most of the provisions were stored in his own ship, anyway, and reserved from general distribution. Martin Mendez mingled with the crews, and made numerous partisans for himself and the Rojas brothers, who also were complaining that Cabot made no effort to allay the ill-feeling which his obstinacy had caused at Seville.

The embers of the Seville imbroglio were smouldering all the way down the African coast and across the Atlantic; by the time Pernambuco was reached they were ready to

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burst into flame. This port, at which was a Portuguese factory, or trading establishment, was reached in June, and after fresh supplies had been laid aboard an attempt was made to proceed. But the winds were contrary and drove the vessels back every time they tried to gain open sea again, so that three months passed away before the voyage was resumed. These three months were very trying to all, especially to the commander, who was now thoroughly alive to the perils surrounding him. The idle life at Pernambuco, while they were confined there by the winds, was conducive to insubordination, and the crews were with difficulty held in restraint.

Cabot, though generally careless in demeanor and gentle with his associates, had kept his eye upon the ringleaders of the mutinous movement, and one day he suddenly descended upon Mendez and Rojas, imprisoned them both, and seized their papers for inspection. While this proceeding may have been warranted by well-grounded suspicions, it could not be, Cabot soon found, sustained by evidence collected from among the crews; and after keeping the twain confined for several days aboard his ship, he



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released them with merely a reprimand. It was a mistaken policy, he found, to deal leniently with these offenders, for one of them at least, Rojas, though restored to his command without loss of authority, blustered and fumed, demanded that his detractors should be punished, and at a later period declared that Don Sebastian had hired two men to murder him. If Cabot had thought to placate the malcontents by kindness, after showing them that he knew of their offences, he soon found out his error, and later profited by it.

After leaving Pernambuco, which was not until the last week in September, the fleet was struck by a gale and the flag-ship lost her small-boat, which, after the storm had abated, the commander sought to replace by another to be constructed of timber cut on the coast. A mountain loomed ahead of them, covered with forest, and in front of it was a deep bay, so that the place appeared all that could be desired. But the entrance to the bay was obstructed by islands and the channel seemed shoal, so Cabot ordered soundings to be taken. To this the pilot, Michael Rodas, objected, and pledged his own head for the safety of the ship.

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“You may have my head, commander,” said he, “if anything goes amiss with our good ship.” But he had hardly uttered the words when the vessel grounded on a submerged bank, with a terrible shock. It was then of no avail for Pilot Rodas to tear his hair and his beard, and to shout, as he did: “Hang me, captain, hang me; here is my head, for our good ship is lost forever!”

It was too true, alas, for the ship went down, carrying with her most of the marine stores, guns, ammunition, provisions, spare sails, shrouds, anchors, etc., with which she was laden. As she was the largest vessel of the fleet, and carried the bulk of the stores upon which the crews depended, as well as the articles intended for trade with the Moluccas, her loss was indeed irreparable. It could not be repaired, and poor Cabot was forced, by the terrible situation, to consider whether it would be possible to continue the voyage to and through the Pacific. His first efforts were directed towards saving what portion of the cargo could be rescued, and we have reason to believe that he exerted himself; though Rojas subsequently testified that Cabot escaped from the ship as soon as she struck on the bank, thinking only of him-

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self. How he escaped, when the small-boat was lost, does not appear; but he adds that the ship could have been saved and floated if the commander had but attended to his duty.

In justice to Cabot, however, it should be said that another eye-witness of the accident declared that the "merit of saving most of the cargo was wholly due to his prompt orders and activity." It was, of course, his misfortune, and in a manner his fault, that the ship was lost, and he could not but expect to be held accountable for it on his return to Spain.

Just previous to the shipwreck he had named the bay in which the accident befell him after his wife, St. Catharine, thus showing that he held her in remembrance. It lies in south latitude  $27^{\circ} 35'$ , and though Sebastian Cabot named it, he was not the first white man to discover it, as he found seventeen Spaniards already living there with the Indians. Fifteen of them had been left by Loayasa, whose fleet had rendezvoused there when it encountered a storm; and two, Melchior Ramirez and Henry Montes, had been with Solis when he discovered the Rio de la Plata. These men, and the friendly

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Indians with whom they resided, informed Cabot that by ascending the Rio de la Plata, or River of Silver, he would find great treasures buried in the soil, for there was a mountain ridge abounding in gold and silver to such an extent that he might fill all his vessels. When asked how it was they themselves had none of this treasure in their possession, they replied that they had secured a vast quantity, but when on the way with it to the coast they were attacked by the Guaranis, who not only took it all, but also the slaves who were bearing it on their backs. They had sent what little they had since gathered to Spain, about fifty pounds in weight, save a few pieces of gold, which had been reserved as an offering to the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Among other slanders which the traitor Rojas circulated in Spain about Sebastian Cabot was an accusation that the Portuguese at Pernambuco had told him of the rich treasure to be found in the mountains above La Plata, and that in consequence the commander then formed the resolution of tarrying there, instead of prosecuting his voyage to the Moluccas. This is evidently false, for it was not until, by the loss of his

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flag-ship, with all its stores and ammunition, he was incapacitated from pursuing the voyage, that he decided to go no farther until his losses had been repaired. When, indeed, the Spaniards at St. Catharine offered to pilot him to the region of gold up the Plata, he informed them that his road did not lie that way. He still intended to proceed on the voyage to the Spice Islands, though he had already suffered so grievously; but when he came to take stock of his equipment, and found that he had not provisions enough for half the distance, let alone vessels and men to sail them, he faltered. The climate of St. Catharine was inimical to the Spaniards, for many fell sick and died. Provisions became so scarce that "when they wanted to ascertain the fertility of the soil they could only collect, from all the vessels, fifty-two grains of wheat for sowing."

Unless a prompt departure was made from St. Catharine, it seemed indeed that Cabot would not have men enough left to work the remaining vessels; but he tarried long enough to build a galiot, in which to carry the salvage from the flag-ship, and then sailed to the southward — though not for the

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Moluccas. He had called a council of his officers, and with their concurrence decided to sail for the Plata, not far distant. In the River of Silver they would make a temporary stopping-place, and while exploring it, perchance, relief might reach them of such a nature that the voyage could be prosecuted to the Spice Islands, as originally intended.

## XV

### MUTINY AFTER THE SHIPWRECK

1527

**B**Y enlisting the services of the Indians, who were devoted to Henry Montes, one of the Solis survivors, Cabot succeeded in constructing a galiot large enough to convey all the stores that had been saved, and took his departure from St. Catharine on February 15, 1527. Nearly seven months had been lost, owing to the detention at Pernambuco by contrary gales and the wreck of the flag-ship. Many of the men had died, while of the survivors very few were fit for duty; yet at this critical juncture the long-smouldering mutiny broke out, and the commander was called upon to act with severity and promptitude. This he did, too, and, though his trials were by no means at an end, he disposed of the mutiny and the mutineers effectually.

It has been claimed that Sebastian Cabot

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was extremely cruel in his treatment of the mutineers; but, in view of the circumstances, this charge cannot be sustained. In short, one day there were unmistakable signs that the ringleaders, Francis de Rojas, Martin Mendez, and Michael de Rodas, had stirred the whole fleet to the verge of an uprising. Before they could act in concert, however, Cabot swiftly descended upon them, as before, and this time showed the scoundrels no mistaken lenity. He might, as he afterwards deposed in Spain (when brought to court to answer for this act), have hung them without form of trial, but instead of inflicting capital punishment he merely marooned them. He had them placed in one of the small-boats, together with their wearing apparel, provisions, two casks of wine, gunpowder, and firelocks, and then set them adrift. He committed no violence, and was even so regardful of their well-being that, when they complained of the wine, a better quality was furnished them. They begged and implored to be taken back aboard ship; but the commander was inexorable. Pointing to an island in St. Catharine's Bay, he told them to seek succor with the Indians dwelling there, and without further ado left



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them to their fate. It is likely that he may have intended to return and rescue them, provided they should change in their behavior; but they and their friends held that the Indians were hostile, and, moreover, were cannibals, like those who had devoured Solis and his men twelve years before. The unfortunate trio then gave way to despair; they raved, they tore their hair and beards, they shouted imprecations; but to all this the commander was both blind and deaf. The wind that bore their lamentations to his ship also filled his sails, and the little fleet stood straight out for the open sea.

The distance between St. Catharine and the mouth of the Plata was covered in five or six days, and the convalescents were refreshed by the brief sea voyage; but so many of the men died at the first island they landed on that it was called San Lazaro, or Isle of Lazarus. Here they found a survivor of the ill-fated Solis expedition, one Francis del Puerto, who told them of the terrible sufferings he had endured as a slave to the Indians.

Twelve years had elapsed since Solis sailed into the great estuary of La Plata and began an exploration of its banks. He had

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made a previous voyage as far as the fortieth degree of south latitude, together with Vicente Yañez Pinzon, who had captained one of the vessels comprising the first fleet of Columbus in 1492. He was not satisfied with the scanty returns for their labors, but returned for a more complete survey of the coast southward of Cape St. Augustine in Brazil. It was on this voyage that he discovered the river named by him La Plata, or The Silver, on account of the rumors that reached him of its riches. Finding his progress impeded by shoals, Solis left his vessels and proceeded up the river in a long-boat, hugging the western bank.

He had not gone far when one of his men pointed out a group of Indians standing on shore and signalling them to land. Desiring to secure some of these natives to take home to Spain, Solis steered for the bank and leaped ashore. He was armed only with his sword, and he committed a second act of imprudence by following the savages when they retreated towards a forest in the vicinity. His men were as eager as himself to capture some of them, and had pressed forward after him without any effective weapons in their hands. They were ill-prepared, therefore,

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for an assault when the wily redskins suddenly let fly a shower of arrows into their midst. They turned to run, but another discharge of arrows laid all of them prone upon the ground. Leaping from their ambush, the yelling savages first despatched the wounded, then stripped the slain, and, building a great fire, roasted the limbs and bodies, right in sight of the surviving Spaniards in the boat. These were overcome with horror, but finally made their escape to the ships, where their doleful story spread terror throughout the fleet. Having lost their captain, the gallant *Solis*, and some of their best men, the rest determined to abandon further exploration and return to Spain with all speed possible.

It was with the terrible fate of his predecessor in mind that Cabot entered the great river, bent upon continuing the exploration interrupted so tragically twelve years before. The *Solis* survivor, Francis del Puerto, repeated the tales the others had told respecting the vast riches of the upper regions, and offered to act as guide. Taking him aboard ship, on May 6, 1527, the fleet left San Lazaro and proceeded up the river. A long stay near the mouth of the Plata was

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necessary to allow the sick to recuperate; but when the final start was made, many were left behind, dead, at San Lazaro.

Thirty miles up the Plata, and opposite the present city of Buenos Ayres, lies the island San Gabriel, which Cabot and his men carried at the point of the sword, their landing there was so stoutly contested by the Indians. They were the same who had slaughtered Solis and his men, and were not only valiant, but possessed of grim humor. One of them, on being asked why they did not eat the two Spaniards slain in the last assault, replied: "We had a taste of Spaniards then, and did not like their flesh; but when we want it we can have it," or words to that effect.

From some of them Cabot learned that the mountains of gold were located somewhere up the Parana, and opposite the confluence of that stream with the Plata he built a fort, which he called San Salvador. There was a good natural harbor here, so the vessels were brought up and left in charge of an officer, while Cabot and a strong company proceeded up the Parana in a long-boat and caravel. They explored it as far as its junction with the Paraguay,

## MUTINY AFTER THE SHIPWRECK

meeting with much opposition from the natives by the way, and occasionally fighting them at close quarters. On January 1, 1528, the Spaniards reached an island which they called New Year's, from which Cabot sent out his trusty lieutenant, Michael Rifos, with thirty-five men, to punish or pacify a tribe in the vicinity that threatened them harm. Rifos chose to punish the savages, finding them sullen and resentful, and returned vaunting a great victory, with abundance of booty.

Most of the people met by the Spaniards were intelligent as well as valiant, says one of the party who kept a journal. This diarist's name was Ramusio, and his superior industry, not to say intelligence, as contrasted with his commander, who seems never to have written anything, is worthy of commendation. It is from him we obtain even the scant information that comes down to us from that voyage, for Sebastian Cabot left not a line referring to his doings, and we might well be warranted in the supposition that he was mentally incapable of serious effort in this direction. His good and his bad traits came out strongly in this expedition. He was determined, yet gentle

in demeanor; he was in the main humane, but severe in the punishments he inflicted upon his men for disobedience. One of them, named Francis de Lepe, because he had incautiously spoken to a companion of seizing a boat and going off where food was more abundant, was given a brief trial and ordered hung to a tree. The half-starved wretch addressed his half-starved companions, as they were about to swing him off, saying: "As I pay for all, my friends, I wish you all a good voyage. Adios!" There were few who pitied more than they envied him, for they were in a terrible condition. Their food had given out by the time the Paraguay was reached, and when Cabot turned into that river instead of following the Parana (which ran easterly and, he feared, might take him into Portuguese territory) they were reduced almost to the last stages of starvation. "They ate the most unclean animals, they chewed the wildest plants, and many called on God for death, being no longer able to endure their torments."

Parties were sent out from the boats in all directions, searching for food. Some men and a boy went out one afternoon.

## MUTINY AFTER THE SHIPWRECK

At nightfall all had returned except the boy, who was lost in the dense forest or had been devoured by wild animals. Great fires were lighted, but the night passed without his arrival. In the morning Cabot sent out searchers, and, as they came back at night without tidings of the boy, despatched another band on the following day, with the same result. He refused to move on, slowly starving though the Spaniards were in that wilderness, until after his officers had urged him to consider their own plight and not to sacrifice their lives in the vain quest. Then, though most reluctantly, the sympathetic commander gave the order to proceed, and the boy was left to his terrible fate.

Some Indian huts were found at last that yielded a supply of coarse food, and soon after the Spaniards came to a land "very fayre, and inhabited with infinite people, who wore small plates of gold in their ears and noses." These signs of the precious metals they were so ardently seeking gave great joy to Cabot and his men, who, when told that they were abundant in the land of the Chandules, who lived near the mountains of gold, less than seventy

leagues up the river, wished to seek them out at once.

If Cabot could but find that golden treasure and lade his ships, he might make his peace with the merchants of Seville and the sovereign; otherwise he must suffer condign punishment for his disobedience. Now, as it seemed, he had the treasure almost within his grasp, and, despite hunger and heat, exposure to the sun by day and the miasmatic mists by night, endless toil and incessant fighting with the insect pests, the Spaniards were heartened to push on. They had scarcely come to this resolution, however, when a presage of disaster occurred in the slaughter of three of their men, who left the galiot one morning to gather wild fruits in the forest. The gallant Michael de Rifos was sent with a small troop to punish the offenders, but was himself slain, together with all his company. Thus perished Rifos, Sebastian Cabot's favorite officer, who had been the innocent cause of the dissension with Mendez, and to the very last a loyal adherent, upon whom the commander could always depend.

Cabot himself, for perhaps the first time in his life, became a military man, donned



## MUTINY AFTER THE SHIPWRECK

armor, seized a sword, and at the head of his company sallied forth to avenge poor Rifos's death. He was met by a horde of savages far outnumbering his own command, but he skilfully fought them, on their own ground in the forest, and, by the aid of superior weapons, finally defeated them. The contest lasted the greater part of a day, for the savages battled valiantly, but were at last compelled to flee, leaving three hundred dead behind them. The Spanish loss was only twenty-five, but Cabot could ill afford this depletion of his force. The original number of soldiers engaged in that wild voyage up the Parana and Paraguay was now reduced by more than half, for, in addition to those killed in fights with the natives, two had been hanged and many died of fevers and dysentery; some had been left behind to garrison the fort of Sancta Spiritu, some were in irons on account of having been implicated in the plot with the luckless Lepe, and there were not men enough to force the galiot and brigantine up the river, even with the assistance of such Indians as could be caught and impressed for the purpose. In this strait the captain-general ordered the manacles of the

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prisoners to be struck off; but they, as well as their companions, were too weak to labor at the oars, and the time soon came when the stout-hearted commander recognized the futility of attempting further progress up the river.

He had borne up with wonderful fortitude, had kept a serene countenance, and, far from complaining or murmuring, had always a word of encouragement on his lips for the despairing. His anguish must have been great when, at the last, it was borne in upon him that the search for the golden mountains must be abandoned. They were then not far away, and, perchance the impenetrable wall of forest enclosing the river could have been overtopped, might have been seen in the distance; but Sebastian Cabot was never to view them. The treasure they were said to contain might have wrought his redemption; it was the only means by which he hoped to avert the wrath of his king; but he was compelled to relinquish his quest for it and to issue an order to return down the river.

## XVI

### BACK TO SPAIN IN DISGRACE

1530

HAVING so much at stake, with disgrace staring him in the face on his return to Spain, the intrepid Cabot might not have given up the quest for the mysterious mountain, so long as a single man stood by him, but for a rumor which reached him at this time that a Portuguese fleet had arrived in the Plata and was advancing to take him in the rear. A Nemesis was on his track, indeed, but a Spaniard, not a Portuguese; though the historian Charlevoix says he had been sent by Spain's great rival, Portugal, for the purpose of frustrating any scheme Cabot might have entertained for extending Spanish commerce in the Spice Islands.

Cabot himself, however, as must have been made apparent by this time, had frustrated his own plans and those of the king and

of the merchants of Seville. No Portuguese marplot was needed to complete the ruin he had already initiated, for his enemies, in their wildest imaginings, could not have supposed him so incapable as he proved himself. He had sailed from one disaster to another, always blundering, always persisting in his own opinion that what he was doing would result in a benefit, but hopelessly losing himself in a maze of doubt and perplexity.

That a fleet was coming up the river, his good friend Yaguaron, the most powerful chieftain in that region, assured him, for he had it from his spies, who kept close watch on the movements of the white men. Yaguaron, of course, could not distinguish Spaniards from Portuguese; but he knew that the new arrivals were Europeans, that they were in great vessels with wings, and armed with weapons similar to those carried by Cabot and his companions, which had caused such havoc in the ranks of the naked savages that they held the strangers in great respect. The commander of the fleet, as it later developed, was one Diego Garcia, a native of Moguer, the town near Palos that produced the gallant Pinzons, companions and rivals

of Columbus. He was an utterly insignificant creature himself, one of a number of free-lances in the field of exploration, whose services were at the command of merchants desiring to trade in the newly discovered countries. He had sailed from Spain without any intention of dogging the movements of Cabot, for, supposing that worthy well on his way to the Moluccas, he had applied for and obtained permission to explore the very river into which misfortune had cast Sebastian Cabot. As the Rio de la Plata had been discovered on January 1, 1516, and twelve years had elapsed since unlucky Solis had been killed and eaten on one of its islands, the wonder is that it had not been explored before. But, finally, it was in a fair way to be opened to observation, for some Spanish merchants associated themselves with Don Ferdinand de Andrada, and secured a concession from the government to explore, perhaps to colonize, the Plata, or River de Solis, as it was called by some. There was one condition only, and that was that Garcia should go in search of a French priest and a companion named Cartagena, whom Ferdinand Magellan had abandoned in the strait discovered by and called after him.

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Leaving Spain in August, 1526, Garcia made so prosperous a voyage that he afterwards boasted he had covered in weeks the distance it had taken Cabot months to traverse. It would appear, in truth, that the veriest tyro at navigation was more successful, or fortunate, than Sebastian Cabot, "with all his knowledge of astronomy"—as has been said before. However, Diego Garcia followed close after Cabot to South America, and arrived at the mouth of the Plata while the captain-general was up the river. As he sailed into the harbor of San Salvador, the Spaniard who had been left there by Cabot to guard the place, fiery Antonio Grajeda, thinking that Rojas, Rodas, and Mendez, the three mutineers, were advancing with evil intent, sallied forth in an armed canoe to meet and give him battle. Each side prepared for a fight, but fortunately Garcia recognized in Grajeda an old acquaintance, and hostilities were suspended. Provisions were scant at San Salvador, but Grajeda gave Garcia and his men the best reception he could afford, at a banquet, and related to the new arrival the details of the great victory gained by his commander over the Indians on the

## BACK TO SPAIN IN DISGRACE

Parana, news of which had then recently reached him.

It must have been disappointing to Diego Garcia, to find his chosen field of exploration pre-empted by one who, he had every reason to believe, had departed for the Pacific and the Spice Islands. Just when he discovered the fact is not known, but probably it was at St. Catharine's Bay, where Cabot had left the three mutineers, who could not have failed to enlist his sympathies if they met him. In any case, he could not have been well disposed towards Sebastian Cabot, when he found his expedition rendered ineffectual on account of the latter's strange departure from his original scheme of voyaging.

It was, then, with anger and jealousy rankling in his breast, that Diego Garcia left San Salvador and proceeded up the river. He sailed up-stream in a brigantine exactly suited for the purpose, and the manner in which he became possessed of this vessel illustrates the unstable character of Diego Garcia. At one of his previous stops, in the bay of St. Vincent, Garcia met a Portuguese lawyer, who had resided there many years engaged in stealing Ind-

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ians from their homes and shipping them to Portugal as slaves. When Garcia arrived he had accumulated more than eight hundred captives, a full cargo for a ship of goodly size, but had no means of sending them to the European market.

Now, Diego Garcia had just the ship he wanted, in which he could transport his eight hundred slaves, and it did not take the two very long to make a bargain. Diego sold the slaver his ship, and the man-stealer's son-in-law sold him a brigantine suitable for river navigation. In this brigantine and another he started up the river with sixty men, and when he arrived at Fort Sancta Espiritu, which was merely a collection of huts surrounded by a mud-wall, he commanded the officer in charge to surrender. This officer was Captain Gregorio Caro, one of Cabot's most devoted friends, and he replied to Garcia's arrogant demand that he held the place by order of his commander and in the name of his majesty. That was sufficient, he thought, to warrant him in defending it to the last extremity, and it was his intention to do so. This answer cooled Garcia down a little, and soon friendly relations were established, during which



## BACK TO SPAIN IN DISGRACE

Caro told the new-comer there was a rumor that Cabot had been defeated by the Indians. If such were the case, and if he should meet his commander, he desired that he would ransom him, if a prisoner, or bring away his body if he were slain.

Three hundred miles above Sancta Espiritu (a distance which, it was his boast, he traversed in twenty-seven days, while Cabot had taken five months to go over the same), Garcia encountered the man who had invaded his territory. Notwithstanding the bad blood that is said to have existed between them, their meeting was friendly, and it was even proposed to join fortunes in continuing the exploration which, alone, Cabot could not carry out. For some reason, however, they soon after separated, and though Garcia furnished Cabot with a supply of provisions, the latter concluded to return to the mouth of the river. They were then in about south latitude  $28^{\circ}$ , at the port of St. Ann, as Cabot called the place, where he was afforded the protection of his friend and ally, Chief Yaguaron.

It had ever been Sebastian's policy to treat the aborigines with kindness, and he once severely punished a Biscayan in his

company for invading the hut of an Indian and throwing him to the floor, afterwards plundering the hut of its contents. He hanged him, in fact; and though his men considered the penalty far too severe for the offence, they refrained from maltreating or plundering the natives wherever they went. The Biscayan, after he had been hoisted upon the gallows, fell to the ground, owing to the breaking of the rope. "Mercy! mercy!" then he cried, and it was hoped that the commander would allow him to go free. But no, he merely sent for another rope, and, seeing that it was affixed with care, caused the wretch to be swung into the air, and did not leave until assured he was dead. Another soldier, who was caught stealing provisions, upon which they all depended for the maintenance of their lives, suffered the loss of both ears, which Cabot caused to be cut off, not only as a punishment, but as a warning to others.

His firmness and just dealing won him the devotion of his soldiers, and also of the Indians; but the latter were soon estranged and embittered by the coming of Garcia, who, with his men, acted atrociously. They demanded supplies, they wantonly insulted

the Indian females, and finally aroused in the Guaranis a spirit of hatred and a desire for revenge. Cabot, by this time, had set out down the river, and was resting either at Fort Sancta Espiritu or San Salvador. Indiscriminate in their hatred, the Indians secretly plotted the destruction of both commands, and assembled in such numbers that, when the storm burst, all the forts were destroyed and many Spaniards massacred. Neither Cabot nor Garcia cared to remain in a country the inhabitants of which were so relentlessly hostile, so both withdrew the remnants of their forces from the Parana and left the region unoccupied by Europeans.

Many had given their lives in this attempt to explore the River of Solis, but nothing material resulted from it, except that at a later day, when Portugal put forth claims to the territory south of Brazil, Spain brought forward, in rebuttal, the names of many tribes over whom, she asserted, Sebastian Cabot had established sway, and on whose territory he had built forts. Though his exploration was a failure, as to immediate results, it was extensive in its aims and comprehensive in its scheme. According

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to Richard Eden, in his *Decades*, the chart attributed to Sebastian Cabot showed that from the mouth of the River of Solis, or Plata, he "sayled up the same into the lands for the space of three hundred and fiftie leagues [or about a thousand miles], as he writeth in his own Carde."

He saw much, suffered much, and made a desperate attempt to find the golden mountains; but all to no avail. He had thought that, inasmuch as the Guaranis, whom he mentions, had invaded Peru and returned, after devastating provinces and acquiring plunder of silver and gold, it might be possible for him to reach that rich region from the Parana. About this time he who became the conqueror of Peru was in Spain, soliciting of the emperor permission to invade that country by the west coast. That Pizarro succeeded in accomplishing his purpose, and that Cabot failed in his, was known to the world centuries ago; but it was not because the latter lacked in persistence that he failed, so much as the misdirection of his aims. Between the time of his departure from Spain and his return four years and four months elapsed, yet for this waste of precious time he had

absolutely nothing to show, except a little, very little, gold, a few specimens of silver, and a description of the country contiguous to the river discovered by Solis twelve years before. He made a chart, it is thought, and wrote an exhaustive description of the region; but, if so, no historian has seen them, it is believed, since Herrera's time, say three hundred years ago.

Soon after his arrival at Fort San Salvador, after leaving Garcia, and before the massacre took place, Cabot equipped a caravel and sent in it to Spain two of his officers, Ferdinand Calderon and George Barloque, who were intrusted with a letter to the emperor. In this letter the discomfited adventurer told of his attempt to reach the gold region of the interior, gave a full account of the various peoples he had met, and asked for "men and means for colonizing the territory." In support of his assertion that the land was fit for colonizing, he says: "The people, on reaching this land, wanted to know if it was fertile and fitted for the cultivation of grain. So, in the month of September, they sowed fifty-two grains of corn, which was all they could find in the vessels, and in the month of December they

gathered from them 2250 grains; and the same fertility was found with other seeds."

The colonization scheme impressed the emperor; but the merchants of Seville, having been victimized by Cabot, whose failure to sail to the Moluccas had lost them their ventures, refused utterly to have anything more to do with him. They denounced him as a base adventurer, whose pretended skill and knowledge, by which he had deceived the sovereign during many years, vanished when subjected to the first real test. Charles himself, however, still professed faith in his pilot major and captain-general; but he was hampered by lack of funds, and with three great armies in the various fields of Italy, France, and Venice clamoring for their pay, long in arrears, he was unready to fit out more expeditions of doubtful utility. He was even compelled to dispose of the Moluccas to Portugal, such was the financial pressure upon him at the time; thus Cabot's failure to reach them with his expedition was somewhat mitigated, and to a certain extent lost sight of in the public clamor over the disgraceful affair.

The two officers sent by Cabot reached

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Spain towards the end of October, 1528, and a year of anxious waiting ensued. On October 6, 1529, finally despairing of receiving the hoped-for succor, the commander held a council with his officers in the port of San Salvador, at which it was resolved, in view of their desperate situation, to abandon the country altogether. This is shown in the first of two memorials prepared by Cabot; and in the second, dated October 12, 1529, he sets forth why, by whose fault, and how the fort of Sancta Espiritu was lost. He does not inform us, however, why, after the forts had been levelled, or reduced to ashes by the savages (with whom the country was then swarming, in many hostile bands), he left a small body of Spaniards in the country. That he did so appears by the evidence of a survivor; but that this commander, generally so humane, could abandon any of his men to the mercies of a savage population aroused to revenge, does not seem credible. It is probable that he found it impossible to take them all home, through having lost a vessel or from lack of provisions; but the real reason is not known.

Then there were the mutineers, whom he had left at St. Catharine's Bay, who had

contrived to let it be known in Spain, through the Portuguese, how cruelly they had been treated by their commander, and had appealed to the emperor for redress. Charles V. sent out an order for Cabot to take up these men on his way home, provided they were still alive, and when arrived at the bay he sent in Diego Garcia to summon them, in the king's name, aboard his ship. Garcia, it seems, had left La Plata about the time Cabot sailed, and had, in all probability, suffered severely from the Indians' attack. He had been amply equipped for a more extensive exploration than his rival made; but his only boast was, in the end, that he had ascended the river as far as Cabot had, and had discovered as far as Cabot discovered, in less than half the time the latter consumed.

The mutineers were not at St. Catharine, where, it was learned, the trio had been able to secure the friendship of the Indians among whom they were cast. One day, Francis de Rojas, in a frenzy of rage, had stabbed a companion when in the hut of some natives, and turned their feelings against them. Fearing his insensate wrath, Mendez and Rodas had seized an Indian canoe and at-





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tempted to reach another island across the bay, but were capsized and drowned. So there was but one of the original mutineers alive when Cabot and Garcia arrived, and he had gone to Port Vicente. When they reached this port, at Cabot's request, Garcia again acted as an intermediary, and bore to Rojas a summons to appear, within six days, on board the flag-ship *Santa Maria del Espinar*, "to be carried to Spain and delivered to his Majesty and to the Council of the Indies, to account for and answer certain accusations that have been made against you."

The mutineer's harsh experience had not tamed his haughty spirit, for he refused to acknowledge Cabot as his commander, and instead of complying with the summons, demanded that he be given crew and equipment for a brigantine, in which he desired to sail for the rescue of those Christians abandoned at Cape Santa Maria, on the coast east of the river La Plata. Also, he demanded an accounting for four young Indians, taken from their homes by Cabot, "and by whose capture the whole island is turned upside down." At the same time he insisted that Cabot should take two of his

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own Indian slaves aboard his ship and deliver them safely to his relatives in Spain.

The charge of kidnapping was true, as Rojas knew; but, though in direct contravention of the sovereign's orders, Cabot escaped censure on the plea that he needed these men to assist at working his ship, for when the disgraced commander arrived in Spain it was found that he had but twenty able seamen left. With but a single ship of his fleet of four, and but twenty remaining of his two hundred men—thus he returned, after four years of peril and privation.

## XVII

### IN THE HANDS OF HIS ENEMIES

1530

**I**T is not necessary, in order to account for the exceedingly hostile reception of Sebastian Cabot when he returned to Spain, to explain that he was a foreigner, and as such had excited the jealousy of Spaniards, for, whether he were foreigner or native, his own acts had been such as to call down upon his head the severest condemnation. He had broken faith with the emperor and with the merchants who had fitted out his fleet; he had hung two of his crew, both Spaniards, and had mutilated others, for committing comparatively trivial offences. And he had abandoned three men with mutinous tendencies to the tender mercies of Indians reputed to be cannibals.

As soon as he arrived in Spain, says Tarducci, "his enemies fell upon him with the fury and unanimity of a pack of city

curs on a lean country dog trembling with fear and hunger. So great was the burst of accusations and rumors, that the Council of the Indies decided to have him arrested at once. In the fury of this attack, this snapping and biting, some of his own officers were pre-eminent for their hatred and rage; so much so that one witness testified that it was said and believed among the members of the expedition that it was they who had caused his arrest." So far as the evidence goes, it was more the clamor of his own officers and crew against him than the malice of the merchants, while as for the king, nothing seemed to move him against his former pilot major so much as the implied ignorance of one who had held a high position in his government. However instigated, "a regular trial was opened at his charge on the accusations preferred against him."

The Spanish historians have ignored Cabot's arrival at port on his return voyage, and but for a letter written by a certain Dr. Affonso Simão, then residing in Seville, to his sovereign, the king of Portugal, we should have no record of it whatever. Writing under date of August 2, 1530, he says,

after the customary formalities used in addressing royalty: “. . . This week there arrived here a pilot and captain who was sent to discover land. His name is Gaboto, he is the chief pilot of these kingdoms, and is the same person that sent the ship which touched at Lisbon two years ago and brought news of land discovered on the river Pereuai, which they said abounded in gold and silver. [This reference is probably to the caravel containing the two officers sent home by Cabot for orders from the king.]

“I find him very wretched and poor, for they say that he brought no gold or silver, nor anything of profit to those who fitted out the vessels; and of two hundred men that he took with him, he brings back less than twenty. They say all the rest were left there dead, some from fatigue and hunger, others killed in war: for they say the arrow-wounds killed many of them, and the wooden fort they built was destroyed; so that they are very ill-satisfied; and the pilot is a prisoner; and the talk is that they will send him to court, to see what shall be ordered done with him.

“What I could learn, and what is said here

publicly, though in a low voice, is that in the land they say they discovered they left no guard but their dead and deserters. But notwithstanding this, these men tell me they saw that the land possessed much gold and silver, and the reason why they brought none is, as they say, because the captain would not allow them to bargain for it, and also because the natives deceived and rebelled against them. Your Highness will believe what you think best of this; but it is certain that the land is abandoned. The river, they say, is very long and deep, and very wide at its mouth. If your Highness shall find it for your interest to send there now, you could do so, for these people fly from a place where they see no money for themselves."

This letter to the king of Portugal, the Spanish sovereign's rival in the race for supremacy in South America, affords us an insight of affairs at the time mentioned. Particular emphasis, it will be noticed, is placed upon the fact that the Spaniards were said to have left nobody on guard in the country, as thereby their rivals would have a clear field for invasion. But Cabot did leave some men there, to hold possession



of what he had found, and in doing so he deprived himself of their much-needed assistance on the return voyage, and went home short-handed. This would give us reason to infer that he fully appreciated the situation in its larger aspects, and sacrificed his personal interests to what he considered to be his duty to king and country.

Not much time was lost in bringing Sebastian Cabot to trial, for Spanish justice, though proverbially slow, was spurred to action by the clamors of his enemies. The king and the merchants held aloof, their resentment having died away in the four years that had elapsed since they committed themselves to the unfortunate adventure. They seemed to hold that it was, at best, an error of judgment merely, in having appointed to supreme command one who was wholly unfitted for the station. Fifty-two months he had taken to accomplish—nothing. Out of his fleet of four, the most important ship was sunk, with a vast quantity of provisions and equipment; one was left at La Plata; the third, a caravel, or small craft, had been sent home with the two officers; and but one, the flag-ship, had returned intact. But the greatest losses

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were represented in men, for of the two hundred who had gone out with Sebastian Cabot, all of three-fourths had perished. And this, the Spaniards indignantly exclaimed, "that an unknown foreigner, whose birthplace even is a matter of doubt, should be exalted over us, and supported by the king in a position of honor and emolument!" Their temper is indicated in the interrogatory propounded by Rojas' attorney at the trial which occurred three months after Cabot's return. "Do you not know," he said, addressing some of the witnesses, "that my client is an hidalgo's son of known worth, while Sebastian Cabot is a foreigner—nobody knows who he is?"

This stranger, this foreigner, was arrested at the request (says the report of the Council of the Indies) "of relatives of persons of whose death he is accused; as also of having abandoned others on the land; and at the request of the Exchequer, which charges him with neglecting to follow the instructions he had received." The complaints were made as soon as he had landed; he was promptly arrested and was lodged in jail. His prospects must have appeared very dark at that time, and doubtless he was

filled with apprehension as to the outcome of the trial then forthcoming. Through it all, however, he seems to have maintained a calm demeanor, as though conscious of rectitude; but among his enemies "what a chorus of imprecations was there. What cries for vengeance. . . . Even the Exchequer turned upon him, and—all that it could do—charged him with not having followed instructions."

Cabot was a foreigner, but he was not quite alone. He had a wife and a daughter, who stood by him nobly. Catharine Medrano, his wife, appears but a few times in the history of his life, but she is always an interesting figure, strong and self-poised. She is more, in truth, for witnesses averred that she was prone to give advice to her husband, which he ever heeded, knowing her good sense. She was charged with having a deadly enmity for Martin Mendez, whom she hired an assassin to stab in the back; but this charge was not sustained. It came, it is said, from the mother of Mendez, Catharine Vasquez, who was the first of those relatives of murdered men to bring suit against Sebastian Cabot. Catharine Vasquez had good cause, she thought, to loathe

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the name of Sebastian Cabot, for three of her sons had sailed with him, and but one of them came back. This one, she averred, Cabot had tried to poison; for the poor soul was frantic with grief, and, knowing that the hated foreigner was the author of her woes, accused him blindly. For the death of Martin, however, she held him directly responsible, and indirectly for the loss of her son Michael, who died, she said, of a broken heart, because his brother had been degraded and abandoned to the cannibals.

Eleven witnesses testified at the trial, some of them that, upon the appointment of Martin Mendez as Cabot's lieutenant, the commander, his wife, and Rifos conceived a violent enmity towards him; that Cabot was ruled by the advice of his wife, and that the latter, Catharine Medrano, tried to have Mendez killed. Five of them believed that Mendez and Rodas died in consequence of their abandonment, "because they were drowned in trying to escape from the island, and they would not have tried to escape [from Rojas] if Cabot had not left them there." Three of them believed that, if Mendez had lived and been retained in his office of lieutenant, the expedition would

not only have kept on its voyage to the Moluccas, but would not have lost so many men.

Cabot's witnesses, on the contrary, testified strongly in his favor. One had heard of the meeting in the church and of the agreement to kill Cabot and put Rojas in his place. He was also told that a sailor had attempted Cabot's life, and every one aboard ship believed he acted on behalf of the conspirators. Also, he had heard that Rojas said he would have killed Cabot at the Rio de la Plata, or Solis. All his eleven witnesses believed Cabot to be a person learned in matters of the sea, that on this account he was placed at the head of the expedition, and that he took no step without first consulting the captains and high officers. They also confirmed his report (being men who had been with the expedition) that he had ordered soundings to be taken before the flag-ship was wrecked, and if these orders had been obeyed it would not have been lost.

The Indians, in whose care the mutineers were left, were not cannibals, but humane and hospitable. The three mutineers were amply provided with provisions and arms;

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if they came to grief it was because of the wickedness of Francis de Rojas, who killed Genoese Michael, and then threatened Rodas and Mendez, who fled across the bay and were drowned. Much of the enmity against Cabot was attributed by him to John de Junco, treasurer of the expedition, because he had often reproved him for ill-treating the sailors, and one time when he found Junco threatening to kill a smith, he, Cabot, said that if he did he would soon kill him! Hence, as soon as they had arrived in Spain, Junco talked with the officers of the Contratacion, and Cabot was arrested immediately afterwards.

One Alonzo Bueno was Cabot's enemy because he had often had him punished for gaming, blaspheming, and selling articles to the sailors at exorbitant prices. Another, Gasmirez, was his enemy because he punished him for speaking ill of the emperor, etc. Nine witnesses confirmed the fact of a sailor's ears having been cut off by Cabot's orders for stealing; nine also testified that the commander always treated the Indians well, and would not suffer them to be harmed. All were agreed that they suffered terribly from hunger, that in conse-

quence of weakness and sickness they were obliged to abandon two anchors in the Plata, and that many died of fever in various places. Finally, ten of the eleven witnesses affirmed that the two men they found at St. Catharine's Bay, who had been with Solis when he discovered the Plata, asserted that one of their companions had gone there and brought away great quantities of gold; also, that Cabot was urged by his officers to go there, and further that he did nothing of importance without consulting with said officers.

Francis de Rojas, former captain of the *Trinidad* (and who appears to have been a deep-dyed villain, notwithstanding his boast of belonging to the *hidalgua*, or nobility), reached Spain a few months after Cabot, and on November 2, 1530, submitted an artfully contrived list of interrogatories, in the form of leading questions, which insinuated that "The witnesses knew that Rojas was of noble family and worth, and Cabot a foreigner, an unknown person, unfit for the command of a fleet, or any other office; those who fitted out the fleet discovered Cabot's incompetency, wanted to appoint Rojas, and this was the cause of Cabot's

hatred of him; the main object of the expedition was to reach the islands of Ophir, Tarshish, etc.; but, when in the latitude of the Cape Verde islands Cabot changed his course so that they were carried to Pernambuco, where the Portuguese who were there, in order to divert him from the voyage to the Moluccas, told him wonders about the wealth to be found on the Plata, trusting to which tales, he decided to alter the purpose of the voyage, and stop at that river; in consequence of the opposition of Rojas, he was arrested and kept some days a prisoner; despite his protests, Cabot stopped in at the island of Patos, to take off some Christians who were there, and get from them information of the Plata; as a consequence he lost his vessel, which, on its stranding, he basely abandoned, though he, Francis de Rojas, came forward and used every means to save crew and stores; as a further consequence of this zeal, Cabot, through envy, became the more hostile towards him; out of this envy he imprisoned him, with two others, on an island, the inhabitants of which ate human flesh, and had already killed and eaten several Christians; Rojas was given as a slave to the



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chief of the island, doubtless for the purpose of being eaten, and underwent great peril and suffering; by continuing the voyage, the expedition would have procured for the emperor a profit of not less than two millions, even if they had brought back only a cargo of spices; Rojas himself would have gained ten thousand crowns; and finally, all that is herein set forth is public voice and rumor." Presented by Francis de Rojas, November 2, 1530.

The outcome of the trial, so far as the accusations of Rojas and Catharine Vasquez are concerned, was what is popularly known, at the present day, as a "Scotch verdict" of "not proven." It would seem to indicate that the authorities haled him to the bar of justice more for the purpose of allaying public clamor than in expectation of a conviction. He was set at liberty in May, 1531, but under bail, and with a suspended sentence hanging over him, which was not pronounced until February of the following year. Then, on account of the disregard he had shown of the king's orders and the merchants' welfare, as well as the high-handed proceedings respecting his men, he was sentenced to be banished from Spain

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for the period of two years. The designated place of his exile was Oran, on the north coast of Africa; but there is no evidence in existence—or at least hitherto discovered—to show that he went there. *Per contra*, a letter written by him from Seville, in June, 1533, indicates his whereabouts at that time, when the sentence would have been little more than half served, and we are led to conclude that it was either shortened, by grace of the king, or remitted altogether.

## XVIII

IN ENGLAND ONCE AGAIN

1548

**D**URING the term of his imprisonment, whether in Seville or in exile at Oran, Sebastian Cabot, in all probability, was sustained and comforted by his loyal, outspoken, and high-spirited wife, Catharine Medrano. Believing her husband to be the greatest man of his profession in the world, she had ardently and openly championed his cause, making many enemies thereby. Perhaps she had threatened those who were opposed to him—at least, some of them, for she was accused by Catharine Vasquez of meditating the assassination of her son; though no proof was offered, and the accusation fell to the ground.

Although she completely dominated the mild-mannered Sebastian in their home, he yielded easily to her government, and that he had a great affection for her was shown on

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several occasions. By means of a document dated October 25, 1525, we are informed that he desired to convey to her for life, in case of his death, on the then forthcoming expedition, a life annuity of 25,000 maravedis. We have seen that he named after her the bay on the coast of Brazil in which his greatest misfortunes overtook him, and he seems always to have had her in mind, though rarely writing of or to her in the course of his journeyings. In the letter referred to in the preceding chapter there is a pathetic allusion to her illness at that time, and to the recent death of his daughter, supposed to have been their only child. This reference comes in quite casually, as though the writer would not allow his private griefs to obtrude in public affairs, but is none the less affecting. The letter is addressed to Juan de Samano, his Majesty's secretary in Madrid, and begins:

“MUY MAGNIFICO SEÑOR, “To-day, on the feast of Saint John, I received a letter from the governor of the Canaries, from which it seems that he still desires undertaking an expedition to the Parana, *tan caro me cuesta*—which cost me so dear— . . . Señor, the chart which your Worship desired me to forward is already finished

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and will be sent you by the *contador* of the Indian house. I entreat your Worship to pardon me for not having finished and sent it sooner; but, in truth, it was not possible, on account of the death of my daughter, and the illness of my wife." [He proceeds to say, without further mention of domestic calamities, that he has not only sent that chart, but has prepared two maps, one for the emperor, and another for the Council of the Indies. He requests the secretary to urge upon the Council an advance of a third part of his salary, in order that he may discharge his indebtedness to various persons in Seville, and after explaining some points of navigation, the variation of the compass-needle, etc., he closes by repeatedly "kissing the hands" of the secretary and his wife, the Señora Doña Juana, and signing himself,]

"Your very faithful servant,

"SEBASTIAN CABOTO."

With this letter to guide us, we can affirm that at this time Cabot was in Seville, that he had resumed the making of charts, which were in request by persons highest in authority in Spain, including the king himself. That he was still chief pilot *de jure* may be assumed by his request for an advance on his salary; that he soon became so *de facto* is also evident a little later, when the government restored him to office. The au-

thorities seem to have reasoned that, whatever his faults, whatever his lapses, he was too valuable a man to lose, and his services were in constant demand. His expedition was a failure, they admitted; but, as one of the Spanish historians, Gomara, expressed it, perhaps "not so much, as some say, through his fault, as the fault of the men he had with him." There was fault on both sides, in fact, for it was Cabot's lack of firmness at the outset that allowed the mutiny to simmer through months of inaction, the ship to be lost from lack of navigating skill, the crews to be decimated by disease and wounds, through lack of judgment. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the *personnel* of Cabot's crews was bad, though no worse than that of Columbus's and Magellan's. The latter, amid dangers far greater than Cabot encountered, quelled a mutiny of more portentous proportions by hanging the ring-leaders, and then compelling the rest to continue with him on a voyage without a parallel in history.

Cabot was at home in the office of chief pilot, and he should never have been removed to a sphere of wider activities, for he was a theorist and impractical. He could

construct charts for others to sail by, but was unable to navigate a ship himself, as seems to have been shown quite fully. Others had no difficulty in sailing by the directions on his sea-charts; or, at least, no protests are recorded. If they had been notably defective, doubtless complaints would have flowed into the *Casa de Contratacion* in a stream against the pretentious foreigner who held the highest position in Spain's mercantile marine; but that he held this position for thirty years, and then left it voluntarily, speaks volumes for his efficiency.

The period that ensued after the tumultuous waters of hate and rivalry had calmed, and in which, once more settled in Seville, Sebastian Cabot devoted himself exclusively to the duties of his office, seems to have been the most satisfactory of his life. A Venetian contemporary who visited him between his return from South America and his final departure from Spain, in 1548, says of him, "He is so valiant a man, and so well practised in all things pertaining to navigations and the science of cosmographie, that at this present he hath not his like in all Spaine."

What we should particularly admire in Sebastian Cabot's character is his composure,

under trials so great that many a less resolute mind than his would have been utterly crushed. His cheerful serenity seems never to have deserted him, even after the accumulated misfortunes of his voyage, of his imprisonment and exile, culminated by the advent of death into his family circle. After the date of the letter to Secretary Samano, we hear nothing more from his family, and may infer, perhaps, that his wife followed the daughter to the grave, for she drops out of sight entirely. Still, his serenity does not forsake him, and many years later we hear him say to a friend, "I do rejoice in the fruit of my labors, and rest with the charge of this office, as you see."

He was always courteous, gentle, soft of speech, and insinuating of address. His chief delight was to convey to others information of which he claimed to be exclusively possessed, and to the end of his days he was prone to "shoot with the long bow." With the exception of Columbus, he was wont to say, he had made more and greater discoveries than any other man since the New World was made known to the Old. He was consistent in his wonderful narratives of adventures, which, perhaps, had



never taken place—at least no proof has been forthcoming—and most tenacious of his theories, such as the existence of a northwest passage to Cathay, the presumption that his native Venice would sustain him in an effort to find that passage, and the delusion that he was the original discoverer of the compass-needle's declination.

In appearance he is said to have been tall and of majestic presence, resembling Columbus in stature and somewhat in features. A portrait has come down to us ascribed to Holbein, which once hung in the royal gallery at Whitehall, and which shows him costumed in rich velvet, with a long, golden chain around his neck and upon his breast. His features are benevolent, his whole aspect venerable; but his eyes, if correctly rendered, are shifty and prevaricating, sustaining his self-delineated character as set forth in this history. Fortunate was it for the reputation of Sebastian Cabot that he lived to be venerable, and became revered for his years as well as for his supposed achievements. Towards the last of his days he grew into the reputation he had striven all his life to acquire, but it was only after he had returned from Spain to England, in or about the year

1548, that his labors brought him substantial fame.

The last-known date of Cabot's residence in Spain, says his biographer, Tarducci, is 1545, in which year he was associated with three others in the examination of a work called the *Art of Navigation*. The year previous he had issued his famous planisphere, which constitutes, with its inscriptions, almost the sole record from his own hand, at present existing, of his accomplishments. Finally, it is thought, he grew tired of the enforced inaction of the pilot's office in Seville (though, accepting his own story, he made several voyages;—but to what points he does not state—after the return from Parana) and allowed his longing for England and renewed activities there to prevail over his sense of duty to Spain.

He owed Spain nothing, however; for what can repay a man for thirty-five years taken out of his life? The empty honors of his position were unsatisfying, and the high-sounding salary of 125,000 maravedis (a maravedi being about a quarter of a cent), when reduced to its equivalent in gold, was not more than enough to satisfy his necessities. So it happened, probably after a

secret correspondence had been carried on with the English court, that in the first year of young King Edward's reign a generous appropriation was made "for the transporting of one Shabot [Cabot], a pilot, to come out of Hispain [Spain], to serve and inhabit in England." How it was accomplished, and exactly when, does not appear; but Sebastian seems to have slipped out of Spain with his accustomed facility, and sometime in the autumn of 1548 he is discovered in England. The next January, probably in conformance with a promise from the crown, he is granted an annuity for life of one hundred and sixty-six pounds sterling, to date from the previous September. This may indicate the date of his arrival in England, where he was wanted to continue the desultory explorations that had taken place since his departure, nearly forty years before.

His stay in Spain almost coincided with the stormy reign of Henry VIII., when all minds were turned to other thoughts than of navigation and discovery. "The disorders of the government," says Tarducci, "must have come to Cabot's ears, and sounded worse than they actually were, as

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Spain was directly injured by the king's madness; for his reputed wife, Catherine of Aragon, was of that nation, and aunt to Charles V. . . . It is, then, easy to imagine what must have been said at the court and throughout the kingdom of Spain concerning so many wives married and divorced, so many learned and holy men given into the hangman's hands, and the scandals of every nature which at that time afflicted England. But in 1547 Henry VIII. died, and the new reign of Edward VI. seemed from its commencement to be the dawn of a new era for the English marine." The English had never given up the intention of pushing to the northwest, by some way that might open a passage to the eastern regions of Cathay, and had made several attempts; but all had resulted in defeat. In 1527, for instance, two ships sailed, well supplied, but were unable to get beyond the fifty-third degree of north latitude; and in 1536 another expedition sailed for the northwest, but disappeared without leaving a trace of its route or record of its discoveries, if any were made.

"To give a strong impulse to the expeditions which were projected (the bad results of others having deterred English sailors from

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again putting their skill and courage to the proof), a man was needed who would be able to restore that courage, and by confidence in his own ability inspire confidence in the hearts of others. This man for England could be none other than Sebastian Cabot."

Edward VI. had just reached the British throne, says the author of a *Life of Sebastian Cabot*, Mr. Hayward, when our navigator returned and fixed his residence in Bristol. Public hopes had been much raised touching the young king, for, having enjoyed an excellent education, and being naturally fond of naval affairs, it was thought that his reign would be most promising for the encouraging of maritime excellence. These hopes were disappointed by his early demise, but he doubtless recognized the superior ability of the navigator newly arrived from Spain, and, in addition to the pension already mentioned, made him a present of two hundred pounds.

The pension had been granted "in consideration of the good and acceptable service done, *and to be done*, unto us by our beloved servant, Sebastian Cabota, of our special grace, certain knowledge, meere motion, and by the advice and counsel of our most honorable uncle, Edward Duke of Somerset, gov-

ernor of our person, and protector of our kingdoms, dominions and subjects." Purchas, the historian, was led to believe, from an inscription on the portrait alluded to as hanging in the royal palace at Whitehall, that Cabot was honored by being knighted, and in his *Pilgrims* occurs this line: "Hail, Sir Sebastian! England's northern pole." This title could not add to or detract from his greatness and glory; but there is no evidence entitled to credence that it was bestowed upon him. He occupied a position in England similar to that which he had vacated in Spain, and that his opinion was deferred to by the king, and any decision of his respecting maritime affairs considered final, appears from the complaint of one Captain Alday, whose license to navigate had been withdrawn, after it had been approved by his majesty, on account of Cabot's disapproval.

Much has been made of Sebastian Cabot's explanation to the king of the magnetic needle's variation, and Edward was, forsooth, greatly impressed thereby. "With his usual ardor," says a misinformed biographer, "he insisted on a convocation of the learned men [and they were not many] of the kingdom, before whom the venerable sea-

man had the honor of explaining the phenomenon to his young sovereign. He showed the extent of the variation, and that it was different in different latitudes. Unfortunately we are without the papers of Cabot himself, and are thus unable to know precisely the theory offered to the prince. Although not the correct one, it attracted general attention, and added to the esteem which our navigator now enjoyed in his native land."

It was not the correct theory, nor, as we have noted in preceding pages, was it Sebastian Cabot's discovery; though, from the general ignorance of such subjects in England, he was readily given credit for what really was an achievement of Christopher Columbus. Owing to his wider range of observation, however, having visited more northern and also more southern regions than Columbus, he may have been enabled to present a more lucid explanation than his predecessor, and to some extent was entitled to credit. "He must be a great man, indeed, who knows so much more than we do," the simple people reasoned, and, following the example of their equally ignorant king, they placed Sebastian Cabot in the niche he had hollowed for himself, and thenceforth his

fame was secure. It only needed the protest from Spain, which arrived in November, 1549, against England's appropriating the services of her chief pilot, to cause Cabot to be regarded with respect approaching veneration.

The Spanish monarch seemed surprised, hurt, and indignant that "this very necessary man for the emperor, whose servant he was, and had a pension of him," should have vacated his kingdom without leave. A demand was made for his return through the English ambassador at Brussels, a belated and cautious answer to which was returned in April, 1550, as follows: "And as for Sebastian Cabot, answere was first made to the said ambassador that he was not detained heere by us, but that he of himself refused to go either into Spayne, or to the Emperor, and that he, being of that mind, and the King's subjecte, no reason or equitie wolde that he shude be forced or compelled to go against his will. Upon which answere the said ambassador said that if this were Cabot's answere, then he required that the said Cabot, in the presence of some one whom we coud appoint, might speke with the said ambassador, and declare unto him this to be



his mind and answere. Whereunto we condescended, and at last sent the said Cabot with Richard Shelley to the ambassador, that he was not minded to go, neither to Spayne nor to the Emperour. Nevertheless, having knowledge of certain things verie necessarie for the Emperour's knowledge, he was well contented, for the good will he bore the Emperour, to write his minde unto him, or declare the same here to anie such as shude be appointed to here him. Whereunto, the said ambassador asked the said Cabot, in case the king's Majestie, or we, shude command him to go to the Emperour, whether then he wold not do it; whereupon Cabot made answere, as Shelley reпорthe, that if the King's Highnes, or we, did command him so to do, *then he knew well enough what he had to do!* But it semets [seemeth] that the ambassador tooke this answere of Cabot to sound as though he had answered that, being commanded by the King's Highnes, or us, that then he wolde be contented to go to the Emperour; wherein we rekon the said ambassador to be deceived, so that he was fullie determined not to go there at all."

In sooth, Sebastian Cabot was averse to going back to Spain, and fully determined

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not to go, whatever his reasons may have been. His answer, that if the king commanded him, "then he knew what he had to do," was crafty and equivocal. It is a fairly good index of his character, which is consistent in its duplicity, to the very end of his life. It sufficed, however, to quiet the Spanish sovereign for a while; but in 1553, after King Edward had been succeeded on the throne by his sister, the infamous "Bloody Mary," another request was made for the return of Cabot to Spain. The queen was asked by the emperor to give permission for Sebastian Cabot to come, "as he has need to communicate with him concerning some matters affecting the safety of the navigation of the Spanish realms." Neither was this request complied with, for, though the suspicions of the emperor were excited as to the use his former chief pilot was making of information he had gathered during his long service in Spain, so were those of Cabot himself. The ill-feeling aroused by his misadventure of more than twenty years before still rankled in the breasts of many Spaniards, and the Spanish historians scarcely veil their animosity towards one who brought their country into disrepute. He had probably

become convinced, long since, that he could never expect to receive what he considered to be his just deserts while he resided in Spain.

Although racially allied to the Spaniards by birth, he seemed less an alien in England than in Spain. He constantly recurred to Venice, however, as the land of his parentage and ancestors, though it had no claim whatever upon him save through the accident of birth. By some strange process of reasoning, he had arrived at the conclusion that Venice ought to benefit by his services, instead of England or Spain, and in 1551, nearly thirty years after he had first formulated the proposition (given on page 173), we find him again approaching a Venetian ambassador to the same effect. It might have been only yesterday, or the year before, that the first proposal was made, so similar was it to the second, after the lapse of a generation.

The Venetian ambassador to England forwarded his proposal—to make an expedition under the flag of St. Mark—as had the Venetian ambassador to Spain, in 1522. All who were previously concerned—all save Cabot—had probably passed away; but the

“Council of Ten” manifested the same astuteness in dealing with the matter as its wily predecessors. The difficulty arising as to the getting of Cabot to Venice, while in the service of England, he suggested, as before, that, to allay any possible suspicions of his employers, the plea be advanced that he wished to collect some old debts due him, and recover certain properties once belonging to his mother. This was done, and “the English government, in compliance with his request, wrote its ambassador in Venice to appear before the Council of Ten and make the recommendation. . . . The Council answered the ambassador that they were very glad to learn in what esteem and confidence a subject of their Republic was held in England, and that they would be eager to satisfy the wishes of Cabot and the English ministers.” But their suspicions were excited, and they finally wrote their ambassador in London to tell Cabot that his offer was most welcome, informing him, however, that “Cabot not being known to any one here, it will be necessary for him to come himself, to prove his identity and give his reasons, the matter he speaks of being very old; and we have given the same answer to his Excellency, the am-

bassador of his Majesty. . . . You will continue, in the mean time, to endeavor to learn from him more in detail the plan of that navigation, giving particular information of the whole to the chiefs of the Council of Ten."

But Cabot the septuagenarian was still Sebastian the unready. The pretended secret which he had carried locked in his breast for more than forty years he was still unwilling to divulge, save on certain conditions impossible of fulfilment. Whether it related to a northwest passage or a northeast passage, or whether there were really any secret at all, nobody knows, and probably nobody ever will know. Meanwhile, during all these years, the map of the world had changed. Comparing, says a writer of note, the map of the world made by Martin Behaim in 1492, with the planisphere made by Sebastian Cabot in 1544, "we shall see at a glance what wonderful progress geographical science had made in the relatively short space of time that separates those dates"; yet Cabot himself was continually harking back to a period when it was believed that Cathay could be reached by merely crossing the ocean.

## XIX

### THE HONORED COUNSELLOR

1551-1557

IN view of his repeated proposals to Venice, in 1522, 1523, and 1551, Sebastian Cabot has been accused of treachery and bad faith to Spain and England both; but, while he undoubtedly allowed his ambition to overshoot the mark, and evidently erred, he withdrew in time to save his reputation, and perhaps his life. The negotiations with Venice were dropped abruptly, in both instances, as soon as Sebastian found the Council of Ten taking him seriously. He had made his point, which was to remind his fellow-countrymen that he was achieving greatly for a foreign power; but their coveted recognition and reward were not forthcoming. He abandoned, then, his tentative inquiry in this direction, and, with the same composure that he endured rebuff of every sort, settled down to his duties in England.

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His recall to that country was, doubtless, premature, for the three or four years ensuing constituted a period of storm and stress in English politics, and nothing was done to avail of his services. It is absurd to imagine that the young Edward, only eleven years of age at the time Cabot returned to England, could have appreciated the old navigator at his full worth, and it was doubtless his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, who, as regent, was instrumental in depriving King Charles of his grand pilot. During those years of inaction, between 1548 and 1553, Cabot witnessed great and distressing changes in the governing body of England. In 1549 the king's uncle, Thomas Seymour, was beheaded on the scaffold, and in 1552 the regent himself, the Duke of Somerset, met the same unhappy fate.

In view of the disturbed condition of affairs, Cabot may have felt justified in concluding that no expedition such as he desired to carry out would be promoted by the English government, and hence offered his services to Venice. However this may have been, before the death of Edward, which occurred in 1553, a movement was set on foot that looked towards the consum-

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mation of his long-deferred purpose. English foreign commerce had become almost extinct, but about this time "certaine grave citizens of London, and the men of great wisdom and carefull for the good of their countrey, began to thinke with themselves how this mischief might be remedied. . . . And whereas at the same time one Sebastian Cabota, a man in those days very renowned, happened to be in London, they began first of all to deale and consult diligently with him."

By his advice a company of merchants, national in character, was formed for the purpose of seeking by sea new markets in the north, and three ships were "prepared and furnished for the search and discovery of the northern part of the world." They were fitted out in the spring of 1553, and on May 20th of that year set sail. They were called the *Bona Esperanza*, the *Edward Bonaventura*, and the *Bona Confidencia*, all names significant of the hopes their owners and masters had in their success. As they sailed down the Thames to Greenwich, the old chronicler says, "presently the courtiers came running out, and the common folk flocked together, standing very thick upon



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the shoare. The privie council, they looked out at the windows of the court, and the rest ranne up to the toppes of the towers. The shippes thereupon discharged their ordinance and shot off their pieces, after the manner of warre, insomuch that the toppes of the hills sounded therewith, the valleys and the waters gave an echo, and the mariners, they shouted in such sort that the skie rang again with the noise thereof."

In recognition of his high standing, and as the proposer of this scheme to seek new regions for trade in the northeast, Sebastian Cabot was elected governor of these "Merchant Adventurers of England, for the Discovery of Dominions, Islands, and other Places unknown," and, together with nearly all the shareholders in the enterprise, was at the river-bank to see the sailors off. King Edward himself had intended to be there, for he had taken a deep interest in the scheme, but at that time was stretched upon his death-bed.

The expedition sailed into the unknown northeast, coasted the shores of Norway, and then was heard of no more for many months. Two years later a single ship of the fleet returned, battered and worn, with

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the tidings that the vessel commanded by Sir Hugh Willoughby had been lost sight of early in the voyage. It was later ascertained that it had been frozen in on the Lapland coast and all its crew had perished. Willoughby's journal was found by his side, beginning, "The voyage intended for the discoverie of Cathay and divers other regions unknown, set forth by the right worshipful master Sebastian Cabota"; and ending: "September.—We sent out three men south-southwest, to search if they could find people, who went three days' journey, but could find none; after that we sent other three men westward, which returned likewise. Then sent we three men southeast three dayes journey, who in sort returned without finding of people, or any similitude of habitations."

"Here endeth," says Hakluyt, "Sir Hugh Willoughby his note, which was written with his owne hand." The pathetic account of his last doings was found near his frozen body, from which his spirit had departed soon after writing those lines. Together with all his men, he had perished of the cold.

The surviving commander, Richard Chan-

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cellor, had rounded the great North Cape, sailed into the Arctic Ocean, and finally reached Archangel, whence he went overland to Moscow. He was received with courtesy by the Tsar, Ivan Basilivich, who gladly embraced the opportunity for opening trade with England, and thus was laid the foundation of a permanent and extensive commerce between the two great countries. It was the genius of Sebastian Cabot that conceived this project of making towards the northeast in search of a passage to Cathay, and in recognition of this fact he was confirmed in his position of governor of the company for life. It was his genius, but perhaps inspired by the ancient geographers, that pointed out the "northeast passage." Chancellor's ship was probably the first to penetrate the Arctic Ocean from this direction; but the complete voyage from the Atlantic to the Pacific, along the northern coasts of Europe and Asia, was not accomplished until more than three hundred years had passed away—by Nordenskjöld, in 1879.

Sebastian Cabot's persistence in pointing, like the compass-needle, ever towards the pole, had at last been rewarded by success; but it was not until he had nearly attained

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his eightieth year and he was on the verge of the grave. Throughout his long life, amid trials, vicissitudes, failures—under circumstances the most adverse—he had kept his eyes fixed upon the northern star. He had voyaged forty degrees beyond the equator, south, and nearly fifty north—assuming him to have been with his father in 1497. No man then living probably knew so much as he knew of the world, either from actual experience or from scanning the works of others. His was a constructive genius of the highest order, though he failed in practice.

Under his direction and supervision the Russian trade became of great importance, for he guided every movement. His old age, says one of his biographers, instead of gliding away in debility or sloth, was occupied by the innumerable cares arising from his connection with the adventurers. The whale fisheries of Spitzbergen and the since-famous fisheries of Newfoundland were improved, if not established, by him at this period. "With strict justice," observes another, "it may be said of Sebastian Cabot that he was the author of the English marine, and opened the way to those improvements which have made the nation

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so great, so eminent, and so flourishing a people." He had shown his perspicacity in pointing out the route to Russia, and also in successfully combating the pretensions of that iron-bound corporation, the "Steel-yard Company," which had fastened itself upon England so firmly and clung so tenaciously that it required the combined energies of the king and the merchants to break its hold. This foreign monopoly of British trade with other lands had held its own in England for many years, but was finally overcome by the union of the merchants, with the king as their head and Sebastian Cabot as their guide.

Notwithstanding the ill-fortune of the *Bona Esperanza*, Sir Hugh Willoughby's ship, the general advantage of the trade opened by Chancellor was so great that the company fitted out a second fleet of three good ships, which sailed the following year, 1556. One of the ships was commanded by Stephen Burroughs, who had been in the first expedition, and who left a journal commencing with the following reference to the festivities as his vessel lay at Gravesend on the eve of sailing: "The 27th April being Munday, the right worship-

ful Sebastian Cabota came aboard our pinnesse at Gravesende, accompanied with divers Gentlemen and Gentlewomen, who, after they had viewed our vessel, and tasted of such cheere as we could make them aboard, they went on shore, giving to our mariners right liberal rewardes; and the good old Gentleman, Master Cabota, gave to the poor most liberal almes, wishing them to pray for the good fortune and prosperous success of the *Searchthrift*, our pinnesse. And then, at the signe of the 'Christopher,' hee and his friends banketed [banqueted], and made me, and them that were in company, greet cheere; and for very joy that he had to see the towardness of our intended discovery, he entered into the dance himselfe, among the rest of the yong and lusty company; which being ended, hee and his friends departed, most gently commending us to the governance of Almighty God."

He was then in his eighty-second year, not wholly free from the pressure of poverty (never having acquired a hoard of wealth for his old age), and looked upon with darkening suspicion by the stern and gloomy queen who had succeeded Edward on the throne. "Bloody Mary" was no friend to

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Sebastian Cabot on account of his discoveries, and was less inclined to aid him when she learned that he was once in the service of her husband's father in Spain. In May, 1557, a few days after Spanish Philip's arrival in London, on a visit to his consort, Cabot's pension was divided, and one-half of it bestowed upon an assistant, William Worthington. At the same time, it is believed, he was compelled to turn over to this man all his maps, charts, and papers of every sort; which fact would explain satisfactorily why so few of his literary remains have been found. Historian Hakluyt, in 1592, or thirty-five years after this shameful event, says, in a dedication of his book to Sir Philip Sidney: "All Sebastian Cabot's own mappes and discourses, drawne and written by himselfe, are in the custodie of the worshipful master William Worthington, one of her Majesty's pensioners, who (because so worthy monuments should not be buried in perpetual oblivion) is very willing to suffer them to be overseene and published in as good order as maybe, to the encouragement and benefite of our countrymen."

The most patient search, however, has failed to reveal these treasures, and it has

been thought by some that they were seized by Philip of Spain, on the occasion of some one of his visits, because they contained so much of value to his nation. This, of course, would preclude the possibility of their being in Worthington's possession in 1592, four years after the destruction of the great armada; but as Hakluyt gives his information merely on hearsay, and no one seems to have seen those treasures since, he was probably mistaken.

Shortly after Bloody Mary and her fanatical spouse had deprived Sebastian of half his pension, and compelled him to share his office and his honors with a nonentity, he disappears entirely from public view. That despicable action, falling upon one of his years, who, though always hopeful and buoyant, could not but have felt the insult keenly, may have proved a mortal blow. Sometime in the year 1557 he was borne to bed by the weight of his calamities, and there we are afforded a fleeting glimpse of the venerable navigator, through his friend Eden, who was with him when he breathed his last. "The good old man," he says, "had not, even in the article of death, shaken off all worldly vanitie," for, with a feeble voice, he "spake



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of a divine revelation made to him of a new and infallible method of finding longitude, but which he might disclose to no living mortal."

Strong in death, indeed, was his passion for mystery, for deception, for maintaining the prestige of his earlier years. And thus he died; but when or where we know not, nor the hallowed spot which at the last claimed his remains, for no monument was raised above it, no inscription marks it.

In forming an estimate of Sebastian Cabot's character, especially as revealed in his latter years, with their ripened fruits of experience, we shall receive great assistance from the "ordinances, instructions and advertisements" which he wrote for the guidance of sailors on the Willoughby expedition into the northeast, in 1553. There are thirty-three long paragraphs, or "items," and we can make excerpts only here and there; but throughout is shown a mind matured by long dwelling upon the results of intelligent observation. In his seventh "item," recommending that "the marchants and other persons skilful in writing shall daily write, describe, and put in memorie the navigation of every day and night, with

the points and observations of the landes, tides, elements, altitude of the sunne, course of the moon and starres, and the same so noted by the master of every shippe," we have, it has been said, the origin of the nautical log-book.

"Every nation," he continues, "is to be considered advisedly, and not to be provoked by any disdain, contempt, or such like. No blaspheming of God, or detestable swearing, shall be used in any shippe, nor communication of ribaldrie, filthy tales, or ungodly talke to be suffered; neither dicing, carding, nor any other divelish games, whereby ensueth not only povertie to the players, but also strife, brawling, and oftentimes murther, to the utter destruction of the parties, and provoking of God's most just wrath and sworde of vengeance. . . ."

These suggestions must have emanated from a nature most devout, for all Cabot's acts on board ship, so far as we have seen, were in accord with them. Another page from his experience is presented when he says: "Item, if you shall be invited into any lords or rulers house, to dinner or to other parliance, goe in such order of strength that you may be stronger than they, and be

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wary of woods and ambushes, and that your weapons be not out of your possession. If you shall see the salvages wearing Lyons or beares skinnes, having long bowes and arrowes, be not afraid of that sight; for such be worn oftentimes more to feare strangers, than for any other cause.

“Item, that morning and evening prayer, with other common services appointed by the King’s Majestie and laws of this realme, to be read and said in every shippe daily, and the Bible or paraphrases to be read, devoutly and Christianly, to God’s honour.” Finally, he adjures the explorers: “All ye seek is most likely to be attained and brought to good effect, if every one in his vocation shall endeavor according to his charge and most bounden dutie, praying the living God to give you his grace, to accomplish your charge to his glorie, whose merciful hand shall prosper your voyage, and preserve you from all dangers.”



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