

**NEWFOUNDLAND IN 1897;: BEING
QUEEN VICTORIA'S DIAMOND JUBILEE
YEAR AND THE FOUR HUNDREDTH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE DISCOVERY OF
THE ISLAND BY JOHN CABOT**

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Newfoundland in 1897;: Being Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee Year and the Four Hundredth Anniversary of the Discovery of the Island by John Cabot by M. Harvey

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BY JOHN CABOT

BY THE

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"NEWFOUNDLAND: THE OLDEST BRITISH COLONY"

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NEWFOUNDLAND: ENGLAND'S OLDEST COLONY.

CHAPTER I.

Discovery of North America by John Cabot—Voyage of the
Matthew.

(Four hundred years ago, on the 2nd of May, 1497, a little vessel of some sixty tons burthen took her departure from the port of Bristol and turned her prow towards the stormy unknown wastes of the North Atlantic. On her stern she bore the name, "The *Matthew*, of Bristol." Her commander was John Cabot, a Venetian by birth, but for some time resident in Bristol. He had obtained a patent from Henry VII. of England for the discovery of new lands to the westward, and with a crew of eighteen stout West-Country sailors, he now embarked on his perilous enterprise.

The expedition attracted little or no attention. In silence, without any pomp or circumstance, the little craft spread her sails on this bright May morning, and dropped down Bristol Channel, unnoticed among the other tiny vessels that then furrowed its waters. But

there were daring spirits on board from the West Country, the country noted long afterwards for its warriors, statesmen, discoverers—its Raleighs, Davises, Gilberts, Grenvilles, Drakes, Hawkinses—of some whom, not without reason, the great Elizabeth said, "The men of Devon are my right hand." We do not know the name of a single officer or sailor on board the *Matthew*; and even of her brave commander, John Cabot, we know very little. We must judge these daring navigators by their deeds, for perhaps never was there an enterprise having such far-reaching consequences and exerting such an influence on the destinies of humanity, of which so little notice was taken at the time, and so few and meagre records have been preserved. So far as known, no diary was kept on board the *Matthew*, and her commander gave to the world but little account of what took place beyond the bare results of the voyage. The voyage of Columbus has thrown around it the glamour of poetry and romance. History has gathered into her golden urn every incident connected with the great enterprise, and eloquent pens have told the thrilling story in every variety of picturesque detail. But of the voyage of Cabot, fraught with such vast results, almost nothing is known. The records which have floated down to us were written long after the event, and are of the most meagre and unsatisfactory description. Hence, while from the writings of Columbus and those of his contemporaries, we are able to form a vivid idea of the man himself, of his heroic character and great achievements, so that his name is a household word and his

life-history a part of our literature, John Cabot is a mere shadow looming dimly from the darkness of the past. He has been, till recently, almost forgotten; his great discoveries overlooked, and his services to England and humanity ignored. No honours have been paid to his memory, and it is only now, after a lapse of four hundred years, that the public conscience seems to be awakening to the injustice done to the name and memory of a great man, and that the wrongs of centuries seem likely to be righted. "The great soul of the world is just," no doubt; but it is often uphill work to convince the world as to who have been its true benefactors and are entitled to its admiration and reverence. Too often the prophets and benefactors of the world are first stoned, and their sepulchres are built by after-generations. Cabot's hour has come at last; and the accumulated dust of centuries will be cleared away from his memory, and due honours paid to the man who pioneered the way for the English-speaking race who have now overspread the continent of North America.

Not for a moment would we attempt to detract from the glories that encircle the great name of Columbus. His achievement must be regarded as the most important in the annals of the world. He raised the curtain that shrouded the abysses of the Western Ocean, and revealed a New World of boundless wealth and marvellous extent and beauty. He at once doubled the habitable globe, and gave a new direction to men's thoughts and efforts. He established a connection which could never be lost or destroyed between two hemispheres. It was

a noble deed which could never be repeated ; and for all time must encircle the name of the doer with imperishable renown.

One brave deed leads to others. The grand achievement of Columbus fired the soul of John Cabot with the idea that he, too, could do something great for the honour and advantage of his adopted country. The thought that possessed his mind was that by taking a north-west course across the Atlantic, instead of the south-west route of Columbus, he would reach, by a shorter voyage, the eastern coasts of Asia. He hoped to open up intercourse with China and Japan, or, as they were named by Marco Polo, Cathay and Cipango. Like Columbus, he achieved far more than he dreamed of. He little suspected that between him and the eastern coasts of Asia there lay a vast continent and the waters of the Pacific Ocean. But the glory of his achievement lay in this—that he was the first who saw the mainland of the American continent ; and a year before Columbus touched the margin of that continent in the neighbourhood of Veragua, and before Amerigo Vespucci made his first voyage across the Atlantic, Cabot landed on its shores and coasted them for hundreds of miles. His hoped-for communication with China and Japan, in this direction, had to be adjourned for three hundred and fifty years ; but by the energy and enterprise of the English-speaking race, whose way he had pioneered, this intercourse has at length been established. Roads of steel, steam-driven vessels, and telegraphic wires have linked Cathay and Cipango to England and the rest of the world across the continent

of North America and the waters of the vast Pacific. The old idea has been realized in a new and more fully-developed form. "There is nothing new under the sun." After four hundred years the western path to Cipango and Cathay has been found.

The discovery of Cabot was only second in greatness to that of Columbus. Indeed, in some respects the former had the more difficult task. While the path of Columbus lay in genial climes, amid summer seas and pleasant breezes, Cabot's course led him across the North Atlantic, the stormiest sea in the world, strewn with icebergs and icefields, and often swept by fierce tempests. While the course of Columbus, ever bending to the south-west, brought him into "the Mar de Damas, the Ladies' Sea," where with "the blue above and the blue below," there is almost perpetual summer, and storms are nearly unknown, Cabot had to face the scowling waves of a grim unknown sea, with its fogs and dangerous currents, and grope his way without knowing where land would be found. Columbus had the Azores as a half-way port; Cabot had two thousand miles of unbroken ocean, never furrowed by European keel since the days of the Norsemen, five hundred years before. Equally with Columbus he had to confront the dark unknown, but under greater perils, where, as Pasqualigo informs us, "he wandered about for a long time." It needed a stout heart and a resolute spirit to launch out into these wild waters for the first time, in a little caravel—a mere cockle-shell—in which most men would now hesitate to take even a short coasting voyage. But Cabot and his bold West-Country sailors