

Early in May, 1497, John Cabot, in the ship *Matthew*, sailed from Bristol on a voyage of discovery, in an attempt to reach India by sailing towards the west, as Columbus had done five years before.

Of the particulars of this voyage, the most important that was ever made under the British flag, English history gives no details. That he was accompanied by his son Sebastian there can be no doubt; but not another name has been preserved as of any person serving in any capacity in the ship. Of the course he steered and the consequent point of his landfall, a great difference of opinion has long existed. Most of the prominent geographers have stated it to have been some part of Newfoundland, perhaps inferring it from the name of that island, or because it would be likely to be the first to be fallen in with in such a voyage. Mr. Biddle, in the volume hereafter referred to, contends that it must have been none other than an island on the coast of Labrador; but it is now rendered certain that the first discovery of North America was on the shores of the French Acadia.

The following extract is from Belknap. The account which he quotes from Hakluyt has often been printed, but it is erroneous in many respects, as Cabot saw no inhabitants, and but slight indications of them. This statement was probably mixed up with some facts that occurred in a subsequent voyage.

On the 24th of June, very early in the morning, they were surprized with the sight of land; which, being the first they had seen, they called *Prima Vista*. The description of it is given in these words. "The island which lieth out before the land, he called St. John, because it was discovered on the day of St. John the Baptist. The inhabitants of this island wear beasts' skins. In their wars, they use bows, arrows, pikes, darts, wooden clubs, and slings. The soil is barren in some places and yieldeth little fruit; but is full of white bears and stags, far greater than ours. It yieldeth plenty of fish, and those very great, as seals and salmons. There are soles above a yard in length; but especially there is great abundance in that kind of fish which the savages call Bacalao (Cod). In the same island are hawks and eagles, as black as ravens; also partridges. The inhabitants had great plenty of copper."

This land is generally supposed to be some part of the island of Newfoundland; and Dr. Forster thinks that the name, *Prima Vista*, was after-