

Genoese to make his voyage of essay under the flag of England. It was, therefore, not difficult for John Cabot, a denizen of Venice, residing at Bristol, to interest that politic king in plans for discovery. On the fifth of March, 1496, he obtained under the great seal a commission empowering himself and his three sons, or either of them, their heirs, or their deputies, to sail into the eastern, western, or northern sea with a fleet of five ships, at their own expense, in search of islands, provinces, or regions hitherto unseen by Christian people; to affix the banners of England on city, island, or continent; and, as vassals of the English crown, to possess and occupy the territories that might be found. It was further stipulated in this "most ancient American state paper of England," that the patentees should be strictly bound, on every return, to land at the port of Bristol, and to pay to the king one fifth part of their gains; while the exclusive right of frequenting all the countries that might be found was reserved to them and to their assigns, without limit of time.

Under this patent, which, at the first direction of English enterprise toward America, embodied the worst features of monopoly and commercial restriction, John Cabot, taking with him his son Sebastian, embarked in quest of new islands and a passage to Asia by the north-west. After sailing prosperously, as he reported, for seven hundred leagues, on the twenty-fourth day of June, 1497, early in the morning, almost fourteen months before Columbus on his third voyage came in sight of the main, and more than two years before Amerigo Vespucci sailed west of the Canaries, he discovered the western continent, probably in the latitude of about fifty-six degrees, among the dismal cliffs of Labrador. He ran along the coast for many leagues, it is said even for three hundred, and landed on what he considered to be the territory of the Grand Cham. But he encountered no human being, although there were marks that the region was inhabited. He planted on the land a large cross with the flag of England, and, from affection for the republic of Venice, he added the banner of St. Mark, which had never before been borne so far. On his homeward voyage he saw on his right hand two islands, which for want of provisions he could not stop to explore. After an absence

1497
of t
wh
and
him
and
him
man
the i
be tl
ships
wher
spice
with
Febr
coordin
age, a
king,
woul
trace
summe
his em
this fi
III
birth,
of his
longiti
China
with y
In Ma
lustre
Trinity
barked
be sent
Sebasti
of age,
compan
to Cath
had left