

# LE COURRIER DU LIVRE

VOL. III. — No 26

---

## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

---

### IV

#### THE LANDFALL (1)

Here is the gordian knot. The difficulty effectively lies in the famous inscription which can be seen on Cabot's map, at the North extremity of Cape Breton, near the spot now called Cape North :

PRIMA TIERRA VISTA, or, *the first land seen*. This land, says the explanatory legend of the map, was discovered by Joan Caboto, a Venetian, and Sebastian Caboto, his son, in the year of Our Lord MCCCCXCIIII, the twenty-fourth of June in the morning ; they called it by the name of *prima tierra vista*, and to a large island in the neighborhood of the said land the name of Saint Joan was given, it having been discovered on the day of the feast of Saint John.

So the Cabotian map says. The first land seen when he reaches America is Cape Breton. It was, we must remember the date well, on the 24th June 1494 !

This land was called by Cabot *Prima tierra vista* !

The same day, he discovers the Island of St. John !

Evidently, Cabot, junior, had already, in 1544, lost his memory, for he puts his voyage three years back. It is no more 1497, but 1494. Some writers have tried to explain this anachronism by attributing it to an error of the engraver. Explanations of that kind are always unsatisfactory, and we are not bound to accept them. I would rather believe that it is the cartographer or the translator who has committed that error, the more so if his name was not Sebastian Cabot. Harrisse says appropriately : " The critic has then the right of

---

(1) See *Le Courrier du Livre*, vol. III, p. 8.