

The whole civilized world was then ringing with the fame of what has proved to be the greatest deed in the whole annals of geographic discovery. The paramount genius and courage of the illustrious Columbus had just planted the banner of Spain on the islands of a new continent across the dreaded Dark Ocean. It was then thought that the East Indies had been reached, and the news stirred to a remarkable degree the speculative and intrepid navigators of the age, whose great aim was the discovery of a new road to the rich land of India. Even at the English court, saith Cabot's son, "all men affirmed it to be a thing more divine than human to sail by the west to the east."

The long dormant theory of the roundness of the earth and the possibility of a westerly route to India were accepted by the keen-witted Genoese at Bristol, and he longed to emulate the achievements of his countryman, and to test practically certain bold cosmographic theories which had been developed in his own contemplative and daring mind. The passion for discovery was in possession of him who had so long been dreaming of marvellous lands beyond the sea.

Cabot probably was poor and uninfluential, and consequently he desired a patron who would assist his designs financially and give them suitable authority. Naturally he looked to his adopted sovereign for such support. Henry VII. was then on the throne of England; and it would be difficult to find a more penurious monarch, or one in temperament more unfitted to become the patron of such a noble undertaking as Cabot had in view.

In 1495 the Bristol navigator laid before the throne proposals for discovery which rivalled those of Columbus, and craved royal approval of the project. The petition was as follows :

"Please it your Highnes of your most noble and habundant grace to graunt unto John Cabotto, citizen of Venese, Lewes, Sebastyan and Sancto, his sonneys, your gracious letters patentis under your grete sele in due form, to be made according to the tenour hereafter ensuying¹ and they shall during their lyves pray God for the prosperous continuance of your most noble and Royal Astete, long to enduer."

Such is the quaint wording and spelling of the earliest document extant definitely connecting England with the New World.

The King was evidently jealous of the glorious achievement of Columbus under the patronage of Ferdinand and Isabella; and his

¹ This portion of the document is lost.