

INTRODUCTION

The European explorer who at the close of the fifteenth century¹ first sighted that portion of North America subsequently called Canada was Giovanni Caboto, of Genoa². Of Cabot's early life nothing is known. We hear of him first in 1461 when he removed from Genoa and took up his residence in Venice, probably on account of the numerous factories maintained by that republic throughout the Levant. On one of his trading voyages to the eastern Mediterranean, Cabot, who in 1476 was naturalized a Venetian citizen,³ made his way via Alexandria and the Red Sea to, as he asserts, Mecca,⁴ which city was then the greatest mart in the world for the exchange of the goods of the west for those of the east. On inquiry whence came the spices, perfumes, silks and precious stones offered at Mecca for barter, Cabot was informed that they were brought by caravan from the northeastern part of further Asia.⁵ Being versed in a knowledge of the sphere, it occurred to him that this merchandise might be transported to Europe by sailing straight across the western ocean. Compared with the long camel route from northeastern Asia to Mecca and thence to Alexandria and Venice, the voyage by water from Asia to Europe would effect a veritable revolution in trade. The first step in such a change was to find the course across the western ocean from Europe to Asia.

1. For an account of the voyages of the Northmen, vid. A. M. Reeves, *The Finding of Vineland the Good*, London, 1890; and J. E. Olson, *The Voyages of the Northmen* in Volume I. of the *Original Narratives of Early American History*, edited by J. F. Jameson, New York, 1906.

2. H. Harrisse, *Jean et Sébastien Cabot*, 13-35, Paris, 1882.

3. After fifteen years' residence or domicile. Vid. Doc. Ita., p. 1.

4. Doc. Xa., p. 20.

5. Ibid.