

ENGLISH DISCOVERY
OF
THE AMERICAN CONTINENT

BY JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT.

To C. S. PERCEVAL, Esq., Dir. Soc. Ant.



Herbert T. Irving

MY DEAR PERCEVAL,

While there remain any in this utilitarian age who value accuracy in history, the date of the discovery of the continent of America by English vessels will not be regarded as unimportant. It is well known that Columbus, whose great achievement of 1492 has placed him on a pinnacle of renown which neither rivalry nor detraction can ever eclipse or undermine, was himself preceded in the actual discovery of *terra firma* by John and Sebastian Cabot. It was not till 1498 that that prince of navigators lighted on the north coast of South America, whereas it is a fact beyond all question that in 1497 John Cabot, accompanied by his son Sebastian, was on the east coast of North America. The question is, whether in that year they discovered that coast for the first time, or whether in 1494 it had been already seen by them, though possibly not explored. Both these suppositions have had their advocates at different periods, but in later years the materials for forming a sound judgment on the question have much increased under our hands, and I should not be occupying your time now if I were not of opinion that the entire collection of documents in our possession is sufficient to enable us to come to a decided conclusion.

The belief that the first discovery was made in 1494 is no novelty. As far back as the year 1594 a German named Nathaniel Kochlaf, but better known by the name of Chytraeus, published at Herborn, in Nassau, a little work entitled *Variorum in Europa Itinerum Deliciae*, in which he prints a large variety of legends which he met with in his travels. In the year 1556 he saw at Oxford a map professing to be by Sebastian Cabot, containing nineteen inscriptions, which he transcribed and printed. Of these the two numbered respectively 8 and 17