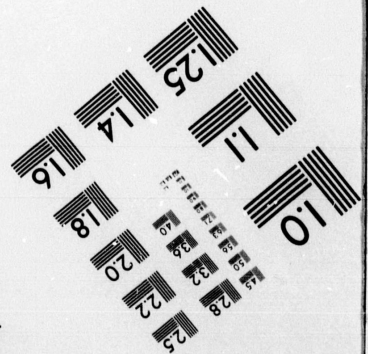
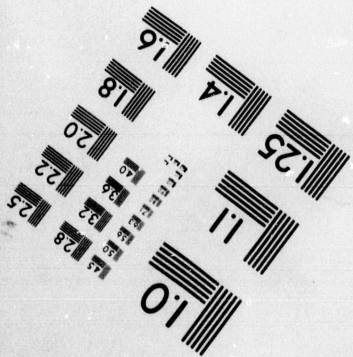
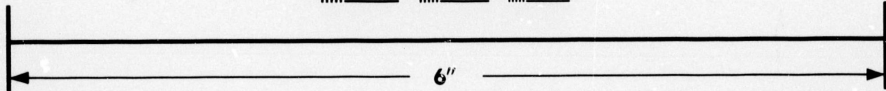
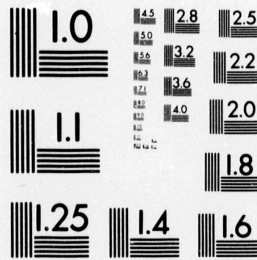


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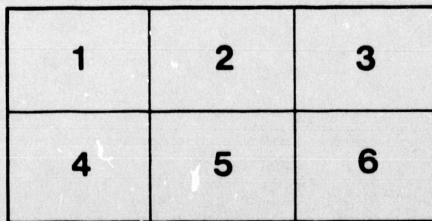
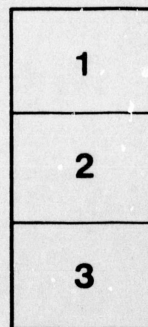
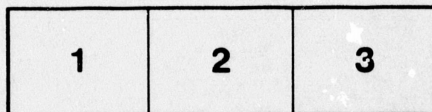
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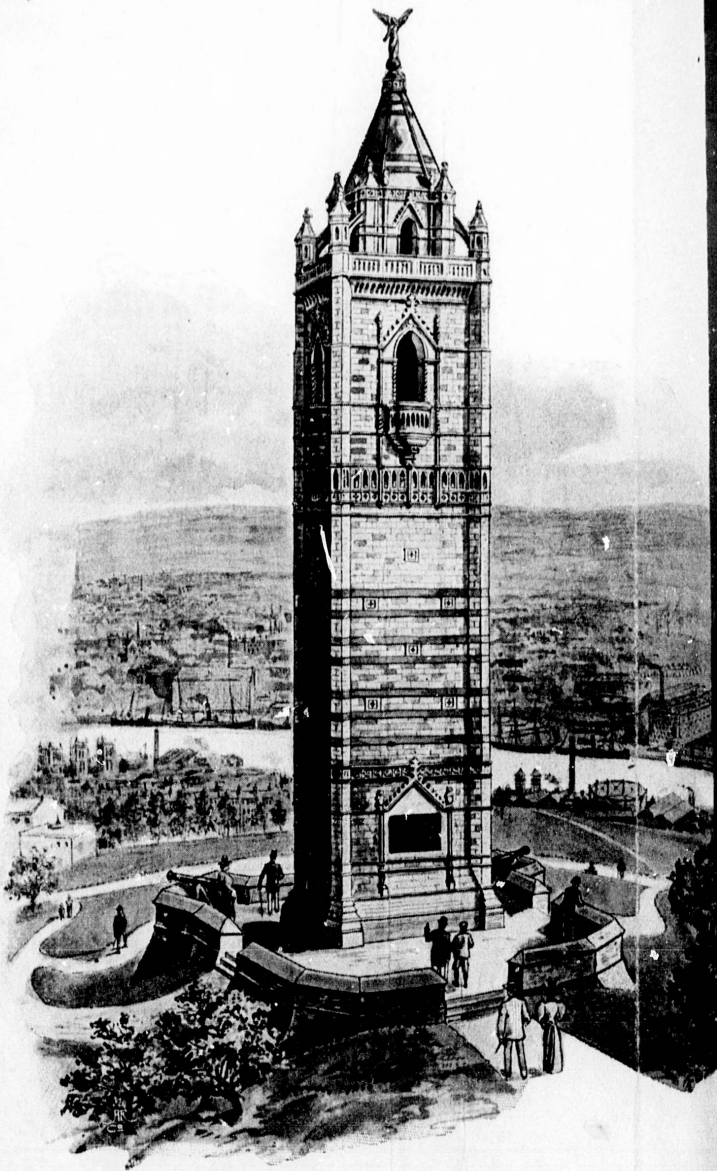
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Compiled for

Bristol, 8th March, 1891.

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A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF

THE CABOTS

AND THE

First Discovery of the Continent of America.

Compiled for the Cabot Celebration Committee by WALTER WILLIAM HUGHES,
Member of the Bristol Town Council.

Bristol, 8th March, 1897.

INTRODUCTION.

SOME few years ago John Taylor, the late City Librarian, thought some public recognition should be made in Bristol of the discovery of the continent of America by the Cabots, and was arranging for an iron tablet to be placed on Bristol Bridge, under the auspices of the Clifton Antiquarian Club. A more ornamental Bronze Tablet was afterwards agreed to, and with the assistance of Mr. A. T. Martin, one of the masters of Clifton College (the design and inscription being approved by both the Club and the Council), the tablet was fixed on St. Augustine's Bridge, being unveiled by Mr. R. H. Symes, Mayor, on May 4th, 1894; Alderman F. J. Fry remarking on that occasion that he hoped it would lead to the erection of a more important memorial in the future. I do not know how long we should have waited for this had Bristol been left to itself in the matter; but the advent of the Canadian deputation last year with the information that Canada had determined to celebrate the 400th Anniversary roused our city at last, and it seems now that a suitable monument will be erected here.

Richard Hakluyt, of Welsh extraction, born in or near London, 1553, the historian of the early voyages to America, from whom we gain much information respecting Cabot, first published a work, *Touching the Discoverie of America*, in 1582. In 1584 he obtained the grant of the next vacant prebend at Bristol. In the spring of the following year, feeling anxious about the reversion of the prebend, he again visited England and exhibited in person on the 24th May, 1585, before the Chapter of Bristol Cathedral,

the Queen's mandate for the coveted vacancy already signed and sealed. Before the close of the year the reversion fell to him, and in 1586 he was admitted to the prebend, which he held, with his other preferments, till the time of his death in 1616.

This statement I have myself verified by a reference to the register of prebendaries kept in the Chapter House of Bristol Cathedral, by which it appears that Richard Hackluyt, A.M., was appointed prebendary in 1586 (no day or month mentioned), and his successor was appointed on December 4th, 1616, so that he held the appointment for thirty years. His stall in the Cathedral was No. 1, and is the same now held by Canon Ainger, Master of the Temple. The Chapter Books of this period are supposed to have been destroyed at the time of the Bristol riots.

THE DISCOVERY.

THE close of the 15th century witnessed an unparalleled excitement in England, and especially in Bristol (England's chief western port), whose citizens were strongly animated with the desire to rival and surpass the Portuguese, Spanish, and other nations in maritime enterprise. The Portuguese were constantly making fresh discoveries along the coasts of Western Africa in the expectation (afterwards realised) of reaching India by sea. It was also averred that the island of Madeira had been strangely discovered by a native of Gloucestershire (Macham by name), who was driven thither by a storm on his voyage to Spain. But what mysterious lands lay beyond the Western Ocean? Legends had been told that the Irish St. Brendan (from whom Brandon Hill takes its name) had in the 6th century sailed with twelve chosen monks, and reached a land of wondrous beauty and fruitfulness, neither hot nor cold, and lit with eternal day. Also of Madoc, a chieftain of Wales, that he had in the 12th century successfully crossed the Atlantic and founded a Celtic colony in a Western World. The hardy mariners and adventurous merchants of Bristol were determined to unravel the mystery, and the first recorded attempt to do so was made in the year 1480 (twelve years before the voyage of Columbus). In the chancel of the cathedral of South Bristol, the beautiful church of St. Mary Redcliffe, we may still see a well-preserved Brass inlaid with the effigies of John Jay and his wife, with smaller figures of their family—six sons and eight daughters. The wife was the sister of the celebrated William Wyrcestre (or Botoner), the topographer of Bristol, who writes thus concerning the maritime adventures of John Jay, junr., probably one of the sons depicted on the Brass:—

1480.—Extract from the Chronicle of William Wyrcestre (Botoner), himself a native of Bristol. Translated from Latin :

“ . . . in 1480, on July 15th, the ship of John Jay, the younger, of 80 tons, and another, began a voyage from Kingroad in search of the island of Brasylle, to the west of Ireiland, ploughing their way through the sea, that Thomas Lyde, the most scientific mariner in all England, was the pilot, that news came to Bristol on September 18th that the ships sailed about the

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sea during nine months (? weeks) and did not find the island, but driven by tempests they returned to a port on the coast of Ireland for the repose of themselves and the mariners."

1498.—Don Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish Envoy to England, writing to his sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, on July 25th, 1498, says:

"The men of Bristol send out every year two, or three, or four light caravels in search of the island of Brasylle and the Seven Cities, according to the fancy of that Italian Cabot, and this they have done for the last seven years."

We may well feel proud of the Bristolians of that period, who were undeterred by repeated failures, but persevered until at last success crowned their gallant efforts. When we think of the size of their vessels (mere cockle-shells compared with the ships of the present day), and think of their encountering the mighty waves and furious storms of the Atlantic, not knowing what lay beyond, we cannot sufficiently admire or praise too much the hardihood, spirit, and tenacity of purpose of those who manned them. We can picture the captain and crew at the end of each weary day thinking of the possibilities of the morrow, and each morning scanning the distant horizon in hopes of seeing the wished-for land; and then, voyage after voyage, having at last to turn back disappointed on their long homeward way, no longer buoyed with hope, but bearing only a record of another failure.

It is thought that Columbus himself visited Bristol, and possibly in one of Canynges' ships sailed to Iceland in 1477, where he probably heard of the ancient Icelandic discoveries of Greenland and Vinland.

In 1492 the news came that Columbus had sighted the first western land, and although this was only an island (St. Salvador or Watling Island—one of the Bahamas), several other and larger islands, Cuba, Jamaica, etc., were quickly discovered, and Bristol's enthusiasm for further discoveries rose to fever height.

According to Ayala's letter (previously referred to) Giovanni Cabota (or John Cabot) must have been in Bristol about the year 1491. In various chronicles his name is spelt in no less than seventeen different ways. It is uncertain whether he was a Genoese or a Venetian, though probably the former: letters of naturalisation having been granted to him by the Senate of Venice in 1476. He probably resided at Cathay, Redcliffe, at that time a suburb of Bristol; foreigners not being allowed to live within the walls of the city. The enterprise of the Bristol merchants, Thorne, Elliott, and others, enabled him to apply for and obtain a patent from Henry VII., dated 5th March, 1496, authorising himself and his sons, Lewis, Sebastian, and Sanctus, to seek and discover previously unknown lands.

An ancient manuscript belonging to the Fust family, of Hill Court, Gloucestershire, threw further light on the subject and the date of the first expedition. Mr. William George, of this city, has himself seen this manuscript, which was unfortunately destroyed in the fire at Mr. Kerslake's. "This year, 1497, on St. John the Baptist's day, the land of America was found by the merchants of Bristowe in a ship of Bristow called the *Matthew*; the which said ship departed from the port of Bristow the 2nd of May, and

came home again 6th August following.' We can imagine the little ship, manned by only eighteen men, nearly all Bristolians, dropping down the river very quietly after the experience of so many failures; but when it returned after the glorious discovery of the New Found Land, with what joy it must have been welcomed back again! The ship's course, instead of following Columbus's more southern route, had been boldly steered northward, and land was in consequence reached in a much shorter time.

A letter from Lorenzo Pasqualigo, an Italian, to his brother says:

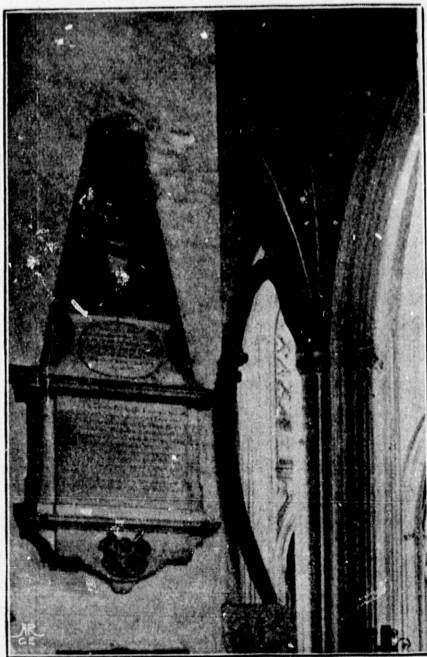
"The Venetian, our countryman, who went with a ship from Bristol in quest of New Islands, is returned and says that seven hundred leagues hence he discovered land, the territory of the Grand Cham. . . . His name is Zuan Cabot. . . . Vast honour is paid him. . . . These English run after him like mad people, so that he can enlist as many of them as he pleases."

Some writers assert that this voyage was in 1494, as that date appears in S. Cabot's map of 1544: but this is probably only a clerical error; the first letter of **VII** not having been joined at the bottom, appeared as **VIII**.

It is highly probable that an actual relic of this voyage, resulting in the first discovery of the continent of America, may be seen by any visitor to the church of St. Mary Redcliffe. On a corbel in a conspicuous position may be seen the large bone of a whale, which has been for years past the subject of a palpably absurd legend representing it to be the rib of the "Dun Cow" which supplied the builders with milk.

A record was however extant in the year 1868, certified by Mr. Tovey in a communication to the *Bristol Observer* of that year, as under: "1497—Item. Paid for setyngge upp ye bone of ye bigge fyshe and . . . (writing illegible) hys worke brote over seas, vid. For two rings of iron iiij*d*."

Mr. Tovey was a great friend of Mr. Garrard, the city treasurer at that time, and both were well known to many still living, who would receive their testimony with the utmost confidence. And this record seems clearly to show that the bone was placed in the church as a trophy and memorial of the discovery of the New World across the seas.



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On 13th December, 1497, Henry VII. grants a pension of £20 per annum: "To our well beloved John Cabot an annuities of £20 out of the customs of the port of Bristowe."

We are indebted to Biddle, an American, who, after a fortnight's search in the Rolls Chapel, found the next patent of Henry VII. loose and uncatalogued. It is dated 3rd February, 1498, confirming the discovery of the "Lande and Isles," and granting fresh powers.

April 1st, 1498. "Two loans of £30 each to Thirkall and Bradly, and a gratuity to John Carter for going to the New Ile."

The second expedition consisted of five vessels—one returning to Ireland damaged. A great many men appear to have gone with this fleet, some of whom probably intended to settle in the New Land. A large extent of coast line appears to have been traversed; but the expedition failed to realise the hopes of the adventurers, and the date of its return is unknown.

I think we may be assured from the patents of 1497 and 1498 that John Cabot commanded the first expedition, and that his sons accompanied him. He, therefore, is entitled to the honour of the first discovery of the Continent of America. Whether he or Sebastian alone commanded the second expedition is a matter of doubt and controversy. But the importance of both voyages cannot be overstated.

The name of John Cabot now disappears from history.

It is strange so little is known of John Cabot. Whether he died before or after the second expedition, the probability is he died in Bristol, and that his unknown grave is within the precincts of St. Mary Redcliffe.

A print of John Cabot and his three sons, from a painting in the Ducal Palace, Venice, copied in 1763, has the following inscription upon it:

Translation:

"In the year 1496 Henry VII., King of England, appointed John Cabot and Sebastian his son, astronomers and most skilful seamen his admirals, by letters, ordering them to find a way by which they might shorten the voyage to the East Indies by the far North. Though this hope was lost to them, nevertheless by navigation [they] discovered the New Land and Cape Florida."

We have now to consider the celebrated map of Juan de la Cosa, a Spaniard, one of the companions of Columbus. He made it in the year 1500; and on it appear on the coast-line of America points marked by five English flags. Near the most southerly point is the inscription in Spanish: "Sea discovered by the English," and the northern point is called "Cape of England." This map from its date cannot refer to any other discoveries than those of the Cabots. These were evidently acknowledged, however unwillingly, by Spain, and this map is the first title-deed of England's rights to that part of the new-found land of North America. This map was taken away by the French during their occupation of Spain; but was afterwards found in Paris, and is now jealously guarded in Madrid.

The exact landfall or spot where the Cabots first landed cannot be absolutely identified. Some authorities believe it to be the southern part of

Labrador, and others the northern part of Nova Scotia in the neighbourhood of Cape Breton, the "Prima Terra Vista" of Sebastian Cabot's map of 1544.

Sebastian Cabot now figures prominently in the history of the times, in Spain, England, and elsewhere. He lived through several reigns, and attained a great age. He was indeed a most remarkable man, full of power, intelligence, and ceaseless energy, and held in high estimation by the monarchs he served under both in Spain and England. He also attained great eminence as a cartographer and scientific observer, especially with regard to the variation of the mariner's needle. Very few men in history have led such a varied and eventful life.

SEBASTIAN CABOT'S BIRTHPLACE.

It has hitherto been generally accepted that Sebastian Cabot was born in Bristol, though of course, as his parents were Italians, it was quite natural he should be claimed sometimes by their countrymen as one of themselves. Richard Eden, the historian, who knew him intimately, writes; "Sebastian Cabot toulde me that he was borne in Brystowe, and that at iiij years old he was carried with his father to Venice, and so returned agayne into England with his father after certayne years, whereby he was thought to have been born in Venice." This note was made by Eden in a translation of Peter Martyr, by whom Sebastian Cabot was called a Venetian, and it was made in correction of that statement. HARRISSE, a writer of the present day (an American living in Paris), thinks that even this personal statement cannot be relied on, as not only Peter Martyr but Ramusio and Contarini (all Italians, however) speak of him as Venetian born. Ramusio's evidence is, however, only secondhand, as he says it was told him by some one else whose name is unknown, but who is constantly referred to by HARRISSE as the "Mantuan gentleman."

I cannot help thinking the distinct testimony of Cabot himself, vouched for by Eden, may fairly be accepted. Eden himself calls him that "goode olde man"; and Peter Martyr says: "Cabot is my very friende whom I use famyliarly, and delyte to have him sometymes keepe me company in myne owne house."

Born of Venetian parents and Venetian born are easy transpositions, and Italians may have readily fallen into the mistake. At this distance of time I do not think it fair to assume that either of the narrators was guilty of intentional misstatements. Sebastian Cabot is described as an Englishman in various English and Spanish records.

The subsequent events in Sebastian Cabot's life can only be noticed briefly.

Henry VII. was evidently disappointed by the account of the newly discovered land, and England itself was in a very disturbed state.

1499.—Sebastian Cabot is said to have made a third voyage to America, and brought home three natives; but this does not appear authentic.

In 1501 a patent was granted to Rich^d. Warde, Thomas Ashehurst, and John Thomas, of Bristol, for another expedition; and again in 1502 to the same, with the addition of Hugh Elliott. No results are on record.

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There is no further record of Sebastian Cabot until 1512, when he entered the service of Spain; and in a warrant of Ferdinand, King of Arragon (October 20th, 1512), appointing him naval captain, he is distinctly described as "Sebastian Caboto Ingles."

1512 to 1515.—Various Spanish records of payments to him. King Ferdinand died in 1516; and in 1517 Sebastian Cabot, in the reign of Henry VIII., took part in a voyage to the N.W. with Sir Thos. Perte, which was unsuccessful owing to Perte's "faynt" heart.

5th February, 1518.—Sebastian Cabot was appointed Pilot-Major of Spain by Charles V.

1526.—An expedition under his command sailed on April 3rd, 1526, the cost defrayed by private merchants (one being Rob^t. Thorn, probably of Bristol, but having an establishment at Seville). Further details of this voyage are given by various historians. Sebastian Cabot sailed up the river La Plata and explored that part of South America. He was absent four years, and had to contend with mutiny, fighting with the natives, sickness, privation, and other hardships. He returned to Seville in July, 1530, when, as appears somewhat usual in that ungrateful age, he was arrested, prosecuted on various charges, and finally sentenced to fines and four years banishment to Africa; but Royalty at last interfered, and the sentence was never carried out. He was reinstated in the office of Pilot-Major. Harrisse himself admits that Sebastian Cabot enjoyed a high reputation in Italy, England, and Spain, and was a skilful cartographer.

He left Spain (we cannot tell the reason) in 1547, in the reign of Edward VI.

On 29th January, 1550, Spain demanded his return, as the following records show:

"The Emperor's ambassador revived to the Lords as having commission from the Emperor in the matter of the marrying of the Lady Mary, the return of Cabot to the Emperor [and other things]; to whom answer was made by the Lords, that of the matters of the marriage, Cabot [etc.], they would deliberate and make him answer with convenient speed."

On the 21st April, 1550, an answer was given by the English Minister at Madrid to the Emperor's request for Cabot, to the effect that "Cabot was not detained in England; but that he of himself refused to go to Spain or the Emperor; and that *he being the King's subject*, no reason nor equity would that he should be forced to go against his will."—Nicolas' *Edward VI.*

Spain stopped Cabot's pension; but Edward VI. granted him an annuity of £116 : 13 : 4 "in consideration of good services done and to be done unto us by our beloved servant Sebastian Cabot."

26th June, 1550.—A warrant ordered to the Exchequer to pay unto Sebastian Cabotto £200 (equivalent to £2000 in our currency) by way of the King's Majesty's reward.

1551.—Sebastian Cabot advised the Merchant Venturers' Company, London, of which he became the first governor, to attempt a north-east voyage; and an expedition sailed, under the command of Willoughby and Chancellor. They rounded the North Cape and proceeded eastward; but Willoughby never returned, both himself and crew having been found by

Russian fishermen frozen to death. Rich^d. Chancellor, however, penetrated to the White Sea, where he was received by the Russians with great astonishment, and laid the foundations of a very profitable trade with that empire.

Queen Mary was now on the throne of England, and Sebastian had attained a great age.

29th May, 1557.—He is deprived of half his pension, William Worthington drawing the remainder; and on 25th December, 1557, Worthington draws the whole in his own name. Cabot himself dies in obscurity. His maps and writings appear to be still in Worthington's possession in 1582, but nothing is known of what became of them afterwards: whether they were destroyed or sent to Spain it is impossible to say. If the latter, there may be still some hope of their discovery. In 1625 there could be seen in the King's gallery at Whitehall a portrait of Sebastian Cabot, and in 1792 Mr. Chas. J. Harford, of Bristol, found either this portrait or a copy in Scotland, under the circumstances related in a narrative just published by Mr. E. R. Norris Mathews, City Librarian. Mr. Harford discovered it accidentally at Slains Castle, Scotland; but Lord Erroll, to whom it belonged, would not part with it. When Lord Erroll died it came into the possession of Sir Fredk. Eden; and Mr. Harford wrote him a poem of forty-seven verses, purporting to be an appeal from Sebastian Cabot himself, asking to be restored to his native city. Sir F. Eden thereupon gave him the picture, which at Mr. Harford's decease was purchased by Mr. Rich^d. Biddle for £500 and taken to America, where it was afterwards accidentally destroyed in a fire.

The 24th of June next will be the 400th anniversary of the Cabots' great achievements. Canada is about to erect a Memorial on the other side of the Atlantic as near as possible to the spot where the Cabots first landed, and it is to be hoped that the Memorial to be erected in Bristol will be worthy of the occasion. It is intended to lay the foundation stones of both Memorials on the same day; although, in consequence of the difference in latitude, they can hardly be laid at the same moment.

Both will be laid on spots belonging to the same Empire, and will thus add an additional interest to Queen Victoria's Record Reign. What wonderful events have happened during those 400 years! Instead of the little *Matthew* of 80 tons, the swift and mighty *Campania* of 12,500 tons now makes the passage in about five days; while underneath the ocean many lines of electric telegraph convey momentary intelligence between our country and the great Continent of America, now inhabited by more than fifty millions of English-speaking people. This year we hope will be rendered still more memorable by the ratification of the treaty of International Arbitration between England and the United States; and we trust with God's blessing, peace and brotherhood may ever remain between the two great kindred nations.

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