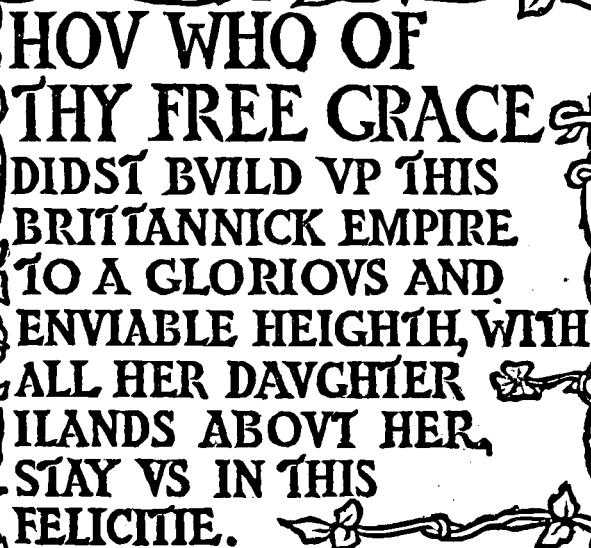


BUILDERS OF GREATER BRITAIN.



JOHN AND  
SEBASTIAN  
CABOT

C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY



**H**OV WHO OF  
THY FREE GRACE  
DIDST BVILD VP THIS  
BRITANNICK EMPIRE  
TO A GLORIOVS AND  
ENVIABLE HEIGHTH, WITH  
ALL HER DAUGHTER  
ILANDS ABOVT HER,  
STAY VS IN THIS  
FELICITIE.

MILTON.



# BUILDERS OF GREATER BRITAIN

EDITED BY H. F. WILSON, M.A.

*Barrister-at-Law*

*Late Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge*



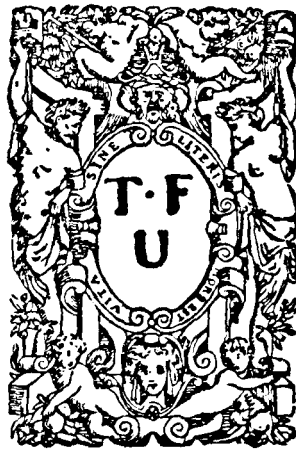
## BUILDERS OF GREATER BRITAIN

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Builders  
of  
Greater Britain

JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT





EFFIGIES SEBASTIANI CABOTI  
ANGLIE FILII ET JOHANNIS CABOTI VICE-  
REGII MELITENSIS AVENTURIS PRIMUM IN ET  
ORIENTIS TERRA NOVA SIVE VIRGINIAE  
INTELLIGENS

SPES MEA IN DEO EST

SEBASTIAN CABOT.

# JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT

THE DISCOVERY OF NORTH AMERICA

BY

C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY

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"PRINCE HENRY THE NAVIGATOR"

"THE DAWN OF MODERN GEOGRAPHY"

*With Photogravure Frontispiece and Maps*

LONDON

T. FISHER UNWIN  
PATERNOSTER SQUARE

MDCCCXCVIII



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## P R E F A C E

A GOOD many volumes and essays have already appeared upon the subject of the Cabot voyages; the details of these ventures have already been studied with the greatest minuteness; and perhaps no events in the history of exploration have been the cause of more perplexing and voluminous controversy. Since the modern Cabot literature began with the appearance of R. Biddle's (American) Memoir in 1831, the educated opinion both of Europe and America has been changed in several important respects. It is no longer possible to speak (with Burke) of Sebastian Cabot as the discoverer of Newfoundland, to the exclusion of his father; it is no longer possible to exult with Biddle and Nicholls over Sebastian's extraordinary purity of motive and elevation of character. On the other hand, a distinguished scholar has laboured to prove, not merely that

the well-praised Sebastian, being a man and not a demigod, had his full share of human feelings, but that among all the treacherous intriguers and self-advertising nonentities of old time there is no figure more disreputable than that of John Cabot's more famous son. In this statement of the case, few we imagine will be found to support M. Harrisse without qualification ; but no one can work at any part of the story of the great age of discovery without admiring and profiting by the admirable industry and close argument of this eminent student.

The simple facts, so far as they are yet recovered, present us with two Italians of great ability,—not unlike Columbus, perhaps still more like Verrazano, in their careers,—who played an important part (like so many others of their countrymen) in the expansion of Europe and Christendom at the end of the Middle Ages. Whatever we may say of Sebastian the son, John Cabot the father certainly gave England her “title” in the New World, by his discoveries of 1497 and 1498. Again, whatever may be said to Sebastian's discredit in other matters, he certainly took an important share in bringing about that voyage of 1553 which opened the

Russian trade by means of the White Sea, gave our merchants their first glimpse of Persia and Central Asia, and was at least one starting point of the Elizabethan revival of trade, discovery, and colonial extension. Of John Cabot we know nothing that is not honourable ; the modern researches in Italian and English archives have "bettered" his reputation more than that of almost any other navigator of the time ; there are few, indeed, among the more shadowy great men of the Tudor age who have won so much from nineteenth-century study. By the necessity of the case the son has lost where the father has gained ; Sebastian's position in the sixteenth century was largely manufactured out of exploits which really belonged to his father ; and as the true proportion has been recovered, the heroic ideal of Peter Martyr and Ramusio has become unrecognisable. Much of the "Sebastianised" history of the early annalists may have been due to their confusion rather than to his misdirection ; but if he had always fairly recognised his father's part and mentioned his father's name, we could not have had such a picture of the first Cabot voyages as is painted for us by the chroniclers

in Chapter V. of this volume. Beyond doubt, Sebastian Cabot allowed his father to be defrauded in silence of much of the credit that was justly his ; beyond doubt also Sebastian had small scruple about the Government he served, or the way in which he was prepared to transfer his services. Yet both he and his father did something towards the creation of Greater Britain, and no list of its "Builders" could be complete without a mention of both names. For if only from the fact that Sebastian's life-work is to a great extent inseparable from John's, and that the one is in so many respects the complement of the other, we must join with the discoverer of "Canada" that other figure, so much more fully known to history, in all its weaknesses, the friend of Eden and of Burrough, the first Governor of our Incorporated Company of Merchant Adventurers or of Muscovy.

In preparing this volume, I have had the invaluable advice of Mr. C. H. Coote of the Map Department in the British Museum, who has read all the manuscript, and made many suggestions. His views, it must be said, differ from those expressed here on the birthplace of

Sebastian Cabot, and the part of North America represented in the map of Juan de la Cosa. Among modern writings those of M. HARRISSE have been found most helpful ; his French and English Cabot volumes of 1882 and of 1896 contain the best (though often highly controversial) treatment as yet attempted of this subject ; the studies of Deane, Dawson, Tarducci, Desimoni, and Coote (in the "Dictionary of National Biography") may perhaps be considered as next in value to the work of M. HARRISSE ; a full list of Cabot literature will be found in the two Appendices to this volume.

One great defect, however, as it seems to me, may be noticed in almost all treatises on this question ; and that is in the usual handling of the evidence. Nowhere, as far as I know, have the leading documents as a whole been presented to the reader as the backbone of the *narrative* ;<sup>1</sup> yet nowhere is a general and accurate view of the small mass of first-hand testimony more essential than in the Cabot controversy. This

<sup>1</sup> M. HARRISSE, *Jean et Sébastien Cabot*, gives them, not in the history and biography, but (with a vast mass of collateral evidence) in what is really a "Mémoire pour servir."

accordingly has been made the leading feature of the present study. For however much our views may differ on disputable points, all alike must reckon with the original records and start from them; sometimes it appears hopeless to reconcile the discrepancies that confront us, and we must be content with registering the evidence—carefully excluding from our text, except for purposes of illustration, all second-hand and late testimony, and trusting to future discoveries to clear up some at least of those points which still remain ambiguous.

C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY.

MERTON COLLEGE, OXFORD,

*February, 1898.*

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