

FIFTEENTH CENTURY

CABOT'S VOYAGES

VOLUMES have been written on the subject of the actual land-fall of the Cabots; in their first voyage in 1497, and as to whether the kudos of this great event was due to John, the father, or Sebastian, his son. Many lengthy discussions, frequently not devoid of considerable heat, have taken place from time to time, on these points, but so far as the object of this enquiry is concerned, very little can be gleaned of a tangible nature. About all that may be relied upon with any degree of certainty, is the fact, that the voyage took place in the year 1497, and that John Cabot commanded the expedition.

It is to the very meagre details of this discovery given by contemporary writers, we must look for such information as is at all worthy of consideration, and even this is hopelessly mixed up.

The only real authentic contemporary references to the first Cabotian voyage of 1497, are contained in three letters still preserved, in the archives of the respective countries. They were all written from London, shortly after Cabot's return, and there can be no question of their authenticity. The first of these letters was from Lorenzo Pasqualigo, a Venetian gentleman, residing in London at the time, to his brother in Venice, and is dated August 23rd, 1497, only seventeen days after Cabot's return to Bristol. It reads as follows:—

“The Venetian, our countryman, who went with a ship from Bristol, in quest of new islands, is returned, and says that 700 leagues hence, he discovered land, the territory of the Grand Cham. He coasted for 300 leagues and landed: saw no human beings, but he has brought hither to the King certain snares which had been set to catch game, and a needle for making nets: he also found some felled trees, whereof he supposed there were inhabitants, and returned to his ship in alarm.”

The second letter is from Raimondo Soncino to the Duke of Milan, dated Dec. 18th, 1497. The third is from Pedro de Ayala, Spanish ambassador to the English Court, and addressed to his sovereign in Spain, dated July 25th, 1498. Only the first named has any reference to the inhabitants of the countries discovered, and this informs us that Cabot did not see any of them.

We have a little more detail of the second voyage of the Cabots in 1498, but still of a very unreliable character. It is quite evident that

the two voyages have been hopelessly mixed up and confused by almost all the historians and writers on the subject. All we can gather with certainty is that Sebastian Cabot drew a *mappa mundi* which was engraved by Clement Adams, in 1549, which map was hung up in the private gallery at Whitehall, and was also to be seen in many merchants' offices in London. This map, though apparently quite common at the time, has, for some unaccountable reason, disappeared, and were it not for the labours of the indefatigable chronicler, Hakluyt, we would to-day be ignorant of its ever having had an existence. Fortunately this same historian has preserved, and translated into English, a Latin inscription engraved on the map as follows:—

“In the year of our Lord 1497, John Cabot, a Venetian, and his son, Sebastian, discovered that country, which no one before his time had ventured to approach, on the 24th of June, about five o'clock in the morning. He called the land *Terra Primum Visa*, because, as I conjecture, this was the place that first met his eyes in looking from the sea. On the contrary, the island which lies opposite the land he called the Island of St John,—as I suppose, because it was discovered on the festival of St John the Baptist. The inhabitants wear beasts' skins, and the intestines of animals for clothing, esteeming them as highly as we do our most precious garments. In war their weapons are the bow and arrow, spears, darts, slings, and wooden clubs. The country is sterile and uncultivated, producing no fruit from which circumstance it happens that it is crowded with white bears, and stags of an unusual height and size. It yields plenty of fish, and these very large; such as seals and salmon: there are soles also above an ell in length¹; but especially great abundance of that kind of fish called in the vulgar tongue, *Baccalaos*². In the same island also, breed hawks, so black in their color that they wonderfully resemble ravens; besides, there are partridges, and eagles of dark plumage.”

Another industrious chronicler, Richard Edens, in his work entitled *Gatherings from writers on the New World*, printed in London, in 1555, gives a somewhat similar version of Cabot's discovery, but after relating the main fact, nearly as above, he adds:—

“Th'inhabitauntes are men of good corporature, although tawny, like the Indies, and laborious. They paynte theyr bodyes, and weare braseletts and hoops of sylver and copper. Theyr apparel is made of the skynnes of martennes, and dyvers other beastes, which they weare with the heare inwards in wynter and outwarde in soomer. This apparel they gyrde to theyre bodyes with gyrdels made of cotton or the synewes of fysshes and beastes. They eate fysshe more than any other thyng, and especially salmons, although they have fowles and fruit. They make theyre houses of timber, whereof they have great plentie; and in the steade of tyles, cover them with skynnes of fysshes and beastes.”

Again he says of these lands,

“*Jacobus Bastaldus* wryteth thus:—The Newe land of *Baccalaos* is a coulde region, whose inhabytauntes are idolatours, and praye to the Soone and moone and dyvers idols. They are whyte people, and very rustical, for they eate fleshe and fysshe and all other things rawe, Sumtymes also, they eate man's fleshe privily, so that theyr cacique have no knowledge thereof. The apparel of both men and women is made of beares skynnes, although they have sables and martennes not greatly esteemed, because they are little. Some of them go naked in the soomer, and weare

¹ Most probably Halibut which is quite abundant on these shores.

² Spanish name for Cod.

Beothucks

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apparel only in wynter....Northward from the region of Baccalaos is the land of Labrador, all full of mountaynes and great woods, in which are manye beares and wilde boares? Th' inhabitautes are idolatours and warlike people, apparelled as are they of Baccalaos. In all this newe lande is neyther citie or castell but they lye in companies lyke hearde of beastes."

Fabian, another chronicler of contemporary date, mentions that Cabot brought away with him three of the natives, "which he presented to the King (Henry VII), in the fourteenth year of his reign," i.e. 1499.

The following account of this circumstance is taken from *Kerr's Travels*, Vol. VI. pp. 3-12:

"This year also were brought unto the King, three men taken in the Newfoundland, that before I spoke of in William Purchas' time. These were clothed with beasts' skins, and ate raw flesh and spoke a language that no man could understand them, in their demeanor like to brute beasts, whom the king kept a time after, of the which upon two years past after, I saw two apparelled after the manner of Englishmen in Westminster Palace, which at that time I could not discern from Englishmen, till I learned what they were. But as for speech, I heard none of them utter one word."

Peter Martyr, in his work, *The Decades of the Ocean*, which was partly written during the lifetime of Sebastian Cabot, with whom he says he was on intimate terms, gives pretty much the same account as the foregoing. Speaking of Cabot, he says, "He declared also, that in many places of these territories he saw plenty of latten¹ amongst the inhabitants."

The above extracts contain about all the really contemporary narratives of the Cabot voyages, in so far as they refer to the inhabitants of these regions. Numerous writers of a later date quote garbled versions of the same references, intermixed with those of subsequent explorers, all of which are attributed to the Cabots. As an example, we find it given in Anspach's *History of Newfoundland*, 1818, thus:—

"When Cabot first landed in the Bay of Bonavista (?), he saw some people painted with ochre and clothed with deer skins, formed into a sort of gown without sleeves, that reach about half-way down the legs and arms, and beaver skins about their necks. Their legs and feet were bare, and their heads uncovered. They wore their hair pretty long with a great lock plaited before; their hair was of different colors² and their clothes as well as their bodies were painted red. Broughton adds they had some knowledge of a supreme being; that they believed that men and women were originally created from a certain number of arrows stuck fast in the ground, and that the dead went into a far country to make merry with their friends."

So soon as the Cabot discoveries became generally known, Spain immediately set up a claim to the new lands found, on the ground of their forming part of the Indies which that nation considered its exclusive territory. Ayala, the Spanish Ambassador in England, writing to his sovereigns, Ferdinand and Isabella, says,

"I have seen the course and distance he (Cabot) takes; think that the land they have found or seek is that which your Highnesses possess, for it is the end

¹ Webster defines this term "latten" to mean thin sheets of burnished brass, or tin-plate, but it is so improbable the natives should possess such things. I conclude it may have been sheets of mica (?).

² This is not correct. The hair was always black; presumably it was smeared with red ochre, which explains the mistake (?).

of that which belongs to your Highnesses, by the convention with Portugal... I believe the distance is not 400 leagues and I told him that I thought they were the islands discovered by your Highnesses, and I even gave him a reason, but he would not hear it"...Speaking of the map drawn by Cabot, he says—"I have it here; and to me it seems very false, to give out that they are not the same islands¹."

The cartographical delineations of all these newly discovered regions soon began to assume a more definite form, but for a long time subsequently, the latitudes and longitudes, more especially the latter, were extremely erroneously laid down. The new lands, found towards the north, were placed fully twenty degrees too far east. In consequence of this error, Portugal now set up a claim, based upon the celebrated *línea divisionis*, agreed upon between it and the Spanish nation. It was found that by extending this line towards the north pole, it, apparently, included the whole of the Terra de Bacalaos of Cabot².

On the strength of this claim the Portuguese king equipped and dispatched two caravels under the command of Gaspar de Cortereal, a distinguished and enterprising gentleman, "who was filled with an ardent desire for exploration, and thirsted after glory³."

The expedition set out in the early part of the summer of 1500, from Lisbon, and returned in October.

First Voyage of Gaspar de Cortereal, in 1500.

For the fullest and clearest account of this voyage we are indebted to Pietro Pasqualigo, Venetian ambassador at the court of Portugal, who wrote to his brother in Italy only eleven days after Cortereal's return. Fortunately this letter was preserved, and published at Vicenza, in 1501, in a work entitled: *Paesi nuovamente ritrovati et novo mondo da Alberico Vesputis Florentini Intitutado*.

The letter runs as follows:—

"On the eighth (8th) of the present month (October), one of the two caravels which His Most Serene Majesty despatched last year on a voyage of discovery to the north, under the command of Gaspar Cortereal, arrived here (Lisbon), and reports the finding of a country distant hence west and north, 2000 miles, heretofore quite unknown. They proceeded along the coast between 600 and 700 miles without reaching its termination, from which circumstance they conclude it to be the mainland connected with another region, which last year was discovered in the north but which the caravel could not reach on account of the ice and the vast quantity of snow, and they are confirmed in their belief by the multitude of great rivers which they found, which certainly did not proceed from an island. They say that this country is very populous, and that the dwellings of the inhabitants are constructed with timber of great length and covered with the skins of fishes.

"They have brought hither of the inhabitants, seven in all, men, women, and children, and in the other caravel, which is looked for every hour, there are fifty more. They are of like colours, figure, stature, and respect, and bear the greatest

¹ Prowse's *History of Newfoundland*.

² It was the same line extended southward, which gave Brazil to Portugal.

³ Damiano Goes, *Chronica do felicissimo Rey Dom Emanuel*.

Gaspar de Cortereal

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resemblance to the Gypsies; are clothed with the skins of different animals, but principally the otter. In summer, the hairy side is worn outside, in winter the reverse, and these skins are not in any-way sewed together or fastened to the body, but just as they come from the animal are wrapped about the shoulders and arms; over the parts which modesty directs to be concealed, is a covering made of the sinews or entrails of fishes¹. From this description they may appear mere savages, yet they are gentle, and have a strong sense of shame, and are better made in the legs, arms, and shoulders, than it is possible to describe. They puncture the face like the Indians, exhibiting six, eight and even more marks.

“The language they speak is not understood by anyone, though every possible tongue has been tried with them. In this country, there is no iron, but they make swords of a kind of stone, and point their arrows with the same material. There has been brought hence a piece of a broken sword, inlaid with gold, which we can pronounce undoubtedly to have been made in Italy; and one of the children had in his ears two pieces (todini) of silver, which as certainly appear to have been made in Venice,—a circumstance which induces me to believe that their country belongs to the continent, since it is evident, that, if it had been an island where any vessel had touched before this time, we should have heard of it. They have great plenty of salmon, herring, stock-fish, and similar kinds of fish. They have also, abundance of timber, and principally of pine, fitted for the masts and yards of ships; on which account His Serene Majesty anticipates the greatest advantage from this country, both in furnishing timber for his shipping, of which he at present stands in great need, and also from the men who inhabit it, who appear admirably fitted to endure labour, and will probably turn out the best slaves that have been discovered up to this time. The arrival appeared to me an event of which it was right to inform you; and if on the arrival of the other caravel, I receive any additional information, it shall be transmitted to you in like manner.”

From all the foregoing extracts, it will be seen that there is very little of a really reliable character, with regard to the aborigines of this island, and it appears very doubtful to me whether they refer at all to our Red Indians or Beothucks. Most certainly, the people who ate raw flesh were Eskimos, as their name implies²; all other inhabitants of North America that I have ever read of cooked their food. No others but the Eskimos use the intestines of animals for clothing. It is the dress worn while hunting seals in their kayacks, and answers the same purpose as our fishermen's oil-clothing.

Those who are opposed to the theory that Cabot's landfall, on the first voyage, was on some part of the Labrador, will find their contention considerably strengthened by these contemporary extracts. It is quite conceivable why Cabot did not see any inhabitants on this cruise, if, as is supposed, he coasted along the Newfoundland shore. It is more than probable that he merely sighted or touched at the outlying points and headlands, and made no attempt to penetrate into, or explore the great bays and deep indentations of the coast. In that case, it would be very unlikely that he should meet with the Red Indians, who usually spent the summer season at the mouths of the rivers, fishing for salmon and sea-trout, or otherwise paddling about amongst the numerous archipelagoes in the northern bays in search of sea-birds and eggs.

No one doubts that the Labrador was visited on the second voyage,

¹ Intestines of seals (?).

² “Esquimaio” is the Algonquin term for raw flesh eaters.

and, as we have seen, it was then Cabot took home the three natives. All the discussions that have arisen on these points might have been avoided, had not Sebastian Cabot, or some one for him, so mixed up the events of the two voyages as to leave a perpetual doubt on the minds of subsequent writers.

Possibly the people brought back by Cortereal may have been Beothucks; his description of the country, the abundance of timber, including pine, appearance of the natives, and mode of dressing themselves, with other particulars as to their dwellings, stone implements, etc., all seem to indicate the natives of this island. Had Pasqualigo only mentioned the custom of smearing themselves with red ochre, I would have considered it proof positive. All we can now look upon with any degree of certainty is the fact that this explorer undoubtedly visited the island, to which he gave his own name,—“Tiera de Cortereal,” as it appears upon Ribero’s and many other of the earlier maps.

SIXTEENTH CENTURY

CORTEREAL set out on a second voyage of discovery on the 15th of May, 1501; from which he never returned. It has been variously conjectured that either his ships were lost at sea with all their crews, or cast away on the far off rugged coasts; while some historians, with considerable show of reason, believe that the friends of those poor natives whom he so ruthlessly kidnapped, set upon, and murdered the Portuguese. His brother, Miguel, now besought the king to allow him to go in search of his lost relative, which request being granted, he sailed with two ships the following year. He also disappeared, and was never heard of again. In the following year, 1503, the king at his own expense, sent two armed ships in search of the brothers Cortereal, but did not succeed in learning anything of their fate.

A contemporary Portuguese writer, Damiano Goes, in his *Chronica do felicissimo Rey Dom Emanuel*, in relating the account of these voyages, gives some additional particulars about the inhabitants of the region, he says:—

“The people of the country, are very barbarous and uncivilized, almost equally so with the natives of Santa Cruz, except that they are white, and so tanned by the cold that the white color is lost as they grow older, and they become blackish. They are of the middle size¹, very lightly made, and great archers. Instead of javelins they employ sticks, burnt in the ends, which they use as missiles, to as good purpose as if they were pointed with fine steel! They clothe themselves in the skins of beasts, of which there are great plenty in the country. They live in caverns of rocks, and in houses shaped like nests (choupanas). They have no laws, believe much in auguries, live in matrimony, and are very jealous of their wives,—in which thing they much resemble the Laplanders, who also inhabit a northern latitude under 70° to 80° subject to the King of Norway and Sweden².”

Bancroft, quoting from *Stow's Annals*, says, “It is granted natives of North America in their wild attire, were exhibited to the public wonder of England, in 1502.” Probably those brought by Cabot(?).

Extract from the Chronicle of Eusebius, published in Paris in the year 1512, by Henri Estienne; translated from HARRISSE:—*Découverte et évolution cartographique de Terre Neuve et des pays circonvoisins*.

“Some savages have been brought from that island which is called Newfoundland, to Rouen, (in 1509, by the French ship, *Bonaventure*,—six in all) with their

¹ Cantino, who examined closely the natives brought from this place in 1501, adds that “they were of a stature higher than ours with limbs in proportion, and well formed.”

² This would seem to imply that he was writing of the Eskimos.

canoes, their clothes and their arms. They are of the colour of soot (*fulginei*)¹, have thick lips, are tatoed on the face with a small blue vein from the ear to the middle of the chin, across the jaws². The hair is thick and coarse, like a horse's mane. They have no beards nor hair on any part of the body, except the hair of the head and eyelids. They wear a belt on which is a kind of little bag to hide their private parts. They speak with their lips, have no religion, and their canoes are made of the bark of a tree. With one hand a man can place it on his shoulders. Their arms are large bows with strings of gut or sinews of animals, their arrows are of reeds pointed with a stone, or fish-bone. Their food is of cooked meat, and their drink, water. They have no kind of money, bread, or wine. They go naked or else in the skins of animals, bears, deer, sea-calves, or the like."

According to Charlevoix, savages from the north-east coast were brought to France in 1508. He says, "There is no profit at all to be obtained from the natives, who are the most intractable of men, and one despairs of taming them."

From the Miller map 1520, "Corte Real brought from this region savage men of the same colour as ourselves, living in the fashion of ancient forms and satyrs."

According to Anspach, quoting from Dr Foster, "One Thomas Hubert, or Aubert, sailed from Dieppe in this year, to Newfoundland and brought home some natives."

The spirit of enterprise and thirst for maritime discovery does not appear to have taken hold of the French, as a nation, till the reign of Francis I. This monarch, being imbued with the love of glory, caught the enthusiasm, and became eager to cope with his rivals of Spain, Portugal, and England. In the year 1523 he fitted out four ships under the command of a Florentine, one Giovanni Verazzano, to explore the new region. After a short while at sea three of the ships were disabled in a storm and put back. The commander then prosecuted the voyage alone in his ship the *Dauphin*.

Verazzano's Voyage, 1523.

The accounts of this voyage are rather obscure. It would appear, however, that on reaching the shores of this continent, Verazzano coasted along northward some six or seven hundred leagues, till he reached somewhere about the latitude of 50° N., when he returned to France. He speaks well of the savages, with whom he traded all along. At one place in particular, supposed to be about the position of Newport, he remained fifteen days. Here he says,

"The natives were the goodliest people that he had found on the whole voyage. They were liberal and friendly; yet so ignorant, that though instruments of steel and iron were often exhibited, they did not form a conception of their use, nor learn to covet their possession." (Hakluyt.)

¹ Hence our word, fuliginous, sooty, smoky, dusky.

² This is the only reference I know of as to the Beothucks tatoeing themselves. I think it doubtful. Yet otherwise the reference seems to point clearly to the inhabitants of Newfoundland.

French expeditions, Jacques Cartier

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But when he approached his northern limits he found the savages much more hostile and jealous, for, says he, "They had learned the use of iron; but in their exchanges, they demanded knives and weapons of steel."

James Stanier Clarke, F.R.S., in his book entitled *The Progress of Maritime Discovery*, 1803, says, "He (Verazzano) entered between a great island and the mainland, and sailed to 50 degrees N. latitude, trading with the natives all along."

Other accounts assert that he did not proceed beyond Cape Breton Island, where, finding the Basque fishermen already in advance of him, he gave up the voyage, and returned home. It is very uncertain whether he fell in with the natives of this island or not, but if he really passed into the Gulf of St Lawrence, or sailed as far as 50° north latitude, it is most probable that he did so. It may be inferred that the people who were so "hostile and jealous, and so eager to procure knives and weapons of steel," were those who had already been visited by the Cabots and Cortereal, i.e. either the Beothucks or Eskimo.

Some historians think that Verazzano made a second voyage to these parts, but if so, there is no authentic record of it extant.

Extract from Antonio Galvano, taken from *Purchas' Pilgrims*: "In the year 1525, Stephen Gomez sailed from the Garonne to Cuba, then coasted North by Florida. It is reported that he came to Cape Razo in 46 degrees to the North, from whence he came back again laden with slaves. The news hereof ranne by and by through Spain, that he was come home laden with cloves (clavos) as mistaking the word, but when the truth was known, it turned out to be a pleasant jest."

Voyages of Jacques Cartier, 1534—1535.

On April 20th, 1534, Cartier set out from St Malo, and arrived on the Newfoundland coast, May 10th. He put into the harbour of St Catherine (now Catalina). Here he spent ten days, refitting, when he proceeded northward, touching at the Isle des Ouaiseaux (the Funks?), presumably to procure a supply of fresh food, eggs, and sea-birds. The island was one of the principal habitats of the Great Auk, or Penguin, commonly so-called, and it was resorted to by the fishermen on the coast, from an early date, for this purpose. Even to this day, though the Auk has long been extinct, our fishermen proceeding to Labrador, still continue the practise, other sea-birds, such as the Guillemot or Murre, the Puffin, Sea-Pigeon, etc., having usurped the place of the Great Auk, breed there in great numbers.

Cartier then proceeded to the northern extremity of the Newfoundland, and put into the Harbour of Rapont (Quirpon). Here he appeared to have first met with the aborigines, with whom he traded, as well as along all the shore on the back of the island, which he explored as he sailed up

the Gulf of St Lawrence. His description of the natives, taken from Hakluyt, is beyond question the first really reliable account of the Beothucks in existence.

"These are men," he says, "of indifferente good stature and bigness, but wild and unruly. They wear their hair tied on the top like a wreath of bay, and put a wooden pin in it, or other such thing instead of a nail, and with them they bind certain bird's feathers. They are clothed with wild beasts' skins, as well the men as the women, but the women go somewhat straighter and closer in their garments than the men do, with their waists girded. They paint themselves with certain roan colours. Their boats are made of the bark of birch trees, with the which they fish, and take great store of seals, and as far as we could understand, since coming hither, that is not their habitation, but they come from the mainland out of hotter countries, to catch the said seals and all necessaries for their living."

On his second outward voyage, in 1535, Cartier does not appear to have landed anywhere on the Newfoundland coast, though he touched again at the Funk Island. He then proceeded to Blanc Sablon, on the Labrador side of the Strait of Belle Isle, from whence he cruised up the mainland side of the Gulf. Later on he is supposed to have run across from the Magdalen Islands, and sighted Cape Ray, which he called Cap. Lorraine (?), and may have harboured on some part of our southern coast. After this he sailed across the gulf, and up the river St Lawrence, where he wintered. On his return journey, in 1536, he touched at St Pierre Island, and also at Renew's Harbour, on the east coast of this island (Newfoundland), but there is no further reference to our native Indians. Cartier made two other voyages to Canada, or New France, in 1541 and 1543, but there is nothing to be learnt from them with reference to the Beothucks.

In the month of April, 1536, a Mr Hore, with a party of gentlemen, sailed from Gravesend with two ships, the *Trinity* and *Minion*, towards the New-founde-launde; they arrived at Cape Breton (?) Island, after being two months at sea.

"They then sailed towards Newfoundland, where they landed at Penguin Island¹, and found a prodigious quantity of white and grey birds, as large as geese², which they cooked and ate....Black and white bears were likewise numerous; some of them were killed, and proved to be eatable food. From this small island, they proceeded to the coast of Newfoundland, where they remained several days at anchor, without seeing any natives. At last some of them were observed rowing towards the ships: a boat was manned and sent after them, but they immediately retreated, and gaining the shore, fled to an island in the bay. This also, they left on the approach of the men who found there a fire at which the side of a bear was roasting on a wooden spit."

A more circumstantial account of the meeting with the aborigines by Mr Hore's party, was related to Richard Hakluyt by Oliver Dawbeney, a merchant of London, who accompanied the expedition, and is extracted from Barrow's *Northern Voyages*, as follows:—

¹ There are two groups of Penguin Islands on our coast, one off the southern side, near Cape La Hune, the other at the entrance to Sir Chas. Hamilton's Sound.

² The Great Auk (?) (*Alca Impennis*).