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# John and Sebastian Cabot,

A FOUR HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL  
OF THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA.

BY

HARRY HAKES, M. D.

MEMBER OF THE WYOMING HISTORICAL AND GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,  
THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA, &C., &C.

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READ BEFORE THE WYOMING HISTORICAL AND GEOLOGICAL SOCIETY,  
JUNE 24th, 1897.

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Prepared at the request of and published by the Society.



WILKES-BARRÉ, PENN'A.  
1897.



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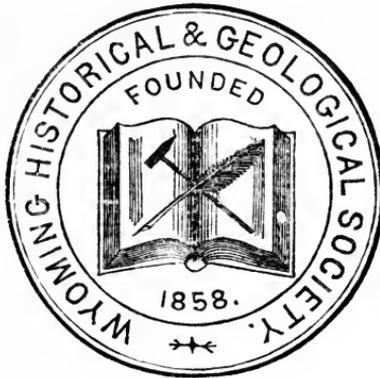
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TO THE  
SACRAMENTO

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E. B. YORDY, PRINTER,  
WILKES-BARRE.

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## JOHN AND SEBASTIAN CABOT.

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*Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen :*

Patriotism is a sentiment, a disposition of the heart, and finds many and widely different modes of exemplification and expression, as shouting, ringing bells, firing cannon, processions, fasting and prayer, music, raising monuments, and erecting arches, &c.

The celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the declaration of American independence, and the world's fair at Chicago, commemorative of the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, as well as the recent dedication of the tomb of General Grant, and the erection of a beautiful equestrian statue of George Washington, were acts indicative of a noble patriotism. Notwithstanding the history of the world shows a great preponderance of military hero-worship, rather than tributes to the grand heroes and leaders in the domain of ideas, yet there is much to encourage the thought that the grade of learning, of civilization, of philosophy and religious ethics now foreshadowed, to distinguish the past from the future, will more and more predominate, to determine that the world's greater heroes are those whose labors culminate in producing the greatest degree of universal peace and happiness without bloodshed and terror.

In this brief paper it is as impossible as unnecessary, and out of place, to attempt to produce a polished literary gem. History, however, is more than a mere chronological statement of facts. In its broader conception it must embrace

the philosophy or ideas which constitute the ground work upon which all facts are based. In other words, theory must precede action.

John Cabot, certainly, and Sebastian Cabot, possibly, were the first Europeans to discover the American continent and make record and cartographical representation of the same, preserving to all posterity the time, place and circumstance of their discovery. To the present time the American people have neglected to place one stone upon another designed to memorialize those men, or to express gratitude for the geographical discovery, which either made our great nation a possibility, or an accomplished fact. While we claim for the Cabots the distinguished honor of the first view of the American continent, technically, and in fact, we do not presume to name them as the discoverers of America, in the largest and more just sense of the phrase. That distinguished honor the world has long since accorded to Christopher Columbus, and their righteous judgment should never again be disputed. The discovery and exploration of America cannot be understood by *one* distinct statement of fact. The results of various navigations and explorations, attended with much peril and anxious solicitude, covering a period of two hundred years, makes intelligible and plain to us, what to the early navigators and explorers was chaotic and at most dubious, and solely problematical. Nor is it necessary for the purposes of this paper that we review all that early history in detail. The nautical problem and the geographical discoveries proposed by Diaz, Da Gama, Columbus, Magellan, Verrazano, and the Cabots, was not to find an unknown continent, but solely to ascertain the most feasible route to the eastern shores of Asia. At the time the Cabots made their first voyage of discovery all the knowledge that Europe possessed pertinent to the great problem, was, that Columbus had come upon islands in the Atlantic which he and all others supposed was the continent of Asia, or immedi-

ate outlying islands. That discovery was made on the eleventh day of October, A.D. 1492. When Columbus returned to Spain, in the Spring of 1493, and reported his discovery, Pope Alexander VI promptly proceeded to make partition between Spain and Portugal, of all the regions of the earth lying between Western Europe and Eastern Asia. This decree (technically called a "bull") gave all lands discovered, or to be discovered, to the west of a meridian one hundred leagues west of the Azores and Cape Verde islands to Spain, and all lands eastward of that line to Portugal. The convention of Tordesillas, June 7, 1494, fixed the line of demarcation at a meridian 370 leagues west of the Cape Verde islands. This was very acceptable to Spain and Portugal, but England recognized no such right or authority in the Papal office. In the meantime the discovery of Columbus was bruited among the English people, and at the English court. Both court and people were pricked with enterprise to compete with Spain for a share of what was to be gained by discoveries at the west. This fact is the proper introduction of the Cabots to our consideration. We need constantly to keep before our minds the total ignorance of all parties at that time of the real nature of the discovery of Columbus. Columbus supposed he had reached Eastern Asia, and no one then could dispute his claim. No correct conception was possible until twenty years had passed, and Balboa had, from the height of Darien, discovered ten thousand miles of ocean breadth between the newly discovered lands and Eastern Asia.

John Cabot, like Columbus, was a native of Genoa. He later removed to Venice, and became a citizen of that place. He migrated to England about the year 1490, with his three sons, the second of them being Sebastian, who was 24 or 25 years of age in 1497. The services of father and son are so commingled and confused by the chroniclers of their day that it is an impossible task on our part to justly distinguish and

divide the honors between them. I can find nothing more suitable with which to prelude the navigation of the Cabots, and the inspiring motives, than the statement in after years made to the Pope's Envoy in Spain by Sebastian Cabot. He says: "When news that Don Christopher Colonus (Genoese) had discovered the coasts of India, whereof was great talk in all the court of King Henry VII, who then reigned, insomuch that all men, with great admiration, affirmed it to be a thing more divine than human, to sail by the west into the east, where spices grow, by a map that was never known before. By this fame and report there increased in my heart a great flame of desire to attempt some notable thing." Whether his father was moved to the same extent and by the same desire as his son we are not informed. It is known that Sebastian Cabot was well versed in cosmography, and on his removal to Spain, some time after making his voyages for England, was commissioned pilot-major for Spain, an office he held for several years. The Cabots appear to have fully appreciated the bearing upon great circle sailing, caused by the shortening of the degrees of longitude as we move further north or south from the equator. Bearing in mind that Columbus had sailed nearly due west on the latitude of the Canary islands, discovering land after sailing 33 days and 3200 miles, the Cabots rightly reasoned, that by sailing from Bristol in England, on latitude 53 degrees north, they would come to the coast of Asia, the land that Columbus was supposed to have discovered, in about two-thirds of the time, and two-thirds of the distance, that characterized the voyage of Columbus. When this plausible theory was by them explained to King Henry, he quite readily granted a patent to John Cabot and his sons, upon apparent liberal terms and conditions, to undertake a westerly voyage of discovery. They were to sail from, and return to, the port of Bristol; must sail under the flag of England, and take possession of all lands discovered for the

British crown, and return one-fifth of the profits of the expedition to the king. King Henry was more discreet than the Spanish king, for he did not bestow upon Cabots the title of viceroy over the lands they might discover, as Ferdinand had to Columbus. The king thus wisely avoided any legal contest with the Cabots or their heirs as to great and important rights and prerogatives.

Our subject is ponderous, in that it relates to great men and greater events, therefore I must deal somewhat by wholesale, for our men are giants in the world's history, and cannot be estimated by or compared with common standards, nor can I now attempt measurements of the earth by inches. Let us for two minutes, in imagination, go back to our little old red school-house by the country roadside, and refresh our recollections in geography. Please take seats, facing the north, right hand east, left hand west, at our backs south, the Eastern hemisphere is at the right, and the Western at the left. Open your maps at the familiar old representation of the hemispheres of the earth on plane. Now we take a small brush and dip it in the blackest of black ink, indicative of total ignorance, and proceed to obscure those parts of the earth's surface of which Europeans had no knowledge, and only quite incorrect conception, on the morning of the 3d day of August, A. D. 1492. On that day Columbus sailed on his first and most important voyage to the west.

We place our brush a little to the south and west of the southerly extension of Greenland, on the 60th parallel of north latitude, and draw a line east, on that parallel, to the meridian of 25 degrees west longitude, and follow that meridian to the equator, and blacken the whole of the Western hemisphere west and south of our lines. Now draw a line from the right hand or eastern border of the Eastern hemisphere, at latitude 40 degrees north, and draw a straight line to the equator to the meridian of longitude 110 degrees

east, and follow the equator to the west border of the hemisphere. Blacken all south and east of our lines to the margin of the hemisphere. You now observe that the whole of the land of the American continent has disappeared, together with the greater portion of the Atlantic ocean, and the whole of the Pacific ocean; about one-half of Africa is in mourning, together with Australia, and the islands to the east and north and to the south to the south pole. What remains unpainted upon the hemispheres is more of the earth's surface than with which Europeans were fairly acquainted. In all the historical works of Mr. John Fiske, he has done no better service to the present or for future generations than by his persistent insistence of the necessity of our first banishing from our minds our modern maps, as preliminary to a just understanding of the difficulties that beset the early theorists and navigators. An examination of the charts and maps made by them when they attempted to delineate their new discoveries and connect them to the Eastern and better known hemisphere, will show us at once the difficulties they encountered. At the date last above given, August 3d, 1492, there was a single grand geographical problem demanding solution; and that was, "Could Europeans travel to Eastern Asia by an all water or sailing route?" There was then two theories. The Portugese had an idea that it might be possible to sail around the south of Africa, and reach the Indian ocean, which was known washed the western shores of India and China. Her daring navigators were at that very date, with doubt and trepidation, slowly ploughing the water of the Atlantic southward on the western coast, to ascertain the southern point of Africa, if there was any. At this period Columbus had determined to anticipate the project of Portugal, by a voyage directly westward over the unknown and untraveled Atlantic, making a shorter journey than by the Portugese theory. Spain, at the moment, was witnessing his departure in her

interest. Europe was on the tiptoe of excitement and hopeful expectation. The objective point of either navigation was the same; the ostensible motives the same—commerce, trade and barter; but, in fact, as was soon to be manifest, conquest and plunder. Down to the first of May, 1497, all that had been discovered for Spain by Columbus was Cuba, San Domingo, Jamaica, and half a dozen smaller islands in the immediate vicinity. Thus the problem stood on that day. Listen; a low muttering thunder reverberates over Europe. It is the threatening growl of the British lion as he breaks from his lair. He sniffs the scent of large game, a continent of royal game. His eyes are balls of fire, his claws as iron, his jaws set with teeth of steel as he crouches in preparation to seize his prey. He brushes aside the Pope's bull. The bull took to the woods or sank beneath the Atlantic's waves as the lion, with a bound, sets his claws in the soil of the American continent, while John Cabot plants the royal standard of England, June 24, 1497, recalling to us the long drawn words of a youthful play, HOLD-FAST-ALL-I-GIVE-YOU.

From that June morning 1497, England could make lawful claim to the whole American continent, by right of first discovery. That is horn-book law, sound law, from the beginning to the end of the world. The right by first discovery extends to and embraces all land connected by continuity of visible and tangible surface with the place of discovery.

John and Sebastian sailed early in May 1497, in the ship *Mathew*, with a crew of eighteen men. They took a course a little north of west and discovered land early in the morning of the 24th day of June following, after sailing by their reconing, 2100 miles. They planted the flag of England upon the land, but saw no native inhabitants. They discovered immense shoals of cod-fish on those coasts, so

dense, that they impeded the sailing of their ship. By the latter part of July following the Cabots had returned to Bristol and made report of their voyage. The precise place of their *terra prima visa* (land first seen) has never since been determined, but it is certain that it was in the region of Newfoundland, most probably at Cape Breton. And it is quite certain that upon that voyage they did not visit the coast of Labrador as some writers have asserted. Such a claim arises by commingling or reversing the places of landing of the two voyages made. King Henry was so well pleased with the reports of discovery that he gave John Cabot fifty dollars, wherewith he might *take a spree*, and in silken dress show himself to Londoners as *the* great navigator who had found, for King Henry, a shorter route to Asia than Columbus had for Spain.

A second and similar patent to the first was granted to the Cabots, and Sebastian Cabot set sail again to renew and extend the discoveries of the former voyage. He sailed in 1498, this time with five ships. As we have never heard a word again of John Cabot, nor know what became of him, it has been surmised that he died before the expedition sailed, but we cannot assert it as a fact. Sebastian Cabot certainly sailed with the fleet, and for aught we know, John also sailed. It seems strange to us that if the son knew what became of his father, he never alluded to it. Sebastian Cabot completed the second navigation, discovering land, first, on the coast of Labrador. After following the coasts northward to a high degree of latitude, and finding the weather very cold, and the coast still trending north, he turned about, following the coast southwardly, we know not precisely how far, but quite certainly not as far as Florida, as some have contended. On this voyage native inhabitants were seen on the coasts. Three were captured and taken to England. Bears and other animals were seen. Sebas-

tian Cabot made rude charts of the coasts, which in engraved form and on parchment and oxhide, may yet be seen—particularly La Cosa's map, 1500, and the Cantino map of 1502.

Of course Sebastian returned to England without having found the land of perfumes and spices which Spain, Portugal and England were so anxiously seeking, or a sailing route through the American continent by which he might sail to lands further west, (or as we understand it now, to Asia.) But Cabot at the time believed the land to be Asia, though not so rich a portion as he had expected and desired.

The final outcome of the Cabot voyages, we state in a few words. The only immediate results were to incite other navigators to go to the same regions for cargoes of codfish, and to renew the search for an all water route somewhere through the lands discovered, to the richer land, supposed to lie to the west. Their navigations were followed by Fro-bisher, Rut, Grube, Hudson, Baffin, Drake and many others.

In my "Discovery of America," published in 1892, in the early chapters will be found an epitome of early American navigators, and their relative claims to priority of discovery, to which I make neither additions or subtractions. As between John and Sebastian Cabot; we may say that John was master of the first expedition, and that Sebastian may or may not have accompanied his father. It appears more than probable that he did. Sebastian certainly sailed and reported the second expedition, and that his father was not in that voyage, but probably had died before the expedition sailed. If not so, and he did embark, a serious duty devolved upon his son, on the return of the expedition, to account for the loss of his father. As this was not done or required, the inference is irresistible that John was not in that expedition. Neither of the voyages appear to have profited either the Cabots or the king a dollar. Mainly what we learn of the Cabots' voyages is from friendly and gossiping letters, written by foreigners in England, to friends

and acquaintances in Italy, Spain and Portugal. These letters have no official authority, but contain the common talk of the people in regard of the current news of the expedition of the Cabots.

During the eighty years, succeeding the discoveries of the Cabots, England might lawfully have claimed the lands and regions of this discovery, by right of discovery. England, however, never attempted to take permanent possession of her American discoveries, until the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and in the meantime other nations had visited the lands, which tended to obscure and somewhat obliterate the English title thereto. However, in 1607 she took possession on the coast of Virginia, for the purpose of colonization, which was followed in 1620, by the pilgrims of the Mayflower, taking possession at Plymouth, on the coast of Massachusetts. England, then as ever since, never relinquished voluntarily any right once acquired to an acre of land in any part of the world. Thus it was 110 years from the discovery of Cabots, to the first attempt made by England to make a permanent settlement of her American discoveries. Of course the pioneer settlers were English stock, and brought with them English language, English laws, English customs, and above all, in power and precious utility, the spirit of political independence, and in a full measure the spirit of religious liberty. The very soil of America seemed exactly and providentially adapted to the germination and growth of the spiritual seed sown, so dear to our forefathers and so precious to us, their descendants. Had our region of North America been colonized by Portugal, France, Italy or Spain, the great nation of the United States of America would never have been born. In recollection of their mother country, there is but little wonder that our early settlers named the new possession "*New England.*"

Do you query what this country would have been or would be, under the auspices of Portugal or Spain? If so,

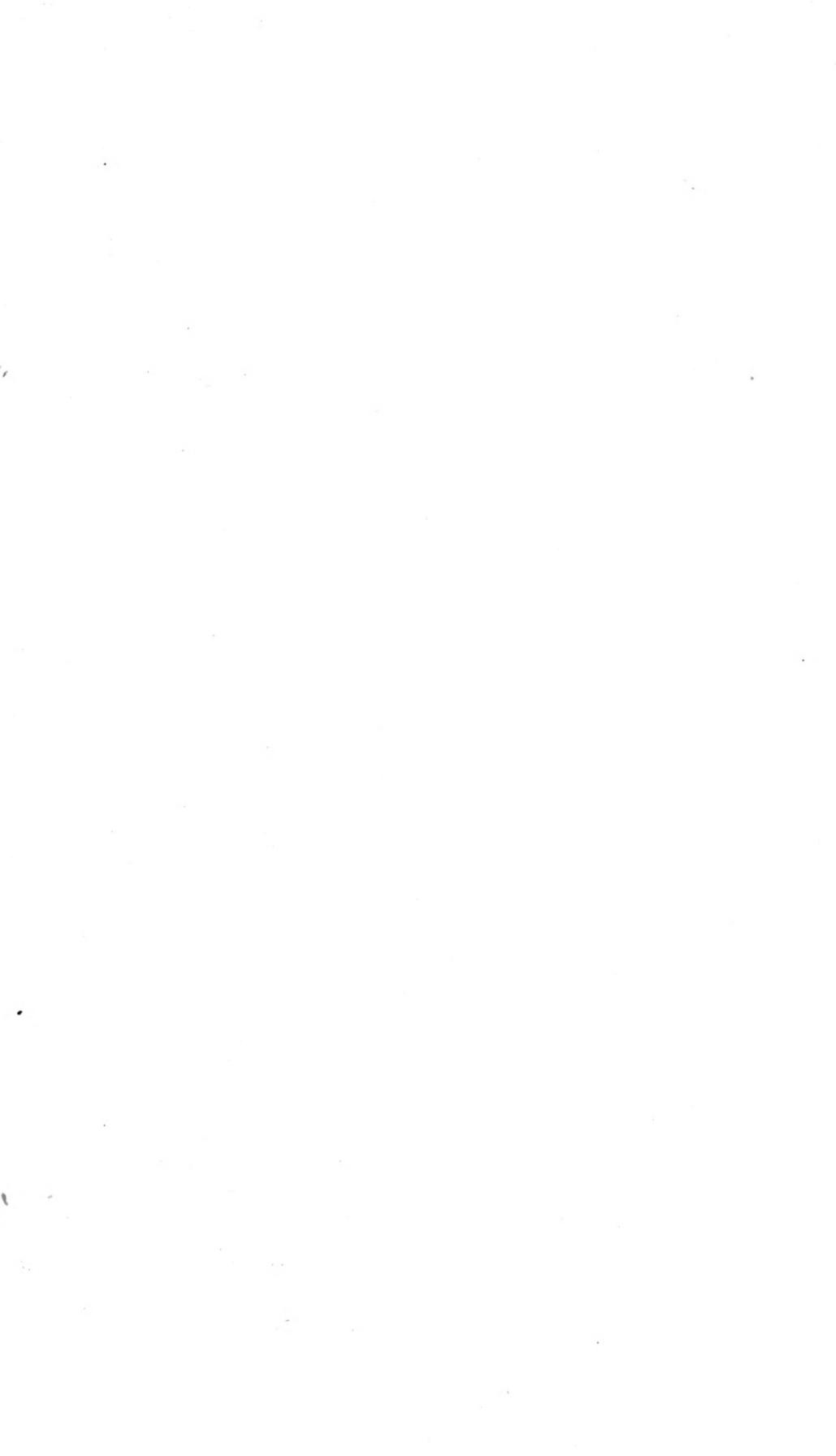
look upon a hundred thousand emigrants as they arrive upon our shores, or look at Cuba, or the Philippine islands, or the decadence of Portugal, where once originated the enterprises which culminated in the discovery of America, and all our grandeur as a nation.

I fancy I hear you ask: What motives impelled those early navigators and explorers to make such sacrifice of time and money, to embark upon such uncertain expeditions upon unknown waters and desert wastes; to imperil their lives and fortunes upon such rash ventures; to undergo years of toil, such terrible anxiety and suffering? With them, as with men in all ages, Gold and Glory took front rank among the motives. But strange as it may now seem, it was not the eye or ear's delight only, nor geographic curiosity, that was consulted. The sense of smell commanded a greater attention and was a greater factor in prompting the astounding enterprise. We are speaking of an age when sanitary science cut no figure in the affairs of life—an age before the ingenious Yankee had made and patented a thousand varieties of toilet soap—an age before a gospel of personal and general cleanliness was preached or practiced. Perfumery, to take the place of soap and water, was in great demand. Rare, expensive, and loud perfumes, to antagonize and stifle the offensiveness of unwashed nature, commanded a premium, and its extravagant use then indicated wealth, and the uppercrust of fashionable society. In keeping with the ideas of the times, it was the sign and seal of aristocracy, as creditable then as discreditable and unnecessary now, however rank the perfume. Spices and perfumes were not indigenous in Europe. Such merchandise came from the extreme and unknown East by caravan to Alexandria, in Egypt. The transportation, added to the cost of production, made such goods enormously expensive. Portugal first—followed by Spain, and lastly by England, all desired a monopoly of that trade. This it was that brought into

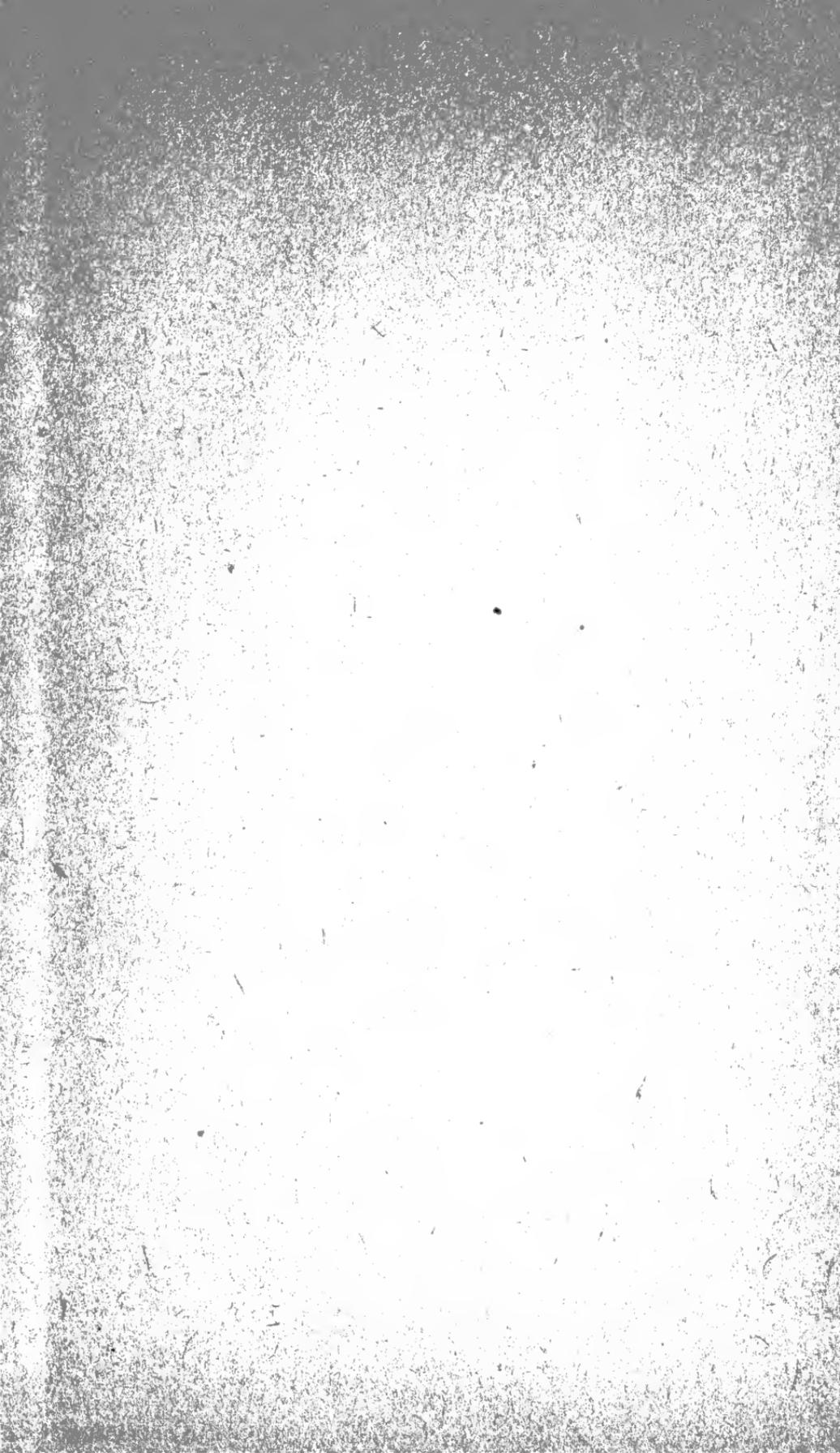
prominence the great navigators already mentioned, including the men whose names and exploits we are assembled to honor and commemorate.

The people of the United States have grown to be a nation of the first rank in power, in wealth, in enlightened intelligence, and in prosperity. Our form of government, founded upon the eternal principles of liberty, governed by law, the equality of men and liberty of religious conscience, that we have amply demonstrated the powers of self-government by the people, without the burden of standing armies to keep the peace. We think our forefathers did wisely in divorcing the church from the state, and that time has now shown the world that people of all manner of religious opinions may dwell together in peace and harmony, and that our system and means of education make strong and secure the family, the church, and the state. In receiving the priceless inheritance, our people must realize the solemn and binding obligation which binds us to keep and preserve all our dear institutions, pure and intact, embellished in all their parts and principles, for all succeeding generations.

And now, imbued with the patriotism that is proper and becoming the occasion, we, without ostentation or pageant, without trumpet, drum or fiddle, in the absence of monument of either stone or brass, devote a passing hour in remembrance of the men whose names suggest this pleasant duty, and the four hundredth anniversary of their discovery of the land we possess in great peace and abundant prosperity.









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