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of John Cabot, the biographer now arrives at the appear-
ance of his name in the letters-patent granted by the king.
These interesting documents, from their priority of date
and the importance of their evidence, every impartial
inquirer would, we think, have ranked first ; but he at once
assigns them the last place, and passes them very lightly
over. With the substance of these royal letters the reader
is already acquainted ;* and it is here sufficient to re-
peat that the commission, in virtue of which the first voy-
age of 1497 was undertaken, during which North Ame-
rica was discovered, is granted to *John Cabot* and his three
sons, whilst the second commission of 1498 is not only
granted to John Cabot alone, but, alluding to the voyage
already made, describes him as the sole discoverer,
“ giving him permission to lead his ships to the *land and
isles of late found by the said John* in the king’s name,
and by his command.” To escape from this clear and
unanswerable assertion in a document whose authenti-
city is higher than that of any other which can be pro-
duced, the memorialist, trembling for his favourite Sebas-
tian, is driven to some very desperate and amusing expe-
dients. He first asserts, that the appearance of the father’s
name in the first commission or patent does not prove
that he embarked in either of the expeditions. Now,
undoubtedly, if the first patent stood alone, the father’s
name in that deed would not conclusively prove that
he conducted the first voyage, although a strong pre-
sumption that he did so might fairly be founded upon it ;
but it is evident the two patents, in estimating the evi-
dence, must be taken together, and how does the biogra-
pher get rid of the second, which, in language neither to
be evaded nor misunderstood, distinctly asserts the fact
of the discovery by the said John, and by John only ; for
no other name but that of the father appears in the deed ?
The extraordinary theory by which he attempts to elude
its evidence will best be given in his own words. “ The
second patent,” says he, “ is to the father alone. If we
seek a reason for this departure from the original arrange-
ment, it may be conjectured that some of the sons chose
to give a different direction to a parental advance and their
personal exertions ; and that the head of the family
thought fit to retain subject to his own discretionary dis-