

HISTORY
OF
SCOTLAND.

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P R E F A C E.

I HAVE commenced the HISTORY OF SCOTLAND at the accession of Alexander the Third, because it is at this period that our national annals become particularly interesting to the general reader. During the reign of this monarch, England first began to entertain serious thoughts of the reduction of her sister country. The dark cloud of misfortune which gathered over Scotland immediately after the death of Alexander, suggested to Edward the First his schemes of ambition and conquest; and perhaps, in the history of Liberty, there is no more memorable war than that which commenced under Wallace in 1297, and termina-

ted in the final establishment of Scottish independence by Robert Bruce, in 1328.

In the composition of the present volume, which embraces this period, I have anxiously endeavoured to examine the most authentic sources of information, and to convey a true picture of the times without prepossession or partiality. To have done so, partakes more of the nature of a grave duty than of a merit ; and even after this has been accomplished, there will remain ample room for many imperfections. If, in the execution of my plan, I have been obliged to differ on some points of importance from authors of established celebrity, I have fully stated the grounds of my opinion in the Notes and Illustrations, which are printed at the end of the volume ; and I trust that I shall not be blamed for the freedom of my remarks, until the historical authorities upon which they are founded have been examined and compared.

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CHAP. I.

ALEXANDER THE THIRD.

CONTEMPORARY PRINCES.

Kings of England.
Henry III.
Edward I.

King of France.
Louis IX.

Popes.
Innocent IV.
Alexander IV.
Urban IV.
Clement IV.

ALEXANDER the Third had not completed his ninth year, when the death of the king, his father, opened to him the peaceable accession to the Scottish throne.¹ He was accordingly conducted by an assembly of the nobility to the Abbey of Scone, and there crowned.²

¹ Winton's Chronicle, B. vii. c. 10. Mathew Paris, Hist. p. 516.

² Alexander the Third was son of Alexander the Second, by Mary, daughter of Ingelram de Couci. Imhoff. Regum Pariumque Magnæ Britt. Histor. Genealogica, Part I. p. 42. The family of De Couci affected a royal pomp, and considered all titles as beneath their dignity. The *Cri de Guerre* of this Ingelram, or Enguerrand, was—

Je ne suis Roy, ni Prince aussi.

Je suis le Seigneur de Couci.

On account of his brave actions, possessions, and three marriages with ladies of royal and illustrious families, he was surnamed Le Grand.—Winton, vol. ii. p. 482.

A long minority, at all times an unhappy event for a kingdom, was at this time especially unfortunate for Scotland. The vicinity of Henry the Third of England, who, although individually a weak monarch, allowed himself sometimes to be directed by able and powerful counsellors, and the divisions between the principal nobility of Scotland, facilitated the designs of ambition, and weakened the power of resistance; nor can it be doubted, that during the early part of this reign, the first approaches were made towards that plan for the reduction of Scotland, which was afterwards attempted to be carried into effect by Edward the First, and defeated by the bravery of Wallace and Bruce. But in order to show clearly the state of the kingdom upon the accession of this monarch, and more especially in its relations with England, it will be necessary to go back a few years, to recount a story of private revenge, which happened in the conclusion of the reign of Alexander the Second, and drew after it important consequences.

A tournament, the frequent amusement of this warlike age, was held near Haddington. At this play of arms, Walter Bisset, a powerful baron, who piqued himself upon his skill in his weapons, was foiled by Patrick Earl of Athole.¹ An old feud which existed between these families, embittered the defeat, and Athole was found murdered in his house, which,

¹ Henry Earl of Athole had two daughters, Isobel and Fernelith. Isobel married Thomas of Galloway. Their only son was Patrick Earl of Athole. Fernelith married David de Hastings.—Hailes' Annals, p. 157. Fordun a Goodal, vol. ii. p. 72. Math. Paris, p. 586.

probably for the purpose of concealment, was set on fire by the conspirators. The suspicion of this slaughter, which, even in an age familiar with ferocity, seems to have excited unwonted horror, immediately fell upon the Bissets; and although Walter was the person present at the tournament, the popular clamour pointed to William, the chief of the family.¹ He was pursued by the nobility, who were incited to vengeance by the Earl of March, and David de Hastings, and would have been torn to pieces, had not the interference of the king protected him from the fury of the friends of Athole. Bisset strenuously asserted his innocence. He offered to prove, that he had been fifty miles distant from Haddington when the murder was committed; he instantly excommunicated the assassins, and all who might have supported them, in every chapel in Scotland; he offered combat to any man who dared abide the issue, but he declined a trial by jury, on account of the inveterate malice of his enemies. The king accepted the office of judge, and the Bissets were condemned, their estates forfeited to the crown, and they themselves compelled to swear upon the Holy Gospel, that they would repair to Palestine, and there, for the remaining days of their lives, pray for the soul of the murdered earl.

¹ Lord Hailes remarks, 8vo ed. p. 189, that Fordun says the author of the conspiracy was Walter. Fordun, on the contrary, all along ascribes it, or rather says it was ascribed, to William Bisset. —Fordun a Goodal, vol. ii. pp. 72, 73, 74. The name of the Bisset banished from Scotland, as shown in the Patent Rolls of Henry the Third, is Walter.

