

INTRODUCTION

It is well, before reading this play, to get rid of the impression that its subject is a semi-mythical personage. For this prevalent belief, the puerilities of Blind Harry's version of his life, and the stories of his exploits and prowess that linger in the Lowland localities he frequented are responsible. Discarding fabulous inventions and confining inquiries to contemporary written records, the Wallace who lived and died for Scotland emerges from the mist of myth and legend, and stands out a strong man, of rare character and ability, whose soul was possessed of one idea, the vindication of the independence of his native country. The chief documentary evidence is contained in the letters of Edward I. to his subordinates engaged in the war he was carrying on in Scotland, and their reports to him. These, together with the little that is authentic so far discovered in muniments, give solid foundation for an intelligent grasp of the conditions under which he played his part. The Wallace of tradition fades and we see a man of high resolve, a born military genius, an able administrator, with a determination to free his country, which neither privation nor disaster could weaken. It has to be kept in mind that, for nearly a year he governed his country. Burns terms him "Scotland's ill-requited Chief", and that was literally true. For nigh seven years Wallace maintained, single-handed, resistance to the plans and forces of England's greatest King, and was cut off in the prime of his manhood before he saw the fruition of his sacrifices. It is generally accepted, he was