

INTRODUCTION.

WILLIAM ALEXANDER of Menstry, a pleasing poet, a vigorous prose writer, and an accomplished scholar, was not less remarkable as a politician. Fertile in device and expert in execution, and of an unswerving tenacity of purpose, he unhappily sacrificed patriotism to policy, and allowed a concern in his personal interests to overbalance loftier considerations. Yet his errors were in a manner the consequence of his surroundings, being more the result of untoward circumstances than of any absolute perversity. For he was raised from the condition of an inconsiderable landowner and travelling tutor to be the cherished friend and adviser of a sovereign at a court unadorned by any virtue, and which by tergiversation and king-craft had become utterly contaminating. Peccant as a politician, but illustrious as a pioneer of British colonisation, William Alexander is entitled to remembrance. And his public policy is bound up with his personal history.

Every considerable Scotsman has a pedigree,—William Alexander's is illustrious. Descended from a Norwegian viking, Conn Chead Chath of "the Hundred Battles," the renowned Somerled of the twelfth century dared to contest the sovereignty of the Western Isles with David I.; he was worsted, yet allowed to retain under the Scottish sovereign a measure of authority over the territory in which he had ruled. Twice married, Somerled had by his second wife, Effrica, daughter of Olave the Red, King of Man, three sons, Dougal, Ranald, and Angus. On Somerled's death, Dougal obtained the depute sovereignty of Mull, Coll, Tiree, and Jura; Ranald, of Isla and Kintyre; and Angus, of the Isle of Bute. From Dougal sprang the Mac-Dougals of Lorne, who styled themselves De Ergedia—that is, of Argyle—and his branch is represented by the ducal house of Argyle.

On the death of Dougal, the isles which he ruled, instead of descending to his children, were acquired by his brother Ranald, to whom were born two sons, Donald and Roderick. Roderick was a noted pirate. Donald, the elder son, was father of three sons, Roderick, Angus, and Alexander. The male descendants of Roderick became extinct in the third generation. Angus, the second son, some time resisted the arms of Alexander III., but, on the conquest of the Western Isles by that king, he transferred his allegiance from Norway to the Scottish crown; he died subse-