

2014

No. 2.

Declaration and Confession
of Robert Watt



L.K. fecit 1794

ROB^T: WATT



By Authority.



THE
DECLARATION AND CONFESSION

O F

ROBERT WATT,

WRITTEN, SUBSCRIBED, & DELIVERED BY HIMSELF,

THE EVENING BEFORE HIS EXECUTION,

FOR HIGH TREASON,

AT EDINBURGH,

OCTOBER 15. 1794.

ATTESTED BY

THE REVEREND DR BAIRD,

PRINCIPAL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH;

A N D

THE REVEREND T. S. JONES,

ONE OF THE MINISTERS OF LADY GLENORCHIE'S CHAPEL.

EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR BELL & BRADFUTE, PARLIAMENT CLOSE.

1794.

Entered in Stationers Hall.

The following DECLARATION, was put up under a sealed cover, addressed on the outside to JAMES CLERK, Esq; Sheriff Depute, Geo. Square.—In the inside of the cover was written the following Letter by Robert Watt to him :

S I R,

THE inclosed papers, - with another parcel, containing fundry miscellaneous letters and papers, I commit to you; requesting they may be transmitted to Principal Baird, and the Rev. Mr Jones, to do with them as they may find proper. The little emoluments which may arise from them, I am persuaded they will give to Binning who attended me.

My watch and my clothes, and any little effects I may leave behind me, I request them to be given to Mr James Stalker, at Mr Wilfon's, baker in Cross-causeway, to whom I owe money *per* bill ;

bill ; and to whom I gave a disposition
to these, and other effects, before my
condemnation. I have the honour to
be,

SIR,

Your obed. humble Servant,

(Signed) ROB. WATT.

Edinburgh Castle, }
Oct. 14. 1794. }

WE, who are referred to in the a-
bove letter, and who subscribe this note,
do hereby ATTEST, that the contents of
the following Declaration are transcrib-
ed *verbatim* from the manuscript of Ro-
bert Watt, transmitted to us by the
SHERIFF.

GEO. BAIRD.

T. S. JONES.

DECLARATION, &c.

As the best service I can now do to religion, which I have injured by the unhappy conduct which has brought me to my present unfortunate situation,—to my Christian acquaintances, whom I particularly esteem, and by whose company and conversation I have been both improved and comforted;—and to my country, for which I have had more than ordinary attachment, I shall give a general, but concise history of the most

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material

material part of my life; and disclose fully the unfortunate circumstances that have been the cause of terminating my life in such a melancholy manner, in the middle of my days.

Having but four days before I am absorbed in eternity, I hope that what follows will be received as the truth.— In the view of such an awful prospect, it cannot be supposed I can have any interest whatever to conceal it.

No sooner is the soul separated from the body, than she is disconnected with the pursuits of mortals, and enters an hitherto unknown scene,—and her powers of perception and communication are then enlarged, in proportion to the sublimity and grandure of the objects exhibited

exhibited to her view. With astonishment and prying curiosity, she travels over the vast expanse of the heavenly Jerusalem, collecting from the most ancient and intelligent of its inhabitants, every information they can communicate of the mysteries of providence and redemption, while she seems, as her knowledge increases, to rise in her accents of praise.

I was influenced by religion when very young. A reflective discovery of the goodness of God, in his interposition when in very imminent dangers, and of my ingratitude (I exceeded my companions in youthful follies, but could never bear swearing), first led me to cry for mercy. My convictions were exceedingly strong; so that I would in

the space of two hours be three or four times at prayer, drowned in penitential tears. I have always found, that my penitential joy was in proportion to my contrition for sin. For a long space of time, I was not a day (if I remember right) without assurance of a saving interest in Christ ; and, at times, my feelings and views were more like an heavenly, than an earthly inhabitant. On such occasions, I had inexpressible discoveries of the infinitude and holiness of God, and of my own vileness. I wondered, admired, adored, lamented, and rejoiced at one and the same time.

No sooner did my convictions take place, than I was, as it were, compelled to allot some particular hours every day

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to reading the Scriptures, meditation, self-examination, and prayer. These hours I found to be the life of my soul. I learned, from experience, that faith must be the gift of God. That I could as soon take up my personal residence in the sun, as truly believe in Christ, or fix my heart on him in the exercise of faith. This unbelief and treachery of heart drew tears of sorrow from my eyes.

Though my pleasure in religion was great, my grief from Satanical suggestions and a depraved nature was also so. I was strongly tempted to despair and suicide; but He who keepeth Israel preserved me amidst these storms.

Religion did no sooner operate on my mind, than I hated the ways of sin,
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and the company of the profane ; and fought, according to my then knowledge, the company of the wise and good. Though my pleasure was particularly in devotional exercises, and in such company; yet I spent a great part of my time, in boyish pursuits and pleasures, with my school-companions; but in these, my devotional frame of mind never left me,—and how soon I came home, I retired by myself, and wept over my vanity of conduct.

Even in school, the thought of my crucifying the Lord of Glory by sin, often bathed my eyes in tears, and impelled me to pray with my head leaning on a table.—The sense of his love, and the injury done him, produced in me a zeal for the salvation of others—to such a degree, that I established the worship
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of God in some families I lodged with, who never had it before.—I was often surpris'd to see the same effects not produced on the minds of others in reading the scriptures, &c. as on myself—But this arose from my ignorance of the sovereignty of God.

As I advanced in knowledge, my high enjoyments were the less frequent; and the instability of my mind in exercises of devotion became more and more perceptible. These soul exercises, less or more, have continued with me amidst grievous provocations, and sore backslidings.

I shall now proceed to state the cause of my backslidings, so far as I can trace them.

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A reserved disposition, founded on pride, seems to have been my constitutional sin—In my earliest youth it discovered itself, by taking pleasure in vexing my guardians when they crossed my inclination. I was so much under the influence of this base passion, that more than once I gave them the greatest alarm and vexation of mind, by concealing myself, and previously saying that I would put an end to my life by personal violence; and enduring fore personal chastisement, without disclosing any secret intrusted to me.

Sometime after I knew the grace of God, this passion disappeared; yet it was not destroyed—but manifested itself in opposition to the inclination of my friends to send me abroad.

My

My friends proposed to send me either to the East or West Indies, but refusing to comply on the ground of a weak constitution; but the true motive with myself was a fear of not enjoying the means of Grace—After which they proposed to send me to London; but not executing this proposal in the time I wished (though their delay undoubtedly proceeded from the best of motives), I resolved to act independently of them. Accordingly, I came to Edinburgh in the year 1786, where I remained for a considerable time without their knowledge, and got into business without their assistance.—So far was my vanity gratified.

Here I digress, and beg leave to observe, though perhaps it may be unne-

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cessary.

cessary, That parents or guardians should be particularly careful to study the ruling passions of young persons under their charge; and, should they be such as tend to hurt their morals or blind their best judgment, to correct them by timely, proper, and wholesome instruction. But above all things, they should study to learn the inclination of their mind as to business, and to put them early to it. Because this will give a full scope to the young mind in the pursuit of fortune, in a way consistent with his profession; whereas when not put early to business, they are apt to seek after her by indirect methods.

After I began business on my own account, I adopted every method that
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my ingenuity could suggest, to arrive at some eminence in Society.

For one, I studied the dispositions and ruling passions of individuals; and, not having the gift of speech equal with others, I spoke but little when in company, lest I should either speak improperly, or hurt the feelings of another by interruption.

From what I have said, the reader will easily discern the following passions to have born rule in my conduct, *viz.* pride and ambition.

Pride is the fruitful mother of all the other irregular passions—It was the origin of rebellion in heaven, and the thunderbolt that hurried Satan into the

bottomless Pit; and stript innocent Adam of his original purity. Ever since, it more or less holds a place in every human breast.

It is capable of assuming various forms—At times it assumes the garb of humility, rigidity, and moderation. But none can trace its various evolutions so well, or discover its malignity, as the sincere Christian. It may possibly keep him company in all his devotional exercises; and, even under the specious pretext of humility, may be apt to drive him from God, as judging himself unworthy of eternal life.

But its influence over me was remarkable—I could not brook the idea to be indebted to any person for advice, even
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in difficult and doubtful cases. I therefore very seldom consulted any person, though many consulted me. Had I acted the prudent part, I should have consulted intelligent and disinterested men, previously chosen.—The friendship and esteem of some such I have had the honour to enjoy.

Ambition—Though this passion be the offspring of pride, it is to be no less watched against than its source. It blinds our best judgment by the appearance of utility, and is apt to drive to acts of injustice in the pursuit of the wished-for object; while it is but a distrustful of, and a contending against divine Providence. Influenced by this base passion, under the semblance of utility, I was induced to carry on a secret

cret correspondence with Mr Dundas and the Lord Advocate.

This conduct, I confess, was altogether inconsistent with the spirit and design of Christianity, which requires the most unbounded simplicity, integrity, and love to my fellow-creatures.

My first connection with the Friends of the People was in the year 1791, or 1792. I several times attended the Committee which met in Mather's Tavern; but would never subscribe my name, though repeatedly required to do it. This was the æra of my correspondence with Mr Dundas. Two reasons induced me to this unhappy conduct. One, a love of the peace of society—I apprehended, that if they were permitted

ted to continue their meetings, the public tranquillity would be interrupted. This opinion was founded on my ignorance of the many abuses in the Administrative—the offspring of corruption in the Legislative branch of Government. For when the Legislative becomes more corrupted than the Executive, there is an end of true liberty.—And that the people had a right to meet and deliberate on, and to obtain a redress of grievances.—The other reason, to obtain Mr Dundas's favour, that I might the sooner arrive at that station in society to which my views were directed. Some may imagine that I had personal hatred at some of the Friends of the People, but this was by no means the case.

Mr

Mr Dundas wished me to correspond with the Lord Advocate, and accordingly recommended me to him. My correspondence with him continued to August or September 1793, when it was discontinued.

My mind being then changed in favour of Reform, I entered into the Committees of Union and Ways and Means*, in order to co-operate with them to the obtaining of a Reform. Naturally ambitious and enterprising, I was soon the leader of these Committees. By my advice, the Committee of Ways and Means, or Secret Committee, was formed; and its regulations drawn up by me. These regulations contained also directions to the Primary Societies, and

* Of the Friends of the People.

and to the Committee of Union. The Circular Letter, though composed by Mr Stoke, was advised by me. And though the Address to the Fencibles was not moved by me, I heartily approved of it. All these papers I got printed; and the whole impression was dispersed, but the Address to the Fencibles, of which I knew nothing, after printed.

My plans, I doubt not, would, when ripe for execution, be effectual. Bloodshed was what I abhorred from the bottom of my soul; they therefore guarded against that evil as much as may be. I shall here narrate them.—Other persons, as Archibald Wright, weaver in Edinburgh, and ——— Craig, Perth, besides John Fairley, were sent at different times through the country, to found the pub-

lic mind, and to give instructions. The intelligence brought me, from time to time, by these persons, from every quarter of the kingdom, was more and more favourable. All their instructions were delivered by myself—But such as I knew I could fully confide in, their instructions went farther than those of others. Indeed, at the time I was apprehended, there were but very few places that information was not received from; and there remained almost nothing to do, for the execution of the whole, but a visit to England and Ireland, by intelligent and confidential persons.

The first movement was intended to be made in Edinburgh, London, and Dublin; while every town throughout

out the kingdoms were in readiness to act, according to the plan, on the very first notice, which was to be given by couriers dispatched by express.

The nature of the plan was this—A body of men, to the number of four or five thousand, were to be assembled in a place to be fixed on. These were to be armed with Pikes, Guns, Grenades—to be properly divided, with proper leaders. In regard to Edinburgh, these were to be placed at the Gælic Chapel, head of the West Bow, Tolbooth, or head of the High Street,—that when the Castle soldiers came out, they might be surrounded. In order to prevent bloodshed, means were to be used to gain as many of the soldiers as possible over to their side. The Regiment was to be

enticed out by companies. But, previous to this, the Magistrates, Lords of Justiciary, Commander in Chief, and many others in town to be selected, were to be apprehended; but to be treated, in every respect, becoming their station in life, and detained till the mind of the ensuing Convention, or rather Parliament, was known. There was no intention whatever to put any to death; but if found guilty of oppression and injustice to the Patriots, to share a similar fate with them, *viz.* transportation.

The manner in which the soldiers were to be induced to leave the Castle was by means of a letter, either signed by the Lord Provost or Commander in Chief, previously in custody, ordering the Commandant to send a company, without

without any amunition, to a fire that was to be kindled in St Andrew's Square, under the pretence of its being a house on fire; and the said company to be secured and disarmed in the meantime. The most of the remainder to be drawn out in the same manner, by means of fires kindled in succession in other quarters of the City.

But in case they either could not be drawn out of the Castle, or had obtained information of what was a-doing, they were to be compelled to surrender, by being deprived of victuals;—the incarceration of the Commander in Chief, and the influence of party among themselves favouring the plan.

The

The Public-offices and the Banks were to be secured, by placing proper persons as centinels over them, till the proprietors and managers appeared next morning. The same were to be consulted with by qualified persons, to be previously chosen. The property of such persons, either residing in town or country, deemed inimical to liberty, in the hands of Bankers, was to be sealed up, but what was necessary for their maintenance, till their fate was known.

The Post-office was to be taken possession of; as thereby all intercourse would be cut off between such as were hostile to the Patriots, while the channel of communication was left open for them.

After

After these things were effected in Edinburgh, London, and Dublin, in one and the same night; and which was expected to be accomplished about six or seven o'clock in the morning,—couriers were immediately to be dispatched throughout the whole nation, to the leaders in other parts; while troops were to be marched from places to be fixed on, that could spare them to the assistance of such as would be deemed necessary. No sooner was the plan executed in the three Metropolisess, than proclamations, previously prepared, were to be issued to the landholders, and officers under government, as did not cordially unite with the Patriots in their views and designs, not to go above three miles beyond their dwelling-places, under pain of death;—to farmers, not to conceal or
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export any grain ;—to ship-masters, not to carry any person coast-ways, without giving intimation of the same; place come from, and where going to, of such person or persons, within a reasonable time after such intimation was given, to the nearest Justice of Peace, that the same might be called to an examination, under a similar penalty;—to such persons as were authorized to levy men, to deliver up their commissions and men to persons to be nominated, under the same penalty.

There was preparing an Address to be made to the King at the same time, consisting of a long catalogue of abuses, both in the Legislative and Executive branches of Government; and requesting of him the dismissal of his present
 servants,

fervants, and a diffolution of Parliament,
the fame to be replaced by men in
whom the people could confide.

With regard to the Pikes, I got them made both for sale and distribution. I do not at present recollect what instructions I might have given at the making of them. Whatever these instructions were, I am certain that none I had were ever distributed †.

There was no person concerned in
these things but the Com. of W. and M.
—Because I was morally certain, from
the aspect of affairs, that how soon the

† D operations

† The Pikes were found in my house, when the Sheriff's Officers were in search of the goods of a bankrupt in Musselburgh, sent to my house, about an eight days before, under the pretence of their being to be forwarded to Glasgow.

operations were commenced, persons in the various ranks of society would carry it on.—I have therefore no new discoveries to make.

I can judge of my intentions from my feelings,—my views were the good of society; and not robbery or murder. I will not say but my own interest was blended in these views; for who is he, that if he serves society, but will naturally expect a reward? But divine Providence has been pleased to permit me to be brought into circumstances of misery and woe—I hope they have been the best reward that could be conferred on me. I however patiently, and I hope thankfully, accept of these as coming from God, not only as the Sovereign disposer

disposer of all events, but as my merciful Redeemer.

In reflection, I see that although my intentions were good, and probable evils endeavoured to be guarded against, yet circumstances might have proved such, as would have caused me to repent my having gone so far, although my person were safe, which I sincerely do this day.

Though the part I acted proceeded from the best of motives; yet, on reflection, I perceive that I erred in taking such an active part, without maturely weighing the probable consequences. Bloodshed and rapine might have ensued. This would have involved me

in guilt; being somewhat accessory to them, though not intentionally so.

The duty of all sincere Christians is,
 “to lead quiet and peaceable lives in
 “all godliness and honesty, giving ho-
 “nour to whom honour is due, and
 “fear to whom fear.” To leave the
 reformation of abuses in the State to
 those who mind only earthly things,
 except when called to assist in a legal
 manner. At the throne of grace they
 may be of more real utility, than either
 in the Cabinet or field of battle.

Had my life been prolonged, I think
 this would have been my mode of con-
 duct. And I bless God for timely pre-
 venting me going the perhaps awful
 length

length my ambitious and enterprising mind might have induced me.

I have given no private offence that I know of. Indeed, my sympathizing mind, though compounded of pride and ambition, would soon relent. I may truly say, if I know my own deceitful heart, that sympathy to the unfortunate was one cause of my adopting the part that has brought me to my present fate. Reflection on the hardships of others has often brought tears of sympathy from my eyes. Nor have I borrowed money, nor purchased goods, but with the most upright intentions.—For the satisfaction of my creditors, I will observe, that I had views of being able to pay what I had either borrowed or purchased, had I lived, altogether disconnected

connected with the matter that has brought me to my present unfortunate situation; but in this situation it would be improper to mention what these views were.

Though I have always kept up the worship of God, at stated times, both in the closet and family, and had honest intentions towards my creditors; yet I am convinced, that my departures from God have been very great; and that, in the glass of his holy law, they are innumerable and highly aggravated. And especially the crime for which I am about to suffer, as viewed in its probable consequences. I humbly hope, that the Spirit of God has given me a saving discovery of my sins; and that, in the spirit of genuine contrition, I am
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led to the precious blood of sprinkling.

In the foregoing narrative, if any article appears imperfect or obscure, I hope the imperfection or obscurity will be ascribed to the urgent pressure of the occasion on which this paper is written. It is a first copy; and, alas! there is not now time to revise or correct.—Of the minutes of life that yet remain to me, even the writing of this sentence has consumed one. But you who now read or hear of this account, remember as you read, that the period is coming when death shall be as near to you as it is to me; and, be assured, you will find that a period when you will shrink with horror from the idea of duplicity or deception. With candour

dour then consider this solemn declaration of a dying man. Nor let prejudices, which appearances have produced against me, lead you to suppose, that, on the brink of eternity, with the throne of judgment in my view, I dare to approach the Omnipotent with a lie in my right hand.

Those who, in an official character, began and managed my prosecution, I freely forgive.

Forgive me, my fellow Christians, for the reproach thrown by my conduct on Religion.

My prayer to God is, That he may inspire all the people with a spirit of subordination and loyalty ; and teach
them

them to lead, under the powers that be, quiet and peaceable lives, in godliness and honesty.

O God ! soon shall my body be given to the dust, and my soul will ascend to thee. Thou knowest my sincerity in the narrative I have given ; thou seest my sorrow for all my sins. Hear me graciously—And, for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, receive my soul to everlasting Glory. Amen.

This is truth, and the whole truth, as far as I recollect, I declare as a dying man.

(Signed) ROBT WATT

Tuesday Evening, Oct. 14th, }
about 8 o'clock at night, 1794. }

In regard of sending Pikes to Perth, to the best of my recollection, I talked with Craig about them, and that he told me they should be sent secretly; but I cannot say to what number, nor to whom.

Note.—Although WATT, soon after his condemnation, promised the Clergymen who visited him, to write a Confession of his crimes, he delayed the commencement of it till within eight or nine days of his death. On the Wednesday before that event, he had written one sheet; this, it is supposed, he destroyed, as it was not among the papers he left behind him: Hitherto he appeared easy in his mind; but on the Friday, Saturday and Lord's day, much agitated. On this last day he again began to write, but advanced no further than the account he has given of his childhood, &c. By what he said afterwards, it is plain, his hesitation arose from the vain hope of a reprieve. On Monday morning he again appeared calm, and in good spirits; and

and said he had at last determined to declare all he knew, and employed the morning of that day in writing what is now given to the public—In the evening, the order for his execution was officially intimated to him—On Tuesday he continued writing; and in the evening, between seven and eight o'clock, finished and subscribed the paper now published, and put it under a cover to the Sheriff—On Wednesday, 15th October, he was executed—The paper was sealed up in Watt's presence, together with another parcel, containing the letters he received whilst in prison, and other papers of no importance. Both parcels were by Watt himself addressed to the Sheriff, and delivered to the Commanding Officer of the Castle, who sent them to the Sheriff on the Tuesday evening, agreeable to Watt's own particular request.

FINIS.

LATELY PUBLISHED,
By BELL & BRADFUTE,

Reports of the Committee of Secrecy, of the House of Commons, on the Papers belonging to the Society for Constitutional Information, and the London Corresponding Society, seized by order of Government, and presented to the House by Mr Secretary Dundas—Price 4s. 6d. *boards*.

Extracts from the Report of the Committee of Secrecy, appointed by the House of Commons, on the 13th of May, 1794. *being an Abridgment of the above*—Price 3d. *stitched*.

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