

Stenart of Ballechin to Mr. Palliser.

Ballechin, of* July 1811.

Sir, - An occurrence of rather an alarming nature only accidentally came to my knowledge a few days ago. A tenant of mine, one Patrick Thomson, an Auctioneer, was here doing some business for me, & he happened to introduce some extraordinary account of the behaviour of one Alex r Douglas, a shoemaker at Balinluig, who he had reason to think had a design of murdering him. Thomson told me the story, but wished me to take no steps in consequence, as he did not like to be instrumental in bringing forward a matter of this kind. However, I viewed the circumstances in a very serious light, & insisted on Thomson coming before me as a Magistrate & making a declaration. Accordingly he came here last night & made the Declaration I herewith beg to send you as a Magistrate, & particularly as the man resides upon the Duke of Atholl's lands. I took down what he said nearly in his own words, and put down everything I considered important, though perhaps not very formally ; however I believe it will answer the purpose. I read it over to Thomson, & he is ready to make oath to the truth of it. From Thomson's account I think the probability is that Douglas intended to have murdered him, if the opportunity had not providentially failed him, & if Thomson had been intoxicated & consequently off his Guard, he might have lost his life. I am quite at a loss what ought to be done in this case, & I could wish you to take it into consideration. Perhaps it might be advisable to call the man before us for examination, & any day you appoint this week, for I am not certain of being at home next, I would meet you at Logierait, & Douglas could be called before us, Thomson & the men mentioned in the Declaration, & after examination some resolution might be come to. I shall be glad to have your opinion on this subject. I do not know whether you heard that this Douglas is not well thought of, & suspicion a good many years ago attached to him of having murdered and robbed a Drover, God knows whether justly or not. If you saw M r Robert Dick he could give you some account of that suspicion and probably others, as it has formerly been much spoken of, & this late affair may revive it, as Thomson says this is quite generally talked of.

I am, Sir, your most ob l Servant,

Hope Steuart.

Patrick Thomson's Declaration.

At Ballechin, 8 July 1811, Appeared before me, Hope Steuart of Ballechin, one of His Majesty's Justices of Peace for the County of Perth, Patrick Thomson, Farmer at Tullipourie, and voluntarily emitted the following Declaration : -

That about three weeks ago, to the best of his recollection, he happened to have some business to transact at the Widow Duff's at Balanluig - he arrived there about one or two o'clock in the afternoon - he immediately enquired for Alex r Douglas, shoemaker there, as he had some money to receive from him. Douglas came to the house, & excused himself from paying, for want of money. He (Thomson) called for some whisky, & gave him a glass of it, & told Douglas he had no occasion to wait as he had no money to give ; the other replied, as he (Thomson) was alone, he would not be the worse of his company. Thomson told him he might do as he pleased, but that if he staid he had better give him some whisky, to which he assented & called for a little. Douglas soon after went out, but returned by the time he (Thomson) had dined, & by the time he returned he (Thomson) had half a dozen people with him paying him money, as this was a day that he (Thomson) was collecting some roup money, being an Auctioneer. Thomson adds that only two of these men had been paying money, the others were chance passengers. Thomson further declares that he was employed in receiving money from various people till near twelve o'clock at night, & though Douglas had no business to do, he (Thomson) declares that, to the best of his knowledge and belief, Douglas never quitted the room the whole of that time, at least that he (Thomson) never missed him ; that Douglas occasionally, when the glass came round to him, continued sitting & drinking without ever offering to pay, excepting for the small quantity he first called for. P. Thomson remained for about an hour after his business was over, taking a few glasses with some acquaintances, viz., Robert Low, Dver, Moulinearn, John M c Craw, there, David Butter, Ballachallan, Robert Robertson, a labourer at Balintuim on Colonel Fergusson's land, with some others that he does not presently recollect ; Thomson is sure that Douglas observed him receiving money, & that he (Thomson) had a considerable sum besides

in his Pocket Book. Thomson remarked that before he took his departure, about half an hour perhaps, that Douglas withdrew. When Thomson came out of the house & had mounted his horse, he observed Douglas standing on the opposite side of the road. Thomson had some little conversation with him in passing, & Douglas begged of him to allow him a little time to pay the money. Thomson bid everybody standing about the door good night, & rode off at the gallop towards the Boat of Tummel. When he got to the river side he cried out repeatedly for the Boat, without being answered, & had not stood there quite five minutes, when he observed some person approaching him. It was a moonlight night & something clear, so as to enable him to discover the person approaching him pretty distinctly, who appeared to be stooping & ascending by the brink of the river towards him. Thomson called out Who's tliere? in Gaelic, no answer given ; he called out again, no answer ; he called out a third time, & the person straightened himself up & said in Gaelic, It is me. All this time Thomson kept approaching him, imagining at first it might be some poor person, or some person in liquor. On hearing the voice Thomson immediately discovered it was Douglas, & said, What brought you here, Douglas ? Douglas answered, You should take quarters. Thomson replied, Whether I take quarters or not, I believe you would wish me to take quarters, meaning that he (Douglas) had a design upon his life. At this instant Thomson was within twenty yards of him, & observed something with a long shaft across his arm & covered by his leather apron. He stopped his horse, being alarmed. Douglas continuing slowly advancing, Thomson called out, What is that you have there for me ? Nothing, nothing, Douglas said, & Thomson replied, That you have, you scoundrel. Thomson having nothing to defend himself, & Douglas getting betwixt him & the land, that is, seeming to wish to prevent him from escaping, Thomson had nothing for it but to rein round his horse to the river, & rode through a little of the water till it came up nearly to the top of his boots, & when he was clear of him, he galloped towards Balinluig, & when he got there, he found the people he had but just parted from still standing & talking upon the road before the houses ; he immediately called out to them to come with speed immediately to assist him yonder, and threatened to make them answer for the consequences if they did not. Thomson turned round and galloped towards the river lest he should lose

VOL. IV. Q

Douglas, & when he saw him crossing into the bushes, he quitted his horse, ran up, & took hold of him by the neck, & asked him what he did with a fearful thing he had; he said he had nothing. Thomson forced him down to the ground, & Douglas roared out murder repeatedly, & said, / will afront you now. Be that as it may, said Thomson, / will take you before a Justice, so that you shall never do this again. By this time the men had come down, viz., the aforesaid Robert Robertson, David Butter, & widow Duff's son, & Thomson told them that if they did not accompany him to a Justice he would make them suffer. Douglas refused to come before a Justice till Thomson pretended to be a Constable, when he said he would go willingly before any Justice ; & when Thomson dragged him towards the ferrying place, he begged Thomson to let him go, & said he would give him half a mutchkin whisky. The men who were present entreated Thomson to release him, & allow him rather to fall into other people's hands, which he complied with, as he found no likelihood of getting over the river ; Douglas immediately ran off, & Thomson took the men to Widow Duffs and treated the men to some whisky, as he had detained them at the river more than an hour. Widow Duff told them Douglas's wife was almost distracted at her husband's being out all night.

Thomson conjectures Douglas might have thrown the weapon he had into the river, that he thought it might be nearly the length of a musket, but what it was he cannot say.

Thomson about Daybreak went home by Port na Craig, & went up the country with the Innkeeper's servant at Blair in Atholl, who was travelling thither from Dunkeld.

Peter Thomson declares that the above named men concurred with him in thinking that Douglas harboured & intended the design of murdering him that night, as Douglas labours under a very bad character, & they all thought Douglas's plan was afterwards to throw him into the river.

Patrick Thomson declares his reason for not giving information respecting **Douglas** before was his being very averse from bringing a man to punishment.

The above Declaration, emitted by me & written by Hope Steuart of Ballechin in my presence, I declare is as nearly as possible the very words

1811 OF ATHOLL AND TULLIBARDINE 243

& substance of what I have dictated to him, & are consistent with truth as far as I can recollect of the circumstances, & written on this & six preceeding pages.

Peter Thomson.
Hope Steuart, J. P.

Mr. Palliser consulted with Mr. Rutherford, his Grace's Perth agent, and some of the local Justices, who were unanimously of opinion that the occurrence had been brought about by a too profuse quantity of whisky having been consumed by the party, and that there was no evidence to convict **Douglas** ; and further, it was Thomson who had committed an assault, and that if the case was taken up it might prove serious for him ; so the matter was allowed to drop.