

DR JAMES MOUNSEY OF RAMMERSCALES.

Lieut.-General, late Privy Councillor and First Physician to Her Imperial Majesty the Empress of Russia ; Archiater and Chief Director of the Chancery of Medicine and of the whole Faculty in the Russian Empire.

By R. W. INNES SMITH, M.D.

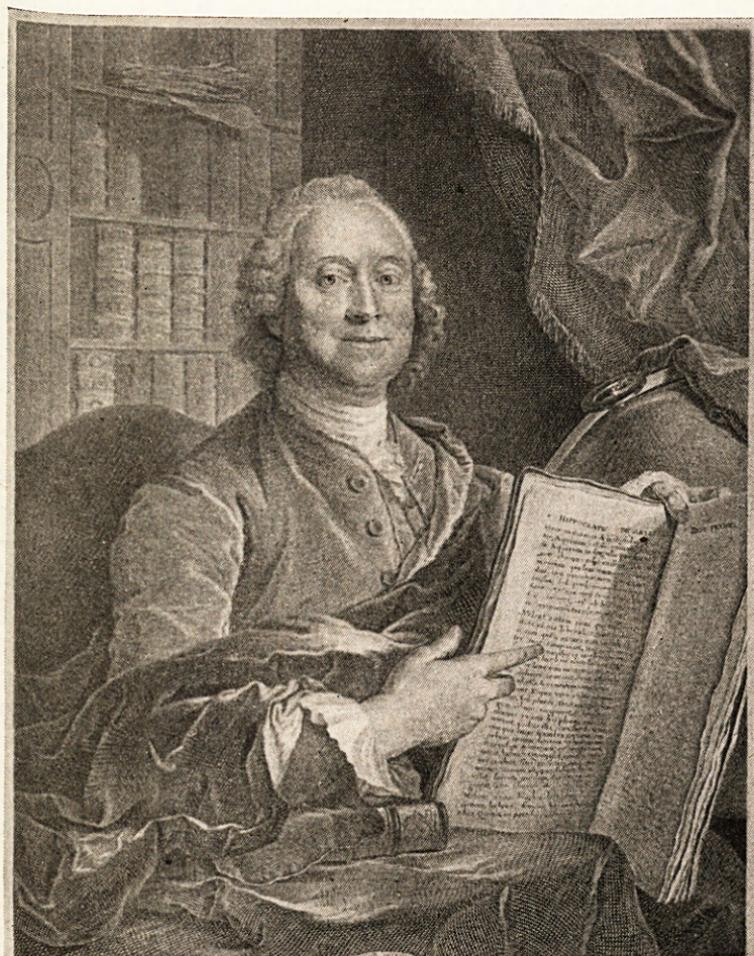
THE finding of an engraved portrait of Dr James Mounsey, a distinguished Scottish physician who rose to high rank in the Russian Imperial Service, impelled me to endeavour to find out something of his career. The print is a scarce one. It is not in the collections of either of the Colleges of Physicians. In the British Museum catalogue of engraved portraits, and in Bromley's catalogue (1793) he has been confused with Dr Messenger Monsey, the eccentric English physician who died in 1788.

James Mounsey was born early in the eighteenth century at Skipmire, in the Parish of Trailflat in Dumfriesshire. He was the son of Thomas Mounsey, farmer, who married in the first instance Jean, the sister of William Paterson,* founder of the Bank of England and initiator of the Darien Scheme. She died in 1698, leaving several children. Thomas then married Margaret Steel, sister of the parish minister of Lochmaben, and James was the only issue of this marriage. There are no particulars obtainable of his education, but his connection with the manse, through his mother, makes it almost certain that his early training would be a liberal one. On completion of this, we first hear of him in London in July 1736 signing an agreement with Prince Kantemir, the Russian Minister, to serve as "lekar" in the Naval Hospital at Petersburg. (A "lekar" is a medical man in Russia who has not got his doctor's degree.) In Dr John Cook's *Voyages and Travels* (1778) there is mention of Mounsey attending at Petersburg a man with a fractured skull (1736). Cook says that neither Mounsey nor he could speak Russian or German, but they made themselves understood by speaking Latin! In 1737 we next hear of Mounsey being sent to the Ukraine to deal with

* In a footnote on page 98 of *The Memoir of Benjamin Bell* by his grandson (1868), it is suggested that Benjamin Bell was related to William Paterson. There is no mention of this, however, in Pagan's book on Paterson. Colonel Rogerson of Dumfries, who has the family pedigree, says that he knows nothing of Benjamin Bell as being related to the Paterson family.

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the plague which had broken out in the army of General von Munnich. Here he met his fellow countryman, General James Keith, who became his close friend. In the same year Keith



Jacobus

*Sacrae Acaemiae & Medicorum Inf.
Petrinae, nec non Consistorii aulici
Imperialis, Archiatrum et Succesor. Supra
burgensis et Saxonici Regalis*



Mounsey

*ing. Consistorii aulici & Medicus
Saxo. & Saxonici Regalis*

was seriously wounded in the knee at Oczahow when fighting against the Turks. Keith was attended in the first instance by the Russian surgeons who wanted to amputate the limb. This was declined, and Keith placed himself under the care

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of Mounsey. The wound continuing to discharge, and the General being seriously disabled, Keith, on Mounsey's advice, applied for leave to go to Paris for treatment. At this period Paris was undoubtedly the leading surgical school in Europe. Leave was granted, and Mounsey was allowed to accompany his friend. On arrival in Paris the French surgeons opened up the wound, removing several pieces of cloth which had been driven in by the shot. Keith made a complete recovery. During the time that Mounsey was in Paris he no doubt profited by his stay there and attended the prelections at the hospitals. He obtained his M.D. in 1740 at the University of Rheims. Keith and he then returned to Russia, where after examination his title of Doctor was recognised by the Medical Chancery. In 1741 he was appointed physician to the Land Militia. In 1742, in the war against Sweden, Mounsey is once more in the field with his friend Keith who appointed him physician to Headquarters at Abo in Finland. It was here that he extracted a foetus from a woman, which had been lodged in a Fallopian tube for thirteen years. In 1747 he sent a note of this to the *Philosophical Transactions*, together with the bones, as a gift to the Royal Society. He sent several communications to the Royal Society through Mr Henry Baker, who describes Mounsey as a "gentleman much esteemed in Russia for his knowledge in Natural Philosophy." In one letter he describes an extraordinary fish called in Russia "Squab." A later communication tells of the "everlasting fire" near the Caspian Sea, which is apparently connected with the oilfields there. He also sent a communication on the Russian "Castor" which is prepared from the prostate, testes, and kidney of the beaver and is of interest in regard to modern endocrinology. On 8th March 1749 Mounsey was elected F.R.S. Lond.

In 1747 his friend Keith left Russia for the service of Frederick the Great. By this time Mounsey was high up in the Army service, being appointed Physician to Reprin's Corps and later to the First Moscow Division. On 1st May 1754 he married Jean, daughter of Dr James Grieve, one of the Physicians to the Empress Elizabeth. In 1756 he resigned the Army and began practice as a physician in Moscow. Success came quickly. The Empress ordered him to Yaroslav to treat the wife of Biron, the former Duke of Courland, and to send a report on her illness to Dr Condoidi the chief director of the Medical Chancery. Soon afterwards Dr Condoidi died

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and the field was now clear for Mounsey. The Empress made him First Royal Physician, with rank of Privy Councillor, and a salary of 4000 roubles. In December 1761 the Empress Elizabeth became ill and he was called in. She began with vomiting and coughing of blood. She was bled but died a few days later—25th December 1761 (O.S.). Peter III., who succeeded her, appointed him to the highest positions in the Russian Medical Service in the following decree: "In consideration of the skill, diligence, and zeal with which James Mounsey 'leib medik' and 'state councillor' served the gracious Empress our Aunt Elizabeth Petrovna of blessed and eternal memory, we appoint the said Mounsey to the office of Archiater and to be chief 'leib medik' and Chief Director of the Medical Chancery and of the whole medical Faculty throughout the Russian Empire with the rank of Privy Councillor and a salary of 7000 roubles per annum, the said Mounsey to be personally responsible to and to receive orders directly from ourselves—the senate to take notice of this decree and to issue the necessary orders."

The Medical Chancery was founded by Peter the Great. It was a body consisting of five doctors which controlled all the physicians, surgeons, and apothecaries in Russia. It had also other duties and might be compared to a Primitive Ministry of Health.

Peter only reigned six months, and after the revolution of July 1762 was succeeded by his wife, Catherine II. During this period Mounsey would be privy to many of the secrets and scandals of the Russian Court. In August 1762 he applied to Catherine to be relieved of his duties, giving ill-health as his reason for so doing. His certificate of discharge was signed on 20th August 1762, and soon afterwards he returned to Scotland. On 2nd November of that year he was elected an Honorary Member of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh.

He brought from Russia the seeds of the Rheum Palmatum and handed them to Dr Hope, the Professor of Botany at the University of Edinburgh. These were sown in the old Physic Garden in Edinburgh, and in the following spring flowers appeared. From these Dr Hope collected thirty seeds and sent a communication to Dr Pringle in London for the Royal Society with drawings of the plant. It is interesting to note that the drawings of the first rhubarb plant grown in this country were done by Mr Sam Bard of New York, who was

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then a student at Edinburgh. Bard eventually became a pioneer of medical education in America.

Mounsey matriculated his coat of arms at Edinburgh on 8th December 1763. It bears: "Chequey Or and Gules on a Chief of the last, three mallets of first. Crest on a mountain eagle looking at the setting sun all proper. Motto 'Decor Integer.'" Lyon office in Scotland in its record incidentally mentions him as Fellow of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh—the forerunner of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Mounsey was the last of the Russian Archiaters, and the practice of vesting the control of the profession in Russia in one person, initiated by Peter the Great, was then discontinued. His position in regard to the control of charlatanism is alluded to by Carlyle in his essay on Cagliostro where he states that the Arch Quack had to submit his methods to the Empress' Physician "Mounsey, a hard Annandale Scot." Carlyle is however wrong in his dates, as Cagliostro did not arrive in Petersburg till 1780, long after Mounsey's death.

Dr Mounsey made several valuable reports on the state of Medicine in Russia. He also issued a detailed "Precept to all Doctors on the carrying out of their duties." This was embodied in a decree published 8th April 1762, which confirmed in their appointments all the medical officers recognised under Mounsey's Scheme.

Dr Mounsey must have returned to Scotland with considerable wealth. In 1763 he purchased the farm of Killielung in Hollywood from the Maxwell family. Later he bought the estate of Rammerscales, which is about four miles south of Lochmaben, and built the present mansion there. For many years it was common talk amongst the natives that there was an underground passage from the house, to enable the doctor to escape or conceal himself should any persons come to assassinate him. Presumably the origin of this myth would be because he knew so many of the secrets of the Russian Court that there might have been a desire to do away with him,

Dr Mounsey died at Edinburgh, 2nd February 1773. He is buried in Lochmaben churchyard, where a large monument 30 feet high marks his grave. It has the following inscription: "In Memory of Dr James Mounsey of Rammerscales, who was First Physician to the Emperor and Empress of Russia. Born at Skipmire. Died at Edinburgh, Feb. 2, 1773."

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He had a large family, most of whom died young and "*sine prole*." One of his sons, Captain T. Mounsey of the 79th Regiment, was killed at Manchester in March 1783 in a duel with Lord Belhaven. One of Mounsey's half-sisters married a Rogerson and had issue, Dr John Rogerson, who went to Russia, on Mounsey's advice, in 1766 and remained there till 1816. He also was an Honorary Member of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh. His descendant, Colonel Rogerson, resides in Dumfries to-day. Mounsey's father-in-law, Dr James Grieve,* was a native of Roxburghshire. He graduated at Edinburgh in 1733. He went to Russia in 1734 and eventually became one of the Physicians to the Empress. He died in 1763. His son, Dr John Grieve, became Physician to the Emperor Paul. He graduated M.A. and M.D. at Glasgow in 1777, becoming L.R.C.P. Lond. 1786, and F.R.S. 1794. He is the Dr Grieve alluded to in the *Gold-headed Cane* as being at the Polish dinner party. Many other Scottish doctors made good in Russia in those days. Dr Robert Erskine, a scion of the house of Rosslyn, was brought to Russia by Peter the Great when he founded the Medical Chancery, and later the names of Wylie and Crichton are familiar in the annals of Russian medical history.

* Dr James Grieve is quite a different person to the Dr James Grieve whose memoir appears in the *Dict. of Nat. Biography* and in Munk's *Roll*. He also was an Edinburgh graduate. The Dissertations of both are in the surgeon-general's library at Washington. The former is marked "Scotus," while the latter is marked "Anglus."

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Tschistowitsch's work is in Russian. No copy of this exists in any British medical library. There is one in the surgeon-general's library in Washington. I specially wish to thank Colonel Phalen who sent me photostats from this work, and Mr G. A. Birkett, the lecturer in Russian at Sheffield University, who translated them for me. My thanks are also due to Mr Barlow of the College of Physicians of London, Mr Graham of the College of Physicians of Edinburgh, Colonel Rogerson of Dumfries, and Dr Kroon of Leyden, all of whom rendered me valuable assistance.