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JAMES GRAHAM MARQUIS OF MONTROSE

Jacobus Houbraken, 18th Century

A framed copper plate engraving of James Graham, the Great 1st Marquis of Montrose, Hannibal of the Highlands, by the Dutch engraver Jacobus Houbrackenn, struck in 1740.

DIMENSIONS: 43.2cm (17") High, 29.2cm (11½") Wide, 2cm (0¾") Deep

PRICE: £120

STOCK CODE: AD1602



HISTORY

"GRAHAM, JAMES, fifth Earl and first Marquis of Montrose (1612–1650), was born in 1612. His father was John, fourth earl; his mother before her marriage was Lady Margaret, the eldest daughter of William Ruthven, first earl of Gowrie. In 1624 he was sent to study at Glasgow. On 14 Nov. 1626 he succeeded to his father's earldom, and on 26 Jan. 1627 was admitted to the university of St. Andrews. He indulged there in hunting and hawking, in archery and golfing, without neglecting his studies. His principal guardian was his brother-in-law, the good and wise Archibald, first lord Napier, son of the inventor of logarithms. On 10 Nov. 1629, at the age of seventeen, Montrose was married to Magdalene Carnegie, daughter of Lord Carnegie, afterwards earl of Southesk, who for the three years which elapsed before the bridegroom came of age boarded the young couple. In 1633, as soon as Montrose was twenty-one, he left Scotland to travel on the continent, from which he returned in 1636 (Napier, *Memoirs of Montrose*, i. 1-94).

On his return Montrose sought an interview with Charles I. He was young, high-spirited, and burning for distinction. Charles, it is said, through the arts of the Marquis of Hamilton, treated

him coldly (Heylyn, *Life of Laud*, p. 300; compare Napier, p. 94, and Gardiner, *Hist. of England*, 1603-42, viii. 357). In the first troubles in Scotland Montrose took no part; but before the end of 1637 he was induced by Rothes to join the national movement. That it was a national movement as well as a religious one was probably its principal charm with Montrose. He was likely to share in any feeling which existed against English interference, and as a nobleman he can have had no liking for the bishops, to whom rather than to the nobility of Scotland the king's favour was given. Charles too had treated him with contempt, and Hamilton, whom the king trusted to manage Scotland, was just the sort of man—solemn, pretentious, and unintelligent—to rouse the antipathy of Montrose. Montrose was consequently soon in the forefront of the agitation in defence of the national covenant, which was signed in February and March 1638. In the summer of that year he was placed in command of a force sent to the north to quell the separatist tendencies of Aberdeen. Arriving there on 20 July he did his best to avoid a collision, and returned after accepting what the more violent covenanters must have considered a very inadequate submission. On 30 March 1639 he re-entered Aberdeen under more serious circumstances. War was impending with Charles, and Huntly had raised an army against the covenanters. Again Montrose showed his powers of conciliation, and on 5 April an agreement was arrived at, in accordance with which Huntly promised to disperse his troops. On the 12th Montrose was guilty of the only mean action in his life. He carried Huntly with him as a prisoner to Edinburgh, in spite of the safe-conduct which he had granted. The result was a rising of the Gordons, and on 14 May the civil war opened with the skirmish known as the Trot of Turriff. On the 25th Montrose occupied Aberdeen for the third time. There was some plundering, but Montrose by his personal intervention hindered a general pillage. He left Aberdeen to put down resistance in the surrounding country. In his absence Aberdeen was occupied by Huntly's second surviving son, Viscount Aboyne; but on 18 June Aboyne was defeated by Montrose at the Bridge of Dee, and Aberdeen was reoccupied by the covenanters. The treaty of Berwick, which was signed on the day of Aboyne's defeat, put an end to the fighting.

In the negotiations which followed Montrose saw the king. Whatever may have been the effect which Charles's personal influence produced upon him, Montrose found himself, in the parliament which met at Edinburgh on 31 Aug. 1639, face to face with a new political situation. Parliament having declared for the abolition of episcopacy, proceeded to discuss a question of

grave constitutional importance. It was proposed not only to leave the estate of bishops without a successor, but to reduce the other three estates, the lords, the barons or county members, and the representatives of the burghs, to an equality, by giving to each of them an equal share in the committee which was known as the Lords of the Articles, and which practically directed parliamentary business. Parliament would thus come under the control of the middle classes as long as the two latter estates remained united. That they would long remain so was exceedingly probable, first, because they were in close connection with the presbyterian clergy, and secondly, because they submitted themselves to the leadership of Argyll, who by their help made himself master of Scotland. Montrose's deepest feelings were thus touched. He saw in the political predominance of the presbyterian clergy all that he had detested in the political predominance of the bishops, and he saw that Argyll was seizing under parliamentary forms that usurped supremacy of a subject which he had detected in Hamilton when he had managed Scotland under the forms of monarchy as the favourite of the king. His own position and character alienated him from the dominant party. As a nobleman whose influence and estates could never vie with those of the greatest landowners, he scorned to submit to the Argylls and Hamiltons, whose estates were far more extended than his own, and he found himself in unison with other nobles of the second class, not only in repudiating their authority, but in wishing to emancipate the life and mind of Scotland from the grinding pressure of the presbyterian clergy, of which the greater nobles were able to make use. Montrose, in short, was attempting to anticipate the freer life of modern Scotland. As it was not in accordance with the law of social development that his hopes should be realised in his lifetime, he was thrust into an opposition for which, during that generation, there was no chance of success.

Montrose's first difficulty was in the king. Charles played his game so badly that Montrose drew back for a time among the covenanters, and on 20 Aug. 1640, when the Scots invaded England, he was the first to cross the Tweed. In the earlier part of the month he had signed the bond of Cumbernauld, by which he and his co-signatories engaged themselves to resist the establishment of a dictatorship in the hands of subjects. In May 1641 Montrose threw himself entirely on the king's side. He wished, as Hyde wished in England, to see Charles rule as a constitutional king, that his authority might serve as a check to the establishment of a democratic despotism ('Montrose's Letter to the King,' in Napier, *Memorials of Montrose*, ii. 43).

He believed, probably with truth, that Argyll thought of deposing Charles. Argyll came upon traces of communications between Montrose and the king which were directed against himself (Gardiner, *Hist. of England*, 1603-42, ix. 396). On 11 June Montrose was imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle. During the king's visit to Scotland Montrose wrote to him accusing Hamilton of treason. Clarendon in his later days told a story of Montrose offering to murder Argyll and Hamilton (Clarendon, ed. Macray, iv. 20), which may safely be rejected by all who are acquainted with Clarendon's carelessness about details whenever he had a good story to tell. (The question is discussed in Gardiner, *Hist. of Engl.* 1603-42, x. 26.) Montrose was set at liberty when Charles left Scotland in November.

In the spring of 1643, when there was a probability that Argyll's government would send a Scottish army to the English parliament, Montrose visited the queen at York, urging her to countenance a royalist insurrection in the north of Scotland, to be supported by troops to be sent over by the Marquis of Antrim from Ireland. Charles, however, preferred Hamilton as a counsellor, and Montrose's plan had to be postponed. In August, Montrose being now certain that a Scottish invasion of England was projected, as he had himself been offered a command in it, hastened to plead his cause with Charles in person at Gloucester. Once more he was rejected. Early in 1644, when the Scots were actually in England, Charles was more amenable to his arguments. In February Antrim was pleading at Kilkenny for leave to send over two thousand men (Wishart, cap. iii., is the author of the mistaken statement that Antrim proposed to bring over ten thousand men). On 1 Feb. Montrose was appointed lieutenant-general in Scotland to Prince Maurice, and on the 14th he was named lieutenant-general, Maurice's name being omitted from the commission (*Hist. MSS. Comm.* 2nd Rep. 172). On 14 April he crossed the borders at the head of a small force, but was in a few days driven back without effecting anything. On 6 May he was created Marquis of Montrose, but the promise to advance him in the peerage was doubtless given before he set out on his abortive expedition.

For some weeks Montrose remained in the north of England, hoping for assistance from Newcastle or Rupert. At last he made up his mind to depend on himself alone. On 18 Aug. he again entered Scotland, in the disguise of a groom, with two companions. Before twelve months were past he had won six pitched battles over the covenanters: Tippermuir, 1 Sept.; Aberdeen, 13 Sept. 1644; Inverlochy, 2 Feb.; Auldearn, 9 May; Alford, 2 July; Kilsyth, 15 Aug.

1645.

Montrose's military genius was of a very high order. His skill in manoeuvring his little force is beyond dispute, but his skill as a tactician was perhaps greater still. At a time when the arrangement of troops previous to a battle was usually conducted after a fixed plan, he varied his plan according to the special circumstances of each battle and the varying component parts of his own army. The invariable quantity in his force was a body of old soldiers from the Irish war, sent to the highlands by the Marquis of Antrim, and commanded by Alaster Macdonell or Macdonald. These men are usually described as Irish, but they were probably for the most part of Scottish descent connected with the race of the Macdonalds. They were consequently extremely hostile to the Campbells, by whom they or their ancestors had been driven out of Scotland. At Tippermuir Montrose depended upon them and some highlanders from Athol and the neighbourhood. He had no cavalry, and won by a rush upon a new-levied and undisciplined army. At Aberdeen he had very few highlanders, and his cavalry numbered only forty-four. He consequently had recourse to the expedient of interspersing musketeers among the horse, so as to put them in a state of defence, and to use them as cavalry after the enemy was shaken. At Inverlochy, where he attacked the Campbells, he relied on a great gathering of the Macdonalds, and as the Campbells had no horse at all, he was able to make the most of his own little force of cavalry. These three battles had been gained over troops either undisciplined or only disciplined in the highland fashion. In his latter battles he had to do with regular troops. At Auldearn, where he defeated Henry, he had at last a respectable body of horse, through the accession of the Gordons, and he won the battle partly by his excellent arrangements, but still more by his adoption of the new cavalry system, which had recently been introduced into England, the old plan of preluding with an interchange of pistol shots having been abandoned in favour of an immediate charge. Alford, again, was won by Montrose's choice of a splendid defensible position. Baillie, his antagonist, was lured across a river and a bog, so that when he was repulsed his destruction was unavoidable. Kilsyth, the most splendid in its results of all Montrose's victories, was the one in which his qualities as a commander were the least shown; but this was simply because the blunders of the enemy were so enormous that it would have been very difficult not to beat him.

Montrose's object had always been to shake himself free of the highlands and to organise the

lowlands, so as to hold out a hand to Charles in England. If he failed it was because his statesmanship was inferior to his military genius. When he entered Glasgow after the victory of Kilsyth he found himself in the air. The Macdonalds went off because they wanted to fight the Campbells and not to succour Charles. Other highlanders went off because they could not be allowed to plunder in the south as they had plundered in the north. The Gordons went off because they no longer occupied the first place in Montrose's counsels. Montrose had no population in the lowlands from which he could draw fresh support. He summoned a parliament to meet at Glasgow, but before the appointed day arrived he, with the small force which remained to him, was defeated at Philiphaugh (13 Sept. 1645) by David Leslie, who had come back from England with a strong body of cavalry. Montrose had no national force behind him, and the varying elements of his armies had each fought for sectional interests and deserted him when he sought to use them for a common object. To the population of the lowlands his conduct of the war had given dire offence. He was himself clement to prisoners, and often liberated them on parole; but his wild followers could not be restrained. The carnage after battle was enormous, and on one occasion, after the battle of Aberdeen, he was so enraged by the murder of a drummer as to make no effort to restrain his men from outrage and slaughter when the town was entered. It is true that Argyll had burned and pillaged before Montrose entered Scotland, but Argyll's violence had been mostly confined to the highlands, and it is in the nature of civilised nations to think much more of injuries done to themselves by a ruder people than they do of the injuries which they themselves inflict on those whom they account to be barbarous. For some months Montrose attempted to raise fresh forces in the highlands, but he had no longer Macdonald with him, and between him and the Gordons cooperation was henceforth impossible.

Charles, indeed, valued Montrose's services highly, and had insisted in his negotiations with the Scottish covenanters that Montrose should be included in any pacification made, and that his army should join the Scottish army in the then projected attack upon the new model. When this proposal was rejected, he proposed to send Montrose as his ambassador to France. As the Scots would not hear of this, he despatched orders to Montrose from his confinement at Newcastle to disband his troops, but he accompanied his public message with secret orders to keep them together. Resistance, however, became impossible, and on 31 Aug. 1646 Montrose escaped in a small vessel to Bergen.

Montrose's first thought was to renew the war. He sent Lord Crawford to Paris to explain to Henrietta Maria his readiness to take the field in Scotland at the head of thirty thousand men. To do this would require money, but Henrietta Maria either had not the necessary supply or was not inclined to trust it to Montrose. When he arrived in Paris in the spring of 1647, he found no intention to support him.

In or about March 1648 Montrose was in treaty with Mazarin for a high position in the French army, but the second civil war was approaching, and he distrusted the French policy as likely to lead to the king's ruin. He therefore left France to offer his services to the Emperor Ferdinand III. By him he was made field-marshal, a title of much less importance than at present, and he also received permission to levy troops in Flanders for service in the king's behalf. Yet though he went to Brussels he was unable to effect anything that year.

On 28 Jan. 1649 Montrose offered his services to the Prince of Wales, who was then at Brussels. At the news of the execution of Charles I he fainted, and when he came to himself swore to avenge him. In February he was with Charles II at the Hague, and advised against his acceptance of the Scottish invitation to go to Scotland as a covenanting king. On 4 March 1649 Montrose received a commission to be lieutenant-governor of Scotland on royalist principles. He betook himself first to Denmark, and then to Sweden, to collect money for, his enterprise. On 12 Jan. 1650 Charles assured him that though he was about to receive the commissioners of the Scottish covenanters, he would agree to nothing contrary to the authority of Montrose. Montrose was already on the way, having sailed for the Orkneys on or about 16 Dec. 1649. He had been furnished with arms, munitions, and vessels. He took twelve hundred men with him, but of these a thousand perished by shipwreck. He sailed up the Dornoch Firth, and his scanty force was easily overwhelmed at Invercarron on 27 April 1650. Montrose himself escaped, but was delivered up to the government by Macleod of Assynt. David Leslie carried him to Edinburgh, where he arrived on 18 May. The day before an act of parliament had been passed decreeing that he should be hanged with 'his book and declaration' tied about his neck — that is to say, Wishart's account of his campaigns and the declaration which he had issued before his last expedition—and that he should, after death, be dismembered.

In a conference with some ministers on 20 May, Montrose laid down his political profession of faith. 'The covenant which I took,' he said, 'I own it and adhere to it. Bishops, I care not for

them. I never intended to advance their interest. But when the king had granted you all your desires, and you were every one sitting under his vine and under his fig-tree, that then you should have taken a party in England by the hand, and entered into a league and covenant with them against the king, was the thing I judged my duty to oppose to the yondmost.' On 21 May 1650 the sentence was carried out. Montrose, dressed 'in his red scarlet cassock,' was hanged in the Grassmarket.

The indignation of the Scots against Montrose was chiefly roused by the slaughter of their countrymen by his followers. He said in defence that no one was killed except in battle. This was not strictly true, as there was much slaughter after the capture of Aberdeen, which Montrose made no attempt to stop. His true defence is that it was impossible to restrain an unpaid army composed of such wild materials as his own. This defence, however, is in reality his condemnation. He made use of a force strong enough to slay and plunder, but entirely incapable of founding a political edifice.

Montrose was a poet as well as a warrior and statesman. His poems have a political purpose, but, unlike most political verses, they have a poetic vigour which would have given them life apart from the intention with which they were written."

- Dictionary of National Biography