

## BIOGRAPHY OF DR. PETER SMITH.\*

Close following the frontiersmen, whose footprints were scarcely rubbed out, and whose rifles had not yet been silenced in the territory embracing the Ohio Valley, came a band of men who cleared away the forest and founded their homes among the stumps. The subject of this sketch may be numbered among these people. He was a typical Puritan, an educated, stern man, of indomitable will, and religious to the utmost degree.

The end of the War of the Revolution had been consummated before the Indian had departed from the Miami lands, where this man lived. John Filson tramped from Lexington to the Ohio River, laid out the village of Losantiville, afterward Cincinnati, and, venturing too far from the fort, left his bones somewhere among the adjacent hills. This happened several years after the subject of this sketch was married. David Schœpf, the talented scientist, that energetic Hessian, who, after the surrender of the British, took his pack on his back and tramped over our land in search of American medicinal plants, had not yet written his *Materia Medica Americana*, which is the first systematic publication concerning the American *Materia Medica*.<sup>1</sup>

B. S. Barton, of the University of Pennsylvania, who, in 1798, contributed the first study of American drugs, from an educational institution,<sup>2</sup> and Samuel Thomson<sup>3</sup> the combative champion of lobelia, who fought the dogmatism, as he viewed it, of the medical profession, and introduced the Thomsonian method of medication, were contemporaneous with Peter Smith. C. S. R. Rafinesque,<sup>4</sup> that picturesque, gifted, erratic, enthusiastic scholar, had not landed in America when Peter Smith trod the Kentucky path.

Coming into the Ohio Valley from the South that he hated because of its slavery, preaching the Word of God and practicing medicine, Peter Smith, the representative of a class of men who sought neither fame nor gold, and who feared no privation, made his mark and passed away.

PETER SMITH'S DISPENSATORY AND ITS RECOVERY. "Peter Smith, the Indian Herb Doctor." The name was familiar during the writer's boyhood in Kentucky. It lingers yet about Western domestic medicine, and is occasionally seen in orthodox medical print. Rafinesque cited Peter Smith

\* Read at the December meeting of the Cincinnati Section of the American Chemical Society. Revised reprint from the American Journal of Pharmacy, January, 1898.

<sup>1</sup> "Materia Medica Americana," 1787.

<sup>2</sup> "Collections for an Essay towards a Materia Medica of the United States," by Benjamin Smith Barton, M. D., 1798. See Bulletin No. 1, Lloyd library.

<sup>3</sup> See "A Narrative of the Life and Medical Discoveries of Samuel Thomson," 1822.

<sup>4</sup> "The Life and Writings of Rafinesque." Prepared for the Filson Club, Louisville, Ky., and read at its meeting, Monday, April 2, 1894, by Richard Ellsworth Call, M. A., M. Sc., M. D.

as one of the authorities consulted in the formation of his *Materia Medica*, but Smith's book was lost to sight. Tradition also told of a book by Peter Smith, but no such book was anywhere to be found. Second-hand booksellers, old men and women throughout the "Miami Country," old physicians' libraries, were appealed to in vain. Neither is a copy of this book to be found in the Surgeon General's library. The name of the man alone remained, the book that he wrote had vanished. Then at last, after a search of twenty-five years, the writer gave up in despair.

Last summer (1897), by invitation of Mr. Le Roy Brooks, the day was spent with the Toledo Club at Middle Bass Island, Lake Erie. General J. Warren Keifer, in speaking about old books, chanced to mention Peter Smith's Dispensatory, a copy of which he incidentally remarked he chanced to possess. The lost book was found, and, in addition, the history of its author was recovered, for Peter Smith was the father of General Keifer's mother. Added interest accrued from the fact that it was learned that the field of Dr. Smith's operations about Cincinnati was near the old Duck Creek church, a pioneer monument in the history of the Ohio Baptists, in which he officiated, being within a few moments' walk of the home of the writer.

HISTORY OF PETER SMITH.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Peter Smith was a son of Dr. Hezekiah Smith, of the "Jerseys," "*a home old man, or Indian doctor.*" Peter was born in Wales, February, 6, 1753, from whence this branch of the Smith family came. He was also a relative of Hezekiah Smith, D. D., of Haverhill, Mass. Peter Smith was educated at Princeton, and was married in New Jersey to Catherine Stout, December 23, 1776. He seems to have early, under his father, given some attention to medicine, and became familiar with the works of Dr. Rush, Dr. Brown, and other writers of his day on "physic," as well as with the works of Culpepper. He also, during his life, acquired much information from physicians whom he met in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky, and Ohio. He called himself an "Indian doctor," because, as he said, he relied in his practice much on herbs, roots, and other remedies known to the Indians, though he did not confine himself to botanical remedies. He seems to have been an original investigator, availing himself of all opportunities within his reach for acquiring knowledge, especially acquainting himself with domestic and tried Indian remedies, roots, herbs, etc.

Starting from New Jersey about the year 1780, he commenced his wandering, emigrating life with his wife and "some" small children. He lingered for a time in Virginia, then in the Carolinas, and "settled" in Georgia. He sought out people from whom he could gather knowledge "of the theory and practice of medicine," and preached the gospel, possibly in an itinerant way. He was a devout Baptist of the old school. A strong anti-slavery man, even in that early day, he could not be content with his Georgia home, as he put it, "with its many scorpions and slaves." Accordingly, he took his family on horseback—little

<sup>1</sup> Credit is due General Keifer for the facts that gave this information.—L.

children, twin babes among them, carried in baskets suitable for the purpose, hung to the horns of the saddle ridden by his wife—and thus, without roads to travel, crossed mountains, rivers, and creeks. The wilderness was not free from danger from Indians, but he traversed the woods from Georgia through Tennessee to Kentucky, intending there to abide. But, finding that Kentucky had also become a slave State, the dogmatic old man and his family bid good-bye to Kentucky. He left that State with a parting shot to the effect that it was the home of "head-ticks and slavery," and emigrated to Ohio, settling on Duck Creek, near the Columbia Old Baptist Church, now adjacent to Norwood village, and near the limits of Cincinnati, reaching there about 1794.

He became, with his family, a member of the Duck Creek congregation, and frequently preached there and at other frontier places, still pursuing the double occupation of farming and the practice of medicine. In 1804 he again took to the wilderness with his entire family, then numbering twelve children, born in the "Jerseys and on the line of his march through the wilderness, the States and the Territories." He finally settled on a small, poor farm on Donnel's Creek, Ohio, in the midst of rich ones, where he died December 31, 1816. It seems from his book (p. 14), published while he resided at his last home, that he did not personally cease his wanderings and search for medical knowledge, as he states that he was in Philadelphia, July 4, 1811, where he made observations as to the effect of hot and of cold air upon the human system. It is certain that he not only taught to the end in the pulpit, but ministered as a physician to his neighbors and friends, often going long distances from home for the purpose. He concluded, near the termination of his long and varied experiences, that "Men have contrived to break all God's appointments but this: '*It is appointed for all men once to die.*'"

Peter Smith, preacher, farmer, physician, pioneer, aggressive Abolitionist before Wendell Phillips or William Lloyd Garrison were born, is buried in a neglected graveyard near Donnelville, Clark County, O. No photograph or other likeness remains to revive the features of this picturesque personage.

Such is the life-record of this man, who, so far as the writer can determine, ventured to publish the first Western work on materia medica.

THE DISPENSATORY. It is to be regretted that Dr. Smith neglected the use of botanical names. His plants are all employed under common names, but he describes the appearance and habitat of each specimen so carefully as to enable the experienced reader to identify most of them. Rafinesque, who credits Dr. Smith's work, objects to his common names, which, however, are very interesting in connection with the text. The pains he takes to credit authorities from whom he obtained information is very refreshing, the relationship of these names to the substances used being useful to us to-day in connection with many drugs.

A few examples both of lost terms and others still in use may be cited:

Brinton's or Culver's Root.

Miami Columbo (American Columbo) Root.

The Nine-bark Root.

The Square-stalk Root.  
The Corn Snake Root.  
The Horse Balm.  
The Mountain Mint.  
The Sore Throat or Blueberry Root.  
The Devil's Nip.  
The Devil's Bit.  
The Backache Root, etc.

Following the description and uses of simples come recipes for diseases, in which the originator of each compound is conscientiously credited. We find a few of these names familiar yet; *e. g.*, green ointment and ointment of red lead. Concerning this latter, he refers to an interesting Revolutionary incident where it had been used with good result on a soldier "who had been wounded at the Germantown battle, 1777, in the Revolutionary War. One of his legs had been broken and shattered while he was one of the forlorn party sent to tear down the fence and palings about Chew's house."

Passing to some of his remedies, we are reminded of the animal drugs of mediæval times; *e. g.*, a dead toad is recommended as an application to a wen, and Smith's remedy for toothache—well it would credit the animal extract men, past or present. Dr. Smith seems to have anticipated the cold-water curers (hydro-paths), but he recorded his views in language which demonstrates that he stood close to some of the sanative surgeons of to-day. He says:

"COLD WATER APPLICATIONS I reckon among the choicest of my discoveries.

"The following I recommend:

"When the accident of a bruise, piercing of a nail, a cut, a broken bone, an eye knocked out and put in again, etc., takes place, immerse the part in cold water as quick as possible, and then dip a large, soft linen cloth into cold water and apply it, and keep out the air. This cloth should be kept close; aid this by dropping cold water upon it for fifteen minutes, and continue it close for twelve hours. The inflammation by this means will be kept back, and the cure by anything else will be almost forestalled; and then a bruise, a strain or broken bone, will scarcely swell at all; and a like application to a burn will have a similar effect. In about fifteen minutes the first pain will be over, and the future ease will be steadfast.

"I have tried the foregoing application of cold water, with full demonstrations, for forty years past."

And that his observing eye caught yet finer lines is evidenced by the fact that he pointed out an "insect" theory of disease, and placed himself (pp. xiv, xv) in the ranks of the microbe theorists of to-day by asserting, in an extended argument, that the "plague, yellow fever, and other bilious and contagious complaints" were caused by "invisible insects;" and in accordance with his methods the Doctor takes pains to credit another for the suggestion.

But enough has been said concerning this upright, picturesque character, whose "Dispensatory" is reproduced in facsimile in the pages that follow, whose face has left no print, but who wrote the first *Materia Medica* "Dispensatory" published in the West.

J. U. L.