

**FILSON CLUB PUBLICATIONS
NO. 20: THE HISTORY OF THE
MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF
TRANSYLVANIA UNIVERSITY**

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DR. ROBERT PETER

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DOCTOR ROBERT PETER.

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THE HISTORY
OF
The Medical Department
OF
Transylvania University

BY
DOCTOR ROBERT PETER
Prepared for Publication by his Daughter, Miss JOHANNA PETER
Member of The Filson Club

Illustrated



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PREFACE

IN preparing for publication the following sketch of the famous Transylvania Medical Department and its professors, I have placed in foot-notes, as far as practicable, my own additions to the text, so as to avoid making any radical change in my father's manuscript.

Portions of the history may seem fragmentary; some of the lives of the professors may be incomplete; some, no doubt, are insufficiently noticed, but this is easily understood when it is considered that my father wrote this narrative at irregular intervals of leisure in the years from 1873 to 1878, when some of the professors were still living; and that the writing was left by him in a yet uncompleted state and lacking those finishing touches which no other hand could so well give. In what I have done I have striven for accuracy. My father's reminiscences will have due weight as coming from one most intimately associated with Transylvania and her medical teachers—from the one colleague of all the brilliant company who could best transcribe them. The notice of Doctor Eberle I have copied from the *Transylvania Journal of Medicine* of 1838, as the nearest I could get

to the estimation in which he was held in the Transylvania School. The sketch of Doctor Bruce is gathered mainly from obituaries by his colleagues. That of Doctor Chipley—oftenest described, by those who knew him, as nature's nobleman—was written by his daughter, Mrs. Boykin Jones, in answer to my letter to her. I have added a few words about Doctor Marshall, and Doctor Skillman, "the beloved physician," the last survivor of the Transylvania Medical Faculty. And I have given as best I could a description of the last declining years of Transylvania, with some account of the Medical Hall and its ultimate fate. Any biography of Doctor Peter, I fear, must be unsatisfactory unless written at length. The brief summary of his life introductory to *The History of Transylvania University*, published by The Filson Club in 1896, was called "insufficient," "far too modest," etc. Such the story of a life so long, so full, and so many-sided must ever be unless a volume be devoted to it. In what I now say of my father I feel, even more than I did then, that I can not do justice. It is a mere itinerary of a life-journey. The same thing is true in varying degree of all the Transylvania professors, and I repeat here what I said of the former *History of Transylvania*—that all errors or faults must be ascribed to my own insufficiency to cope with the subject.

Preface

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Nevertheless, with all its shortcomings, this is a record not unworthy of preservation, and while biographers point us to the fact that in the United States Senate there sat at one and the same time no fewer than *eight* graduates of Transylvania University, including Jefferson Davis, afterward President of the Southern Confederacy, the student of these pages will remark that Transylvania's Medical Department had already won as abundant laurels in the field of science.

My grateful acknowledgments are due, first and for many kindnesses, to our invaluable President, Colonel Reuben T. Durrett, through whose unflinching interest, literary judgment, and tactful encouragement so many gems of Kentucky history have been preserved which otherwise had perished, and to the many friends of old Transylvania who have bid me Godspeed in my undertaking. I am indebted to Mrs. Thomas H. Clay for letters and documents bearing upon my subject; to Miss Mary Mason Brown for a copy of Jouett's admirable portrait of Doctor Brown which hangs in the old Brown homestead at Frankfort; to Mrs. Lawrence Dade Fitzhugh for data and the permission to use the beautiful portrait by Jouett of her ancestor, Doctor Richardson; to Mrs. Sallie Overton Bullock for the picture of Doctor Overton; to Mrs. Anderson Berry for the picture of

Doctor Cooke; to Mr. William Short, of Louisville, for valuable suggestions and the fine likeness of Doctor Short; and to Doctor A. M. Peter for some of the illustrations. The several descendants of Doctor Ridgely to whom I applied have, without exception, aided me most courteously and patiently in my search for a picture of Doctor Ridgely: a search which I abandoned with the utmost reluctance and with the feeling that his portrait, could I have found it, must have adorned this history as his life had adorned the times to which it belonged, and therefore be sadly missed from its place with Doctor Brown. To Doctor John W. Whitney, who was professor of Surgery and Anatomy in the Transylvania Medical School in 1854-55, and is now the sole surviving representative of that school, I am indebted for a number of facts and suggestions.

JOHANNA PETER.

INTRODUCTION

THE late Doctor Robert Peter, one of the most distinguished analytical chemists of his times, was a member of the Medical Faculty of Transylvania University from 1833 to the time of the dissolution of that institution, and afterward occupied chairs in the different colleges into which Transylvania was merged. He was one of the most active of the professors, and did as much as any one else to raise the university to the lofty heights it attained as a school of literature, law, and medicine. It occurred to him after the merger of the Transylvania into the Kentucky University that an institution which had led the way and done so much for literature, law, and medicine should not be permitted to vanish and leave nothing but a name and memory behind. He, therefore, went to work, after the weight of years was gathering fast upon him, to write the history of Transylvania University, and got his work almost finished in 1894, when death, which alone could have arrested him in his undertaking, relieved him of the task at the age of eighty-nine. His daughter, Miss Johanna Peter,