

GRĀMATU APSKATS

BOOK REVIEWS

IMANTS EGLĪTIS

A HISTORICAL BOOK ON HISTORY

A. Viksna. *Pa ārstu takām. [Along the Path of Physicians.]* – Rīga: Avots, 1990. – 175 lpp.

In 1992 Latvian readers received the book on history of medicine which was written in 1987, printed in 1990, but published in book form only in 1992. Its author was Dr. Arnis Viksna, a well-known and prolific writer on the history of Latvian medicine. He has published books on Prof. A. Bieziņš, the history of the University of Tartu, as well as many articles on historical events and personalities. The last book is only one of 955 publications he produced before his 50th birthday in 1992*.

The essential idea of this work was to describe the cultural values of medical specialists, as well as prominent locations and events associated with these specialists, either in Latvia or abroad – at Tartu in Estonia, or in St. Petersburg or Moscow. The work also included profiles of three Latvian specialists who had emigrated to the West (H. Budulis in Germany, J. Alksnis in England and J. Primanis in the United States). The places and institutions where these men worked are historically important in that they provided centers for Latvian scientific thought before the establishment of the University of Latvia and its medical faculty in 1919, during the period of Latvian independence from 1918 to 1940 and after World War II.

Each personality is described in the book at approximately the same length, and each article is accompanied by photographs. The texts are concise and, while accenting the most important aspects of each person, they are written with such wit and precision as to read almost like fiction.

Of course, not all these stories are of equal interest to those who are living in the time of Latvia's second independence. The revolutionaries P. Dauge, A. Krumbergs, K. Pelēkzīrnis and M. Vecrumba are in the book only because of a Soviet-style writing hangover (please remember that the book was written in 1987).

The author of this review moreover believes that the role of some physicians in this collection is exaggerated. A. Liepukalns, for example, was not a good teacher, in my view. He lectured poorly, was rude in contacts with his

* Viksna A. Publikāciju saraksts / Red. K. Arons. – Rīga: P. Stradiņa Medicīnas vēstures muzejs, 1992. – 48 lpp.

colleagues and students. I studied medicine during his tenure and remember him well. V.Kalbergs published a manual of anatomy in Latvian which actually was written by his colleagues, and he did not even thank them in the preface. Nor can I agree with the view that E.Burtnieks was responsible for the establishment of the Latvian Therapeutic School.

These remarks, of course, are not meant to belittle the importance of this book. Rather, they are intended as suggestions for a next edition, which is certainly needed. It is worth noting that the available copies of this book were snatched up so quickly that the volume is already a bibliographical rarity.