



*Jędrzej Śniadecki*

*(1768 – 1838)*

*An enlightened mind*

Jędrzej Śniadecki was born on 30 November, 1768, in his parents' estate near the city called Żnin. At the beginning of his education he was learning in Trzemeszno, to be next taken to Krakow by his elder brother Jan after their father's death. Jan was at that time a professor of Krakow Academy already.



Żnin

stated above had an enormous influence on Jędrzej, who – following his respected in scientific circles, famous brother – fell in love with the science as well.

Following Jan's footsteps, Jędrzej begun studying mathematics, so beloved by Jan, and was quite successful in this very discipline.

However, he was afterwards persuaded by margrave Wielopolska to relinquish mathematics to medicine.

Living with Jan was a very important experience in young Jędrzej's life; for his brother's soul was entirely devoted to his native country and to the truth. He was, as some say, filled with light which he carried with him continuously and shared with others, as if it was coming right out of his very self. Circumstances



Jan Śniadecki

Nowadays, we can but vaguely describe her motives for that action; we can, though, say with certainty that the minds of the two brothers varied. Jan was a skilled mathematician, wonderful when it came to logical thinking. But, what is typical for this sort of people, he was hardly interested in the world as it is. Of the whole vivid reality, Jan paid attention to but one aspect; and it was necessary for him only when it came to measuring some certain objects. Out of the logic itself we can build a world indeed; it will be admittedly pale and dead, but filled with harmony and order. Jędrzej, however, was far more observant and sensitive than Jan; he not only wrote very precise clinical works, but also – what is worth remembering – satirical works. He was a man intrigued and attracted by the beauty of the universe.

From Krakow travelled Jędrzej to Vienna and Pavia. There he studied medicine and natural sciences, his professors being e.g. famous inventors Luigi Galvani and Alessandro Volta. Sometime later he was offered a profitable position by the East India Trading Company. He couldn't, though, imagine working beyond the borders of his native country. His feelings for it were still very strong, even though he had lived abroad for a long time. Besides, his motto was "To learn and to enlighten the compatriots", and we can now say that he fulfilled this task.

Jędrzej Śniadecki was a brilliant student, not only because of his outstanding intelligence. He lived for the science, it was for him a way of living, treated really seriously and admired. When it happened so, that this man encountered some problematic issue, he no sooner gave up nor relinquish the subject, than he found the solution. Being unable to solve a problem tormented him, was even painful for him. In studying he put his whole soul.

As a scientist and chemist, he is best – known for his work entitled "*Teoria Jestestw Organicznych*", where he described his attitude towards various issues. Secondly, his also very important work is "*Początki Chemii*" / "The



*beginnings of Chemistry*”, being a textbook about one of his favourite disciplines, which he dedicated a great part of his time and studies. In it was first published polish chemical terminology, being the very achievement Jędrzej Śniadecki is most famous for. Elements’ names, invented by him, are still – with several changes – being used in Poland.

In 1797 Jędrzej began teaching at the Vilnius University in polish language. This very circumstance shocked even such an enlightened person as Marcin Poczobot. Students, however, thought differently. The lecture hall in which a young professor resided was always overcrowded,

and Śniadecki’s lectures enjoyed a reputation of being really rousing.

At the same time in “Dziennik Wileński” Śniadecki published many works concerning medicine, he was also a person who thought instructing people in this very discipline vital. This is one of his greatest virtues indeed, for the other doctors saw medicine as a secret of their profession, which no person from outside could have access to.

One of his most important thesis, published in 1805, was “*O Fizycznym Wychowaniu Dzieci*”/“*On the Physical Education of Children*”; for Śniadecki was a successful propagator of this matter in Poland.



The Vilnius University



Simultaneously, he was busy completing the book “*Chemia*”/”*Chemistry*”, and particularly he was working on the theory of solutions. Śniadecki is also said to be the prime discoverer of an element called ruthenium. What concerns medicine, Jędrzej is most famous for describing medical treatment of rickets.

Jędrzej Śniadecki died on 11 May, 1838, aged 70. His whole life was a constant work; work on his own education, on the development of science, on the enlightenment of his compatriots and their manners, on the healthy growth of children. Jędrzej and Jan were closely connected with their native culture. Their country’s needs were their own. Rarely can be encountered people who – living in such crucial times as they were – preserved such strength and power, integrity of character, such perseverance in work and such balance and harmony of thought, like Jędrzej and Jan Śniadecy did.



Ruthenium crystals

Significant in light of these facts is Jędrzej Śniadecki’s famous saying:



„Piękna to i pożyteczna rzecz odbywać drogi. Co moment można się czegoś nauczyć, a najczęściej tam, gdzie się człowiek najmniej spodziewa.”



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