

LOUIS PASTEUR⁴¹

"LUDWIK PASTEUR"

In an undistinguished little French town, there lived a poor craftsman. It was a long time ago. He lived, he worked, there was nothing else. But feeling lonely, he got married to a gardener's daughter. Then a child was born — and died. They were very sad.

Later, however, they had four more children — three girls and a boy. That boy was born on a Friday at two o'clock in the morning on the 27th of December 1822. When they took the little fellow to get his birth certificate, nobody guessed, nobody cared. They wrote down that the father's name was Jean Joseph and that the boy was to be called Louis. The witnesses signed. Done. Who could be bothered about a screaming suckling.

But the parents delighted in little Lou's development. He grew bigger and bigger. The father told him how he had served in Napoleon's army, and the boy listened. And he loved to draw. The father sent him to school, and every evening took care to see that he had done his homework well. But there was a small stream not far away, and Lou preferred to catch fish with his pals, or draw. The only thing that angered him was when other boys destroyed birds' nests. At school, he was no trouble, except that he asked too many questions and annoyed the teacher by wanting to know too much. The teacher did not understand that Lou liked to know everything in detail and got really upset if there was something he could not understand. Lou draws, and draws, and the neighbors say that he should be a painter and advise that he should go on studying. Let him go to a big city, to the capital, to Paris itself. For as Lou grew older, he developed a great liking for books.

The father was afraid to send his only son too far away; but when a neighbor sent his, he finally agreed. Terrible weather for the boy's departure. Rain and snow, and they were going by coach because there were no trains yet. It didn't work. Lou was homesick, wanted to return. He was still too young and the father took him home. Lou kept up his drawing, and by now everybody is saying that he will definitely be a painter. But things were to turn out quite differently.

Lou went to a higher school where there was a very young teacher who realized that the boy loved to work. But he is young and does not know what to do.

Lou once wrote in a letter: "Once a man takes to study, he can never again live without

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it."

But he did not like everything equally. In his finals he had good grades in nature study but only fair in history and geography.

So when Louis Pasteur was eighteen, he became a teacher himself. Pupils were very fond of him. And he not only taught but also read a lot and always wrote in his letters about the books he liked most. What made him happiest, though, was a small room of his own, where nobody disturbed him.

But in books there are many things hard to understand. And Pasteur was eager to read the most difficult ones and to understand everything. So he went to Paris for the second time. And he was so 'poor that all winter he turned on the heat only twice.

He took seriously to study and work. He learned and worked all his life. And he became famous as no king, not even the world's most famous leader, had ever been.

In Paris there is a Pasteur Street, a Pasteur Hospital all made of glass and steel, a Pasteur Institute where only great scientists are allowed to work. And all Frenchmen love him, even though he is no longer alive. Now, we also have a street in Warsaw named after Pasteur. There is not a single scientific book on the treatment of diseases in the world which does not say that Pasteur was great and very learned. Now the whole world knows that it was an important — extremely important — event when in 1822 that little boy was born in a little town.

But what did Pasteur actually do that all praise him so much? Pasteur taught the world one important thing, and now everybody knows that it is as he said, so it seems to be plain and easy. But he was the first and they did not want to believe him. They laughed at him and argued. And, of course, it is awfully unpleasant if you are telling the truth and they don't believe, but laugh instead.

Pasteur was the first to say that there are such tiny things, like little worms, too small even to be seen, and that those little worms cause various sores and all kinds of sicknesses. So it is necessary to wash your hands, drink boiled water, open the windows to let in good air so that you may live long and not be sick. The doctors poked fun at him, said he was stuck up, knew nothing himself yet, thought he could teach others. They nicknamed him *The Brewer*. Pasteur was not a doctor, only a learned naturalist, and he had noticed these bacteria for the first time when they made wine. So they gave him this nickname out of spite.

Anyone else would have been insulted and said: "You don't want to believe it — too bad." But Pasteur was not insulted. He felt sorry for those who were being killed by

bacteria, leaving so many orphans. But what worried him most was that nobody was willing to help him, and he could see that his idea did not explain everything.

Because you can be very clean and still have sores, and not all diseases come from bacteria — those little things like worms.

Since that time a hundred thousand scientists and all kinds of doctors have been working on the problem and every now and then they find something new, and can see that it is true. But he was all by himself and the first ever, so he couldn't explain everything.

Pasteur had to go through a good deal before at long last some admitted he was a little right. How could they go on calling him a fool when they could see with their own eyes that he really was able to help? Before, if a mad dog bit someone, he was almost sure to die. But Pasteur discovered a method of treating them. Before, people used to die or be sick for a long time after almost every operation, and then less and less died because the doctors started washing their hands thoroughly and boiling the instruments and dressings in water. Even though there were already some who believed Pasteur: others opposed him even more because of *envy* or sheer stubbornness.

"If you know so much, tell us — why this, why that?"

"I don't know yet," Pasteur would answer.

As if one man could know everything. Pasteur was a great scientist but certainly no miracle worker.

Even later, when everyone knew that there were tiny bacteria which cause infectious diseases, one stubborn doctor said:

"Alright, I'll swallow those worms, those bacteria of yours, and you will see — the next day I will still be fit and well."

"Don't — you'll get cholera."

But he was stubborn, drank the water with the cholera bacteria — and nothing happened.

"Now who's right?" — he laughed. Some who had already learned from Pasteur said:

"You didn't catch the disease because you have a strong, healthy stomach."

"Alright then, I'll spoil my stomach with stale sausage and when my stomach aches, I'll drink some of the choleric water."

He did, got cholera, and died.

And now everybody knows that bacteria exist, everybody knows what to do against

different infectious diseases. And every doctor and every patient knows the great benefits which the famous scientist Louis Pasteur conferred on mankind.

Pasteur liked children very much. Once he said:

"When I approach a child, I have two feelings. Affection for what he is today and respect for what he can become."

Probably in saying this Pasteur remembered his own boyhood when he liked fishing more than studying, he drew, and did not know what he wanted be when he grew up, when he asked a lot of questions because he wanted to understand everything ii, and how he started to study and then could not o without it.