

O naukach przyrodniczych w dawnych polskich encyklopediach rolniczych

On natural sciences in old Polish agricultural encyclopaedias

SUMMARY

The fall of the 1863 rising in the Russian-occupied lands of Poland contributed to ruining the country's economy. The effects could be seen especially in agriculture, the main branch of the economy. At the same time, the victorious Russian authorities also restricted to a minimum any Polish specialist education at the secondary and tertiary levels. In those circumstances many aware citizens decided to organize agricultural (and naturalist) education for Poles by means of self-instruction, and in particular by publishing encyclopaedias. In the years 1873-1902 three series of such encyclopaedias were published:

1. An encyclopaedia of agriculture and of information connected with agriculture (five volumes in the years 1873-1879; 278 extensive surveys of a college-textbook type).
2. An agricultural and agricultural-industrial encyclopaedia (three volumes in the years 1888-1890, with short entries of a reference-item type).
3. An encyclopaedia of the Museum of Industry and Agriculture (eleven volumes in the years 1890-1902, with 614 entries of a monographic-survey type).

Conspicuous in the first and the third of those encyclopaedias is the broad range of studies relating to the natural sciences (geology and mineralogy, botany and zoology, as well as the history of science and technology). The level of the information contained in the encyclopaedic entries is very high, with such information being based on the latest literature of the respective subjects (published in Poland and abroad), which can, for example, be seen in the treatment of concept of quaternary glaciation in Europe. As for the history of science, the encyclopaedias mainly brought information on the achievements of Polish naturalists.

The encyclopaedias made a major contribution to reviving the national economy, by promoting education through self-instruction. The first two encyclopaedias were devised by specialists living in the Russian-held part of Poland, while among the authors of the third encyclopaedia there were also professors of Polish tertiary schools from the Austrian-held part of Poland (including S. Jentys, J. Niedźwiedzki, J. Siemiradzki). The encyclopaedias thus constitute an interesting part of the cultural heritage of Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries.