



Review:
"Impossible, inconceivable doctor's indifference to someone's suffering..."

**Liechtenstein, E. I. (1974). *Remember the patient. The grant on medical deontology*.
Kiev: The high school.**

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The words in the heading are taken out of Liechtenstein's remarkable book *Remember the patient*. It first published in the publishing house "The high school" in Kiev in 1974 and the second edition has been carried out in 1978.

Among the works devoted to medical ethics and deontology, this book possesses a special place in variety of circumstances.

First, the personality of its author makes this book unique. Efrem Isakovich Liechtenstein (1910-1973) was the well-known Ukrainian therapist with a wide experience in clinical work, the Doctor of Medicine, the professor, the author of tens scientific works devoted to pathology of heart and lungs, the lecturer, the Head of the Therapy Department in the Faculty of Sanitation and Hygiene of Kiev Medical Institute (now - National Medical University named after A. A. Bogomolets). Efrem Isakovich connected the deep professional knowledge with the broadest general culture, erudition, love to the literature and other art forms, their profound knowledge and understanding. E. I. Liechtenstein had one more talent - the literary talent. The book is written by remarkable art language, and the main thing - the author manages to cause deep sincere feelings in readers.

Second, E. Liechtenstein's book is marked out for its form. The definition "The grant on medical deontology" formulates its core problem; however the significance made by the author



is beyond not only the medical deontology, but even medicine. The book is useful to read for both doctors, and lawyers, and artists. The form of short stories does a genre of work a scientific essayistic. It is equally interesting to everyone who is not indifferent to creation, to service, to true search.

The book consists of 9 essays. The introduction ("By the author") and final ("Remember the patient") carry the decisive and the generalizing character. Three essays are devoted to the analysis of medical plots and characters in works of L. N. Tolstoy, I. S. Turgenev and G. Flaubert. One essay is devoted to A. P. Chehov as a doctor. And three more essays study case records and deaths of M. M. Kotsyubinskiy, I. S. Turgenev and V. A. Mozart.

And at last, third, the answer to a question about preservation of the topicality and undying reader's interest to I. E. Liechtenstein's book throughout almost forty years is covered in that circle of ideas which are developed by the author.

Professor Liechtenstein reflects on the nature of medical art, on the mission of the doctor, seeing in this mission something unique, putting the curing and the doctor on absolutely special place in a society.

Liechtenstein formulates not all his discoveries in the finished way. He does not apply for creation of the special theory of medical deontology. But he does more – his work highlights universal in the professional service, the book approaches the thoughtful reader to reflection on sensuality and sympathy as fundamental basis of the social intercourse.

Efrem Liechtenstein warns the doctor against fatal simplification of his profession, against transformation of his work into the ordinary craft, into a version of the official service "from here to here".

He appeals to see a vocation in the profession of the doctor – to see this vocation in its complication, multidimensionality, sometimes – in the intolerable hopelessness. (It is not casual that already at the very beginning of the book the author gives the words from A. P. Chehov's letter to V. V. Veresayev – where one doctor-author writes to another doctor-author about "the disgusting" days and hours, i.e. those which are spent by the doctor at a bed of the incurable patient, realizing bitterly his professional helplessness...).

It is clear to Liechtenstein - and he proves it from the first page to the last one – that the real compassion of the doctor to the patient is the most powerful factor of healing, the source of belief both sick and the doctor in a successful outcome of treatment.

E. I. Liechtenstein sees "vocation and a sacred duty of the doctor" in the compassion indeed, underlining, that this compassion should be (by S. Tsvejg) "true which demands actions, instead of a sentimentality, it knows what it wants, and is full of determination, suffering and feeling pity, to make everything, that is in human forces" (p.10).



This suffering gives to the doctor not only special moral and ethical responsibilities (and first of all – to feel pity actively). This suffering equalizes patients among themselves and in the opinion of the doctor. "Equalizes" means that there is no difference for the doctor who to treat either alien or the Jews, either a slave or the tsar, either the righteous person or the guilty. He cures everyone with the identical eagerness. He gives everyone a part of himself, all his skills and the whole experience.

The leitmotif of the book is the conviction of the author that pledge of successful overcoming of illness is the deep belief of the patient in the doctor, full and sincere mutual trust. The morale state of the patient (his belief in successful treatment, trust to the doctor, a desire to live) plays major and sometimes leading role (p.13).

As usual the belief is capable of working miracles in the delicate doctoring business. However, the author accurately shows also the dramatical examples when incautious words said by a doctor, imprudently exact (with instructions of time of a possible aggravation or even death) prognosis became fatal for impressionable patients.

Liechtenstein proves and pays attention of the readers (and doctors first of all) to surprising healing force of art. His book contains set of surprising cases of treatment by force of music, poetry and prose, which are sometimes inexplicable from the point of view of a traditional science.

Without any doubts, the detailed acquaintance with E. I. Liechtenstein's work convinces that the deep learning of world culture history, knowledge of topmost achievements of art is a necessary part of professional training of the modern doctor, a condition of successful performance of his direct professional duties. The humanity knowledge in the widest understanding of the term is a great experience from which the doctor can take if necessary both an example for imitation, and the important argument for the acceptance of uneasy decision. Therefore E. I. Liechtenstein gives as an example encyclopedic erudition and the general culture of great doctors: S. Botkin, V. Obratsov, V. Bekhterev, G. Zaharin, N. Strazhesko and others.

E. I. Liechtenstein writes: "There was a time when a doctor was allowed to perform his medical activity, only having degree of the Bachelor of Arts; the arts education was obligatory for the doctor" (p.77).

The author addresses to examples from the great literature so that together with the reader to reflect on the world of illnesses, wounds and sufferings with which the patient or wounded is left alone, sometimes being on the verge between life and death.

The literature and medicine is an inexhaustible theme. Not only because medicine "delegated" to the literature tens (if not hundreds) well-known writers.



E. I. Liechtenstein writes: "A literary history keeps names of the great majority of the doctors who have become well-known writers. Their list includes not only such names as V. I. Dal and A. P. Chehov, V. V. Veresayev and M. A. Bulgakov, F. Rable and F. Shiller, S. Moem and A. Konan-Doil. Each of them has left his trace in the literature. Many of them succeeded both in writing and in medicine, others left medical practice after a short period of time. But nobody of them, as a rule, was left by attitude peculiar to the doctor. And this distinguished their literary works" (p.77).

Liechtenstein comes up with an idea of special perception by physicians of art works: "When the unsophisticated admirer enjoys F. Shopen's music, M. Vrubel's art or S. Esenin's lyrics, he perceives only an outer side of the work, only the finality of creative ecstasy. The doctor gets into the side scenes of the work hidden from an extraneous sight. Sleepless nights, often beggarly existence, illusions, hallucinations, fear of death, inexpressible torments of work..." (p.78).

The doctor's experience is the most valuable – and important not only for the doctor. And not only for the specialist, who observes the next case of illness. A pain, illness is an important push to learn the person, to self-knowledge. E. I. Liechtenstein reminds us the words of Roman Rollan enclosed in the lips of musician Jean Kristof: "Who was never sick, that has not learnt himself entirely".

"The pain reminds about the great mission" – German poet-romanticist Novalis said so. The poet, obviously, meant, first of all the one who feels a pain. While reading the Liechtenstein's book, you understand, that a pain, someone's pain, reminds also the doctor about his really great mission.

This mission is sacrificial. It supposes by its nature the doctor's readiness to reject many pleasures and every day to face closely a grief and sufferings of people, to see their tortures and death. And to be ready to sacrifice his life, even without his will.

In several lines in the introductory essay the author recollects his father – a rural local doctor who did everything in the countryside area that the doctor should do: took notes from the eyes and peas from the ears, used forceps during pathological deliveries, operated the intestines during constipation...

Once at late night when he was rather tired after a long day, he had to carry out embryotomy in a country log cabin. During the operation he had wounded a finger with splinters of bones of a fetus. The doctor caught bad sepsis which caused to death. He died as hundreds ordinary doctors died sacrificing their lives for the sake of others. As from generation to generation thousands and thousands of other doctors gave their lives, fulfilling their duty. They didn't think of monuments and awards, didn't always expect the grateful memory from contemporaries and descendants. Not casually the book covering shows the symbolical image of



a candle and the motto of doctors: *Aliis inserviando ipse consumor* (Shining to others I burn down).

The material picked up by the author convinces that the great literature (as original art in general) always was an outstanding means to retain and to transfer the major human experience. First of all it is the experience of preservation of humanity in the most brutal circumstances.

It is really interesting to read about medical images in Lev Tolstoy's works. The great writer described thousands of various characters in the diverse circumstances with epic width in his works, and certainly, illnesses and doctors hadn't been left without his attention. With surprising penetration E. I. Liechtenstein shows, addressing to different fragments from L. Tolstoy's works, his (Tolstoy's) remarkable knowledge of all subtleties and features of the described subject. Here there are gripping pages describing Prince Andrey's wound and treatment ("When he regained consciousness, the broken bones of the hip had been taken out, the chunks of meat were cut off and a wound was bandaged. He was sprinkled water in his face. As soon as Prince Andrey opened his eyes, the doctor bent down over him, kissed his lips silently and left quickly".) And also there are pages full of irony devoted to Natasha Rostova's treatment. E. I. Liechtenstein traces Lev's long-term dialogue with the great doctors of that time, their mutual influence to each other. The author manages to track an origin of some Tolstoy's characters, in particular the illnesses described by Tolstoy, their clinical symptoms, etc.

The essay "A. P. Chehov as a doctor" can be recognized as a classical example of declared theme research. The majority of the literature is devoted to medical aspects of the great writer's work. However the essay from Liechtenstein's book doesn't lose its value. Any diligent author will not pass it. The author who is either studying A. P. Chehov's life and work or engaged into studying the problems of interrelation of art and medicine, problems of medical ethics.

The reference to the case records and death of great art workers always represents the particular interest for Liechtenstein as a doctor. Actually, the book under consideration goes back to several first doctor Liechtenstein's essays. He reconstructed the circumstances of illness, treatment and losing the life of great musicians, writers and artists. Each narration about illness and death of the remarkable Ukrainian writer Michail Kotsyubinskiy, great Russian writer Ivan Turgenev and ingenious composer Wolfgang-Amadej Mozart is a separate short story which intertwines with memoir digressions where E. I. Liechtenstein recollects his meetings with well-known medical stars.

The author writes not only about bad illnesses, but also how illnesses of different social layers were displayed in the works of literary artists, how the surrounding people perceived this



illness, how the representatives of medical corporation approached to treatment. We can see original galleries of doctors' images, their manners, conditions of work and their disturbing life...

The most important thoughts of the author are crystallized in the essay finishing the book, which has the same name as the whole book – "To remember the patient". These thoughts are about the value of the doctor's outlook and culture in his work, about preconditions of the formation of intuition, which is hardly perceptible and very necessary quality: "Correct interpretation of illness is sometimes (and frequently) the expression of the inspired intuition evolving out of any vague associations, in a complex with a profound knowledge and the humane relation to the patient. So, for example, the description of myocardial infarction as an independent illness appeared, which was created by V. P. Obratsov and N. D. Strazhesko" (p.144-145).

E. I. Liechtenstein strongly defends the creative, inspired relation of the doctor to his vocation. He believes that the elements of inspiration distinguish doctor's art and originally scientific medicine from "workmanship with thoughtless majority of instruments and laboratory researches and drugs" (p.145).

The author reflects on prospects of the medical diagnostics connected with the development of cybernetics. Then, forty years ago, computer technologies only did their first steps. It was difficult to imagine the size and consequences of forms of diagnostics mediated by various clever machines. However E. I. Liechtenstein's thoughts about that are immutable true and the modern medicine should keep the tradition and carefully use the past experience (the author gives the words of German professor B. Naunin to a place, that medicine is not the same as military science where with the invention of the new old becomes unnecessary stuff: "Old is expensive because it is tested and checked up...").

In this tradition the author has his own values and priorities from which he never receded: "During all my medical life the most human appeal of the Kiev scientist-therapist of the first quarter of the 20th century of academician F. G. Janovskiy was clear and close to me: be closer to the sick person!" (p.149).

E. I. Liechtenstein expresses conviction that this appeal becomes actual in the conditions of the new challenges, new tests to which vocation and doctor's profession are exposed.

Why is so essential everything on what E. I. Liechtenstein reflects throughout the whole book?

Since time when the book under review has been written, such challenges appeared to be immeasurably more: experiments on stem cells, on cloning and gene engineering, a complex of problems connected with the possibilities of transplantation, discussions of the problem of



ethanasia. We do not speak already about medicine which has become totally commercial, which removes humanistic priorities off the beaten track...

The institutional system of a society assumes high degree of anonymity of operating social institutes, their prevailing non-personality, removal "outside of brackets" the human beginning, humanity. Here the whole dominates over private, removing superfluous sensitivity and emotional reflection.

It is the precondition and condition of functioning of the majority of steady social institutes. They act to say "automatically", independent of us – as it was before our occurrence and as it will be after us.

At the same time the requirement for experience of private, passing, unique is always generated, supported and cultivated in a society.

First of all this role is carried out by an art which formed at all the times and supported the certain level of emotional sensitivity, sympathy, compassion. Thus (without denying by art the function of the social institute in a special way integrating a society and drawing attention to common) art is cared by human experience of disastrous, tragical, breaking the soles – everything, that tests a human nature, everything which has human and humanity – even in spite of existing foundations of dominating morals and the law.

The substance of the problem can be expressed as general and simple in the following way. Functioning of the majority of social institutes assumes abstraction from human subjectivity, "removal" of excessive (superfluous) sensitivity. Such is the army, school, the government and business and, in general, the most spheres of social being.

Liechtenstein sees in the doctor's vocation and in the medical profession a specific and necessary exception of this institutional anonymity, of dissociation between people. He considers sympathy and sensitivity in general *conditio sine qua non* of the medical profession, a part of the doctor's duty.

He does not doubt that such sensitivity is given hardly and even complicates performance by the physician of his professional duties (sometimes quite routine). After he is imbued with another's sufferings, the doctor himself appears in the power of emotions, he cannot remain indifferent that the patient's health and life depend on his diagnosis, on the prescribed treatment, and sometimes on one movement of a scalpel.

Therefore: remember the patient! To see in the patient not depersonalized object of standard manipulations, but unique creation, to see a person similar to you – and to remember about it. Remember because memory keeps the experience, including emotional experience too (it is doubtless, that the author of the book treats the emotion as value, whether it is spoken about inspiration, about success and victory experience or about loss experience, about feeling of disappointment, a failure...).