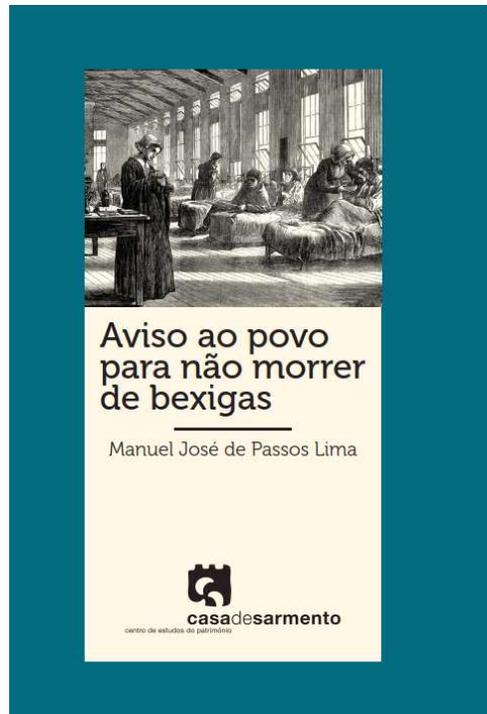


HEADING REPORT(H)A: Environmental Stories

PASSOS LIMA, M.J., *WARNING TO THE PEOPLE NOT TO DIE OF BLADDERS* [SMALLPOX]

Antero Ferreira¹ and María Isabel Porras Gallo²



PASSOS LIMA, M.J., *WARNING TO THE PEOPLE NOT TO DIE OF BLADDERS* [SMALLPOX], with an introductory study of Antero Ferreira and María Isabel Porras Gallo. Guimarães: Casa de Sarmiento, 2021

[<http://hdl.handle.net/1822/74859>]

At a time when the media are invaded by pseudo expert comments on the latest news, we consider it opportune to recall some pioneering works that, confronted with the present, have the potential to demonstrate that some of today's heated debates already concerned our ancestors and that the analysis of their answers can still enlighten us today.

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This is the case of the multiplicity of publications that, since the beginning of the 19th century, sought to inform the population about the benefits of vaccination against smallpox, among which we highlight the publication of the pharmacist Manuel José de Passos Lima, who, faced with the serious epidemic of smallpox which was raging in the city of Guimarães in 1873, decided to offer his fellow citizens a «Warning to the people not to die of smallpox...».

Passos Lima's text was a response to the appeal that administrative authorities made to pharmacists, to provide "all assistance to patients attacked by smallpox, who were in unfavourable circumstances and with few resources to medicate themselves at home". He highlights the importance of the vaccine as the main defence against smallpox, while seeking to give clear instructions on the treatments to be followed by people who had contracted the disease.

Today, we are mainly interested in the arguments he used in defence of vaccination. He describes Jenner's discovery and the controversy that followed: "this wonderful discovery was also controversial, as is everything that appears in the world with the seal of novelty". For Passos Lima, it is natural for the people to have doubts about the vaccine, as it is «always easy to be impressed with matters that terrify them», but it is up to men of science «the duty to clarify the truth, because only with the truth can humanity profit". In conclusion, he asserts peremptorily: "the people must believe us, because we take God as a witness, at this time when we are concerned with the general good of mankind, — the vaccine was much discussed, much contradicted, and its opponents fell unarmed in the face of the infinite immensity of the facts; — is believed throughout the civilized world as one of the best benefits that God has sent from heaven».

Little is known about the life of this pharmacist from Guimarães, knowing that he was an outstanding professional, recognized for his support to the most disadvantaged. Reading his pamphlet, we are impressed by his erudition: in addition to his mastery of several languages, the bibliography he uses is very diverse and up-to-date – even quoting French works published in 1872.

This republication is accompanied by a study that analyses the process of introduction of the smallpox vaccine in Portugal and Spain. Although the first experiences with the vaccine took place in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century, its

generalization only occurred at the beginning of the 20th century. In Portugal, with no smallpox episode since 1952, the vaccine was withdrawn from the national vaccination plan in 1977, the year in which this disease, responsible for high mortality and major disabilities (blindness, severe scarring), was declared extinct.

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