

Piotrowska, Monika

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Monika Piotrowska (Poland)

FRIENDS OF MANKIND.
OBLIGATIONS OF PHILANTHROPISTS
AS SHOWN IN A WILNO JOURNAL CALLED
„HISTORY OF CHARITABLE WORKS AT HOME AND ELSEWHERE
WITH INFORMATION INTENDED TO IMPROVE THEM” (1820–1824)

The title *friends of mankind*, guided by a spirit of humanitarian help to the poor and the ill, rallied to a journal called *History of Charitable Works at Home and Elsewhere with News Intended to Perfect Them* [*Dzieje Dobroczynności Krajowej i Zagranicznej z wiadomościami ku wydoskonaleniu jej służącemi*]. The journal appeared regularly in the years 1820–1824, as studies show, as the unofficial mouthpiece of the Wilno Charitable Society [Wileńskie Towarzystwo Dobroczynności] which was founded in 1807¹. Many of its founders, philanthropists concerned about the broad spread of poverty, were among the staff of the local University and a Medical Society (Towarzystwo Lekarskie) – the first ever such body on Polish soil – founded in 1805. The monthly, under its original title *Dzieje Dobroczynności Krajowej and Zagranicznej z wiadomościami ku wydoskonaleniu jej służącemi*², was unique indeed on the press stage in Poland and Europe. It preceded the mid-19th century Paris journal *Les Annales de la Charité*, considered to be the first journal dealing with charitable works³, by thirty years. Orgelbrand's *Great Universal Encyclopaedia* [*Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna*] of the mid-19th century in its entry *charity and charitable homes* referred interested readers to the journal as a competent and singular source in Polish⁴.

The Wilno *History of Charitable works* presented a broad picture of the main social issues of the time, including the spreading poverty and beggary that followed the Napoleonic wars, as well as issues connected with the spread of infectious diseases and epidemics and ways to streamline the work of charitable institutions to enable them to live up to those challenges. The

¹ More on this B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno-medyczne „Dzieje dobroczynności Krajowej i Zagranicznej ...” w latach 1820–1824* in: *Kwartalnik Historii Nauki i Techniki* 40, 2/1995, pp. 39–56.

² Quoted hereafter in the notes as: *Dzieje dobroczynności*.

³ K. Koralewski, *Opieka Społeczna (Dobroczynność publiczna)* [*Social welfare (Public charities)*], Warszawa 1918, pp. 7–8.

⁴ F. H. Lewestam, *Dobroczynność i dobroczynne zakłady* [*Charitable works and public charities*] in: *Encyklopedia Powszechna S. Orgelbranda*, t. 7, Warszawa 1861, pp. 170–171.

many contributions by philanthropists and community doctors working among the poor published in the journal brought about reflections on the origin of poverty and better methods of work, furnishing stuff for more theoretical reflections. Polish and foreign cases of philanthropic undertakings were discussed to present various ways of fighting unemployment among the poor and of easing their poverty, the cause of many diseases¹.

The notion of philanthropy

In its basic dictionary meaning, *philanthropy* is defined as the provision of welfare, that is, helping those in need. As the above-mentioned 19th-century encyclopaedia of Stanisław Orgelbrand put it, *by the word philanthropy we commonly mean care taken of the poor, welfare actions public and privately provided, compassion with the lower classes, rendered unto communities suffering deprivation*². The more recent literature of the subject distinguishes between the two terms, in that it highlights different sources of inspiration of such actions: charity, understood in Christianity, Judaism and the Islam as a religious precept, is distinct from philanthropy, which puts emphasis on solidarity with the poor in the name of secular humanitarianism, brotherly love of the other, and a command to sport education and culture³. At the time Polish lands were in the hands of foreign powers, philanthropic and charitable works had one more dimension, apart from the caring function – a patriotic dimension, unusually significant for the development of the national awareness of the Polish community⁴.

The title journal provides a source of information any student of the *philanthropic movement* in the sense given the term by sociologist Jan Szczepański or historian Bronisław Geremek will certainly appreciate. Szczepański says philanthropy, which developed into a European ideological current at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, had its sources in the tradition of Christian charitable works, humanist currents, yet also a pervading sense of hazards to the social order and of growing pressure of the deprived classes⁵. He highlights the meaning of philanthropy juxtaposing theories and doctrines promoted by philanthropists and various reformers side by side with liberal and socialist theories, which played a prominent role in the growth of state welfare

¹ B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno-medyczne ...*, p. 44.

² *Filantropija [Philanthropy]* in: *Encyklopedia Powszechna S. Orgelbranda*, t. 8, Warszawa 1861, pp. 170–171.

³ Cf. E. Leś, *Zarys historii dobroczynności i filantropii w Polsce [Outline history of charitable works and philanthropy in Poland]*, Warszawa 2001, p. 17; E. Mazur, *Dobroczynność w Warszawie XIX wieku [Charitable works in 19th century Warsaw]*, Warszawa 1999, p. 7.

⁴ Cf. E. Leś, *Zarys historii dobroczynności i filantropii ...*, p. 15. Cf. too M. Piotrowska, *Działalność filantropijna kobiet polskich w XIX wieku – kierunki aktywności, motywacje, przykłady [Philanthropic activities of Polish women in the 19th century]* in: *Polacy w czas zaborów wobec obcych władz i systemów politycznych*, (ed.) S. Kalembka, N. Kasperek, Olsztyn 2001, pp. 11–20.

⁵ Cf. J. Szczepański, *Socjologia. Rozwój problematyki i metod [Sociology. Development of issues and methods]*, Warszawa 1967, p. 85.

policies which went on throughout the 19th century¹. As Geremek observed, the widespread belief in a need to contain and hold in grip pauperism co-existed side by side with an *attitude of active compassion for the poor*. He pointed to the Enlightenment as the true origin of philanthropy, which regarded poverty as a result of *darkness* of the poor, yet also in a lack of a sense of overall human solidarity of the well-off with them. So it associated social progress with a need to co-operate for the general welfare and with a necessity to spread education. The movement was putting emphasis on charitable works rendered privately and supported the existence of schools funded with charity and other forms of support².

The notion of philanthropy has become overgrown with simplifications and misconceptions. Modern compendia would include in its definition one more notion that was absent from it a hundred years ago: philanthropy, in this extended meaning, is *also, ironically, generosity for show*³. As time went by, then, philanthropy developed a somewhat dubious undertone. In Poland, in the years after 1945, the establishment treated philanthropy as *bourgeois relict*, which brought research into that topic practically to a standstill⁴. To be true, charity came under criticism already in the latter half of the 19th century, as the workers' movement was spreading, and critical voices were heard from the working class before others. The widespread belief at the time that poverty was linked to the working class problem⁵ boiled down – according to followers of socialist ideas opposed to philanthropic actions – to impoverished workers being treated on a par with beggars and vagabonds.

One frequent charge against philanthropy to this day is that such actions have merely palliative character. While that is a serious charge, it is not unequivocal, if you consider the social awareness of health care or want of it at the time, at least before mid-19th century, and that governments showed little interest in developing any social assistance network that would cover the total population⁶. It may be recalled that police methods of providing assistance,

¹ Cf. J. Szczepański, *Socjologia ...*, p. 84. In practice, however, liberal ideas were often hard to tell from socialist or communist ideas. As the authors of *Spoleczne historie pomocy* [Social histories of assistance] put it, *Any philanthropist or social reformer could become a socialist, as anyone viewing radical turnabout as the way to social improvement could become a communist. (...) the ultimate goal attracted was given attention to, as more attention was paid to the faith in efficiency, and thus also to the necessity of adopting a definite way of work*. J. Radwan-Pragłowski, K. Frysztacki, *Spoleczne dzieje pomocy człowiekowi: od filantropii greckiej do pracy socjalnej* [Social history of providing assistance to human beings: from Greek philanthropy to social work], Katowice 1998, pp. 175–176.

² Cf. B. Geremek, *Litość i szubienica. Dzieje nędzy i miłosierdzia* [Mercy and the gallows: A history of misery and charity], Warszawa 1989, pp. 289–290.

³ Even in 1900 dictionaries would still define a philanthropist as a *friend of men, a benefactor of mankind*, whereas in modern compendiums readers will come across negative meanings attaching to the notion. Cf. *Słownik języka polskiego* [Dictionary of the Polish language], (ed.) J. Karłowicz, A. Kryński, W. Niedźwiedzki, t. 1, Warszawa 1900, *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, t. 1, Warszawa 1978 & *Słownik języka polskiego PWN*, Warszawa 1995.

⁴ Cf. E. Leś, *Zarys historii dobroczynności ...*, p. 15.

⁵ Cf. B. Geremek, *Litość and szubienica ...*, pp. 290–292.

⁶ Arguments put forward by Johann Peter Frank (1745–1821), a German physician, head of the Vienna Common Hospital from 1795, a precursor of social hygiene, by which he sought to get rulers of states interested in the establishment of a medical police were essentially about the practical need to secure the ruling classes

which in modern times took the form of intervention by town councils or the relevant government departments, usually responded to spreading epidemics, a need to keep watch over prostitution, or statutory limitation of the number of beggars homelessness of children and adults¹.

Paternalism, another feature characterising philanthropy, is also considered – and not without reason – as one of its faults, if only in view of the wide gulf between the opinion, common at the time, that the poor deserved some help from the well-to-do, and the reality around them². Yet philanthropists themselves called for abandoning practices motivated by pity or handing out alms, and for taking instead the effort of exploring the causes of the lower classes' poverty and staging a more informed organisation of help. This point deserves to be studied more systematically, but at this point it suffices to say that in the epoch when the *History of Charitable Works* were published secular philanthropy was still held to be a duty of the well-off towards the poor.

Outstandingly interesting research material can be found especially in the column of the *History of Charitable Works* entitled *Skills wanted to do charitable works, along with the subsidiary learning, art and dexterity*. The broad range of issues discussed there reflected the variety of interests philanthropists cherished at the time, both out of concern for the welfare of the poor and for fear of their persistent calls for help, but especially out of fear to catch infectious diseases so often ravaging the lower classes. The principal responsibilities of philanthropy included supporting and educating *the truly poor*, rehabilitating beggars through work, and finding ways to fight disease as causes of the poverty of the lower classes, the journal declared.

The poor: *true and false*

Representatives of the lower classes were looked upon from the angle of their attitudes towards work, yet also to assess their real possibility of doing work, and on that basis drawing a line between beggars and vagabonds and other poor people.

The *truly poor* then were the ill and cripples, who were unable to make a living for themselves nor could they count on their families; but also, individuals who were eager to work yet, as it went, *unable to cope with their privation and misery, inched step by step and slowly through worse and worse misery to illness and crippling, which they might have avoided had something been done before to prevent their misery*³. But then, the fall of those people

against epidemics. Cf. B. Seyda, *Dzieje medycyny in zarysie [An outline history of medicine]*, Warszawa 1973, p. 205. Capitalist states began to consider the issue of medical care in the second quarter of the 19th century when the alarming overall health condition of new army recruits especially those coming from the working classes, was noticed. A major breakthrough in the mentality of the time at the time came with the cyclic epidemics of cholera, which touched off a sweeping campaign for a reform of public health in Great Britain in the 1840s. Cf. Z. Jastrzębowski, *Spory o model lecznictwa. Opieka zdrowotna w koncepcjach polskiej polityki społecznej w XIX i XX wieku (do 1918)* [*Health service models under debate. Medical care in concepts of Polish social policy in the 19th and 20th centuries (till 1918)*], Łódź 1994, pp. 13–16.

¹ Cf. *Źródła do pedagogiki opiekuńczej [Sources regarding care pedagogy]*, (ed.) I. Lepalczyk, t. 1, Warszawa 1988, p. 7.

² Cf. B. Geremek, *Litość and szubienica*, p. 290.

³ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów [The perfect hospital]* in: *Dzieje dobroczynności 1820*, p. 483.

was often attributed to the supposedly common disposition of the lower classes yielding to *fits of uncontrolled fury and home brawls*, and to bad habits, drunkenness before all¹. The deprived classes included also: families with many children, as well as young people with no property or education that could enable them to find jobs or having no assets enough to find a job at all. Next to sloth or crippling, other causes were found of impoverishment as well: *misfortunes adding more people to the ranks of those who lost their possessions in fires*, as well as diseases, particularly such that incapacitated individuals, say orphans, widows, and entire large families, many of them in debt². Hence the attempts to show to the community at large that the random handing out of alms should be abandoned as that only added to those suffering from *self-imposed poverty*, in favour of planned support of certain charitable societies only and some other philanthropic institutions.

Beggar: a calling

The standard perception writers propounded in the press on the issue of pauperism in the latter half of the 18th and the former half of the 19th centuries was that a poor man was accepted by the community if they did work, being able to do work, and if they were without employment then only temporarily³. Unwillingness to work was really contemptible. Beggars were denounced universally not only for that reason but also for their propensity to crime and preying on the naivety of others. August Bécu (1771–1824), the stepfather of Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki, a doctor and professor at Wilno University, wrote of that type of poverty, or, more strictly, of what *beggars take as their calling*, as a *hideous wound on the body politic*. He denounced those who *stooping to misery and contempt*, by issuing their *deceitful wailings* and pretended crippleness impose their *abominable toll on the compassion and gullibility of passers-by*. Even worse, in reality they live comfortably off the alms they can garner, never really suffering – in the author's opinion – true privation and never thinking of their future. His experience of the condition and behaviours of *local beggars* taught him, he wrote, that *they as a rule ended up coming to public hospitals with their illnesses to die, thereby completing their plunder of hospital funds*⁴. In Bécu's opinion, who should be eligible for public help in hospitals should be above all *the industrial class* (hired labourers, workmen, servants, poor craftsmen), because as long as they are healthy they present no burden to the community but they are *useful* and needed⁵. But the way they carry on beggars act to the detriment of others, the true poor, because their deceits call forth, *instead of sensitivity, disdain and anger*. As a result the community *shut and harden their hearts to the call of*

¹ W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa* [Ways to root out beggary] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1821, p. 1064.

² W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa*, p. 1064.

³ Cf. B. Geremek, *Litość and szubienica*, pp. 289–290.

⁴ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 484.

⁵ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 483.

„the truly destitute”. One way to suppress beggary, he thought, was to have the truly poor and cripples wear well-visible marks identifying them as such, but the most important way to do that was to ensure the efficient organisation of whatever help may be given such people¹.

Bécu was baffled why it should happen here, in this prosperous country, which is held back neither by excessive population growth nor by a dearth of industrial resources, that there is so much poverty and so many beggars? He put the blame primarily on the lack of education of the plain people and the sloth that brings with it. For, as he put it, a man who never raised his mind to come to understand his real worth will not be able to hold resources such that can keep his worth at a decent level, which is why many such people live lives even more lowly than cattle².

A school for plain people

Aware of the problem of the lack of education of the plain people, the *History of Charitable works* sought to spread a new method, called monitorial method of mutual teaching, launched by Anglican pastor Andrew Bell in India and popularised in England by Joseph Lancaster from 1797³. The method could help develop the neglected elementary education, teach the broad masses of peasants or people in small towns read and write. Elementary schools in Polish gubernias in the Russian empire was dependent on private initiatives in that respect, as the clergy of most churches just did not develop their educational services and small towns were simply too poor⁴. The journal in question tried hard to promote philanthropy and civil responsibility among landowners, encouraging them to found schools in the countryside and in small towns. As studies by Daniel Beauvois have shown, such initiatives were rare though. Most landowners would set their minds first of all on getting their subjects to perform their duties as serfs, fearing that peasants, once they were given education, would want to abandon their farms⁵.

In 1820, Jan Chodźko, writer and secretary of a charitable society in Minsk, and a prominent proponent of education in that region⁶, published in the *History of Charitable works*, at a time public interest in the *Lancasterian method* peaked, an outline programme, more ambitious than the English ori-

¹ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 485.

² A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 485.

³ The journal popularised their methods among interested *friends of mankind* in a series of articles by Józef Hamel (who studied the Lancaster method in London in 1813), in Stanisław Hryniewicz's translation from the German. Cf. more on this in *Historia wynalazku albo raczej użycia i rozszerzenia sposobu wzajemnego nauczania* [*History of an invention or rather utilisation and spread of a method of mutual teaching*] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1820, pp. 215–220, pp. 326–332, pp. 378–384, pp. 431–439, pp. 469–474.

⁴ D. Beauvois, *Szkolnictwo polskie na ziemiach litewsko-ruskich 1803–1832* [*Polish schools in Lithuania and Ruthenia*], t. 2: *Szkoły podstawowe and średnie*, Rzym – Lublin 1991, p. 370. That was because a majority of the towns were parts of private holdings whereas towns held by the state had just too few inhabitants and, as the quoted author put it, suffered just too much poverty to feel they needed reform at all. *Ibid.*, p. 383.

⁵ D. Beauvois, *Szkolnictwo polskie ...*, pp. 384–390.

⁶ Appointed honorary member of Wilno University in 1821.

ginal, for a four-year schools for peasant children¹. In elevated style he wrote out the aim elementary education provided by the Bell and Lancaster method should serve. The proposed aims were much in the vein of educational philanthropy, specifically, *to spread education among the people, to lift the largest class of people from their savagery and misery; to give everyone a sense of the indigenous dignity of man, and, in the elevation thereof, the relations by which different communities of people are bound up inextricably with one another; to demonstrate that the true honour of people depends on the use of their bodies and minds, to fulfil strictly the duties of their own proper condition; to convince them that no socially useful work would mark anyone as a lower or contemptible person, while leisure humiliates and disgraces man in his own eyes and in those of his fellow-countrymen*². The bottom line of the article was a practical plea for educating farmers. The establishment and spread of schools especially for peasants' children would serve the aim not so much of emancipating the peasantry as – in keeping with the conservative spirit of the Metternich epoch – lifting peasants from their *unenlightened and miserable existence*, preparing „a future” *change of their condition*, yet above all the spreading of knowledge of *simple methods, supported by experience, of tilling and other kinds of farm work*³.

Giving the poor useful work to do

Not only education alone, but above all work, was seen as a panacea for the problem of poverty. Foreign precedents and experience were reached for to provide effective ways of fighting beggary and helping the poor. The *History of Charitable works* wrote extensively on the ideas of Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford (1753–1814). An American physicist, who laid the foundations of kinetic heat theory, a member of the Royal Society and a talented soldier, he became famous not only as the inventor of a staple and nutritional soup but also for his great contribution to organising help for the poor. He put down his experiences in detail in his *Practical and theoretical memoirs* of 1796, which were also published in the journal in question⁴. Among his accomplishments were mentioned *the solution* of the problem of beggary in Bavaria and the streamlining of work of care institutions there – by combining free or cheap food help with the creation of jobs in small yet well–

¹ Cf. D. Beauvois, *Szkolnictwo polskie ...*, t. 2, p. 387, pp. 418–419. It is remarkable, he wrote, that monitorial mutual teaching became fashionable at a time the previously discussed idea to abolish serfdom appeared *to stand no chance at all* in the Lithuanian and Ruthenian lands, as elsewhere in Europe a reactionary tendency was clearly getting the upper hand. The method in question, which was designed for the proletarian masses in England, was seen as surest way of providing the plain people with a minimum amount of indispensable knowledge without opening any prospects of advancement for them though.

² J. Chodźko, *O szkołach parafialnych and wiejskich* [On parish and village schools] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1820, pp. 315–316.

³ J. Chodźko, *O szkołach parafialnych and wiejskich*, pp. 317–318.

⁴ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych. Pamiętniki praktyczno-teoretyczne hrabiego Rumforda* [On the improvement of charitable institutions. Practical and theoretical memoirs of Count Rumford; retranslated] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1821, pp. 525–556, pp. 613–663, pp. 768–792, *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1822, pp. 387–406, pp. 495–515.

organised institutions¹.

Rumford's new approach found expression in dropping the previous terminology. The term *work home*, which sounded ill to the ears of the poor, was replaced by *poorhouse* or *institute for the poor*. In particular the Munich institute for the poor founded towards the end of the 18th century became famous for its new methods of work. It adopted a system of rewards and incentives to encourage beggars and the poor to learn trades and to work, and it taught its wards to live hygienic lives and to develop an understanding of their own value. Families were not separated, no physical punishment was used². The Munich establishment, which manufactured textiles for the army, was financially sound. *Giving the poor useful work to do* – wrote Benjamin Thompson Count Rumford – is *essentially an issue in political economy that waits to be solved. One great mistake committed in all undertakings to introduce a spirit of industry in the stead of ingrained sloth was the inappropriate and very common habit of using punishments for that*³. In his opinion, in *whatever condition he may find himself a man will never toil himself for the charm of the work alone*⁴, and *no coercion can make him do that*⁵. Much the same views were voiced by Wiktor Bohatkiewicz (1798 – ca. 1831), a librarian and philosopher by education, connected with the Wilno Society of Charitable Works. In an article discussing possible ways to fight beggary he mentioned two major ways conducive to that aim: to lend support to the poor unable to work where they lived or to hand out weekly alms, fuel and food, and, secondly, to enable them to take up jobs (to the poor in their homes, and to detained vagabonds in special establishments)⁶.

Writing in the spirit of 19th-century philanthropy, the author did say in the journal that begging and the handing out of alms in the streets should be banned only *after* assistance institutions helping and providing care of the poor were prepared and appropriate *poorhouses* and *institutions* offering moreover employment were put in place. The police should be allowed to detain all those begging in public places only if they ignored administrative regulations, the way it was done in Munich at the time of Rumford's reforms⁷. Prevention was preferred because people impoverishment could be caused by other factors, apart from sloth or laziness, as well. Bohatkiewicz insisted that any work charged to poor children or adults should always bring some kind of reward for them because rewards *prodded people to want to work and made*

¹ At Rumford's initiative a work home was founded in Mannheim in 1789, and another one in Munich in 1790. Cf. B. Suhecki, *Żywot hrabiego Rumforda [A life of Count Rumford]* in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1820, p. 525.

² Cf. *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 515.

³ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, pp. 387–388 [retranslated].

⁴ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 391 [retranslated].

⁵ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, pp. 387–388 [retranslated].

⁶ W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wyłączenie żebractwa*, p. 1050.

⁷ W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wyłączenie żebractwa*, p. 1061.

*their hardships easier to bear*¹.

That view was also to do with the acceptance of children's work which is so hard to accept today. For, *educating them for industry and charging them with gainful industrial work was considered to be so important a way of shaping a new man, such a revolutionary change in managing human resources that – as Nina Assorodobraj wrote – the „sensitive” and enlightened people of the late 18th century were honestly moved by children doing work in manufacturing establishments*². In Count Rumford's Munich poorhouse work was done by all together, and their skilfully stirred enthusiasm was to be a model for all, even for the youngest. *A majority [of them] were put behind spinning wheels to make yarn*³, *children from four to seven years were shown how to sew and make stockings, old or crippled men were given wool to comb, aged women, whose sight was weakened, or with ailing other members of their bodies, were told to put thread on spools for weavers, and eventually children too young to do any work at all yet were told to sit on benches along walls of halls where their parents and mates were working*⁴.

Medical care of the poor

The call to study causes of poverty in order to streamline the assistance provided, to educate and rehabilitation through work entailed the belief that something had to be done to improve the disastrous living and health conditions the broad masses had especially in cities, and also to have the poor themselves develop hygienic habits.

The journal popularised the idea of reinforcing the therapeutic functions of hospitals by setting them apart from poorhouses⁵. Providing efficient medical care to the community was regarded as a way to fight poverty. This is why the editors brought back to readers August Bécu's essay on *The perfect hospital* he delivered for a first time at a inauguration of the new school year at Wilno University in 1807 and which was still valid then⁶. Bécu wrote, based on his years-long experience as practising doctor that deficiency and ineptitude are almost the only source of illnesses among the people. The poor classes are hurt most by illnesses, both the common ones, those neglected early on in life, and epidemics or *infectious diseases*. This is why it was important to prevent complications and to combat infectious diseases⁷. If they are to attain that goal, hospitals should be run separately from poorhouses.

In his article, Bécu named three features a *perfect hospital*, or one that does meet its therapeutic function, should have. First, a *perfect hospital will*

¹ W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wyłączenie żebractwa*, p. 1058.

² N. Assorodobraj, *Początki klasy robotniczej [The origins of the working class]*, Warszawa 1946, p. 269.

³ Or hemp. More on this, A. Brückner, *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego [Etymological dictionary of the Polish language]*, [3 ed.] Warszawa 2000, p. 409.

⁴ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 617.

⁵ Cf. B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno-medyczne ...*, p. 46.

⁶ Cf. B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno-medyczne ...*, p. 46.

⁷ Cf. A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 480.

receive and provide the best care it can provide to any suffering person who cannot help themselves¹. He did realise that short funds or want of beds may prevent hospitals meeting this goal, so he demanded that hospitals must avail themselves of any possible way to overcome such shortages. In 1805–1806, he went for a scholarly journey across north Germany, England and Scotland. Reminiscing on his trip he later wrote that in those countries information is gathered regarding all the poor, who are subsequently divided into *classes* depending on the degree of poverty and wants, whereupon, with the expense to help them established, funds are established, permanent and temporary, to that end, and help institutions are set up other than financial ones. Bécu was relieved nowhere to have seen crowded hospitals, except in *towns where only few hospitals existed and were they were big enough to accommodate the masses of the destitute pushing into them*. In certain towns of *tidy and affluent* England that saw their population number grow all of a sudden, Bécu did see dirty and miserable hospitals as well. Nowhere, though, did he find any hospital limit, by order or regulation, the number of ill people to admitted².

It was important, Bécu wrote, pointing to the second important feature of a good hospital, *that patients should be brought back to health as fast as possible, for them to stay there shortly, to make room for others*³. Bécu observed that this was not necessarily, as one would think, to do with the availability of *medicines or doctors*, but *it is best seen in the dilapidated huts and hospitals. A man that lacks the most basic needs of life, comfort, help and care in his infirmity, such a man cannot be brought back to health even if he is given them [medicines]. Nor is such a man, albeit ill, a subject of interest from a doctor as doctor, as the medic's advice is not going to help him unless other support is provided along with it*. Poverty is a barrier to health such that all medical care is to no avail⁴. The most important thing, then, is to admit the ill right away, to hold the illness from developing, and also *to give such a person the most careful treatment and willing service*. Only then can simple and cheap medicines be applied successfully to complete such *humanitarian acts*. Quoting from his personal experience Bécu pointed out that *a great many ill people will be brought back to health if cuddled, given food, comfort and compassionate service, with no medicines administered* and that in serving such remedies (described as *economical*) *there is no need to be particularly frugal*, for it is on such medicines that genuine help and health of the ill will be based⁵.

Bécu completed his description of the *perfect* hospital with a need for such institutions their own business administration and *services by women or*

¹ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 480.

² One exception was a hospital founded in London by a banker and philanthropist named Gay which was among the best-funded health care institutions in the city and which admitted no more than 300 patients at a time. Cf. A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 482.

³ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 485.

⁴ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, pp. 485–486.

⁵ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 486.

maids called to do this particular service¹, that is, sisters of mercy. Their presence by the patient's bed and the care they give was proof, in the light of article, of the superiority of French over German and English medical care; apart from causing keeping mortality rates under the average for other European hospitals².

Three years later, a French article called *Medical care of the poor*³ was reprinted in the *History of Charitable works* to tell readers about several major issues connected with the provision of medical care. A practising doctor who seriously desires to devote himself to providing medical care to the poor will find it immensely important to have, next to experience, primarily a love of people, a heart merciful by nature, a disinterested mind, a noble disdain of greed. But then, a doctor-philanthropist also has to have a peculiar kind of courage and a certain resilience of spirit, to be able to watch unmoved and overcome „the sight” of misery and the „hazard of infection” which is so common among the poor. Nor should such a person afford not to be polite and charming in approaching an ill person, for by his harsh behaviour he may easily hurt the patient's already shaken sense of dignity⁴.

As it was spreading the therapeutic functions of hospitals the journal fought popular medicine and practices of quacks. As they felt they had a duty to popularise basic knowledge in medicine or hygiene the editors carried many articles on such matters. Feliks Rymkiewicz (1799–1851), a doctor of medicine of Wilno University and member of the Medical Society there, nicknamed *father of the poor* by his contemporaries there, published an instruction on *How to proceed, in the absence of a doctor, in trying to bring back to life the frozen, the suffocated, the gassed, the drowned, those hurt by lightning or by a fall*. It was obviously incumbent on friends of mankind, he wrote, to find and spread as widely as possible any safeguard liable to protect the community at large against loss, especially as it is so common in everyday life to see all kinds of accidents happening to people by hapless victims of their own carelessness, stubbornness or insanity or caused by unexpected accidents (...) leaving them in crippled or incurable conditions for a long time (...) and causing them to go before their time⁵. To forestall that the author described in detail how to handle every one such case, how to bring back a person who suffered a shock, how to make them breath again, what they should be served to drink before a doctor arrived.

The *History of Charitable works* raised many issues in social hygiene the broad sense. The Wilno centre, which hosted professors of international renown including Jan Piotr Frank and his son, Józef, or the brothers Jan and

¹ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 487.

² Cf. A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 488.

³ *Medycyna ubogich* in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1823, t. 1, pp. 73–87. A reprint of an article from the *Dictionnaire des sciences médicales*, translated by I. E. Lachnicki.

⁴ *Medycyna ubogich*, pp. 73–79.

⁵ F. Rymkiewicz, *Prawidła postępowania w niebytności lekarza, dla przywrócenia do życia zmrożonych, uduszonych, oczadzonych, utopionych, zabitych od pioruna albo obumarłych od uderzenia lub spadnienia* in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1822, p. 983.

Jędrzej Śniadecki, was ahead of other research centres in Polish lands¹. The authors of the publication, noticing links between the standard of living and the degree of health on the one hand and the growing poverty, sought to reach out to a broad range audience, popularising vaccination, fighting prejudice and bad habits, or spreading through the press *rules of good health*. The Scientific Committee of the journal, who were responsible for its profile, warned in their correspondence with the Wilno Medical Society that „*The History of Charitable works*” by its nature does not reach out for topics belonging in the higher sciences, but deals with matters closer to natural use and news not requiring skilful handling to take over. (...) *The best way to advertise that work (...) could be to promote rules of health care, much needed especially in those places where no physicians work and where the local people live lives well remote from the benefits of the art of medicine*². They were worried seeing that *certain peculiar ways, bad habits, absolutely harmful to the health and life of the inhabitants* still abound in their country and that cannot be undercut or uprooted unless through philanthropy and patriotic works of medics–philosophers³.

Hygienic life in the broad sense was also popularised by Józef Jankowski, a physician sitting on the Scientific Committee of the *History of Charitable works*. He presented readers with simple ways of mechanical and chemical ventilation of premises such as hospitals, fever wards, barracks, or places of public gatherings and work where many people used to come together at one time and that tend to hold air that was unclean either by its composition or because no natural cleaning was possible⁴.

As for the organisation of hospitals, the above–quoted August Bécu described certain architectural solutions sometimes used in certain modern hospitals in Western Europe to keep them in good hygienic condition. He mentioned in this connection: location outside the town (preferably on a hill); buildings no more than two storeys in height; lit and easy–to–air rooms; halls running along the sides of buildings; rooms for patients beds large, tall enough and vaulted, with even and smooth walls; large windows, opening easily (some windows opening fully, other ones partly, and always at an oblique angle to one another in order to avoid draughts) with window sills fixed from the yard. As materials used to finish the interiors, the author recommended

¹ Cf. B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno–medyczne ...*, p. 47. Jan Piotr Frank (cf. note 6 on p. 3) in 1804–1805 was lecturer at Wilno University. His son, Józef Frank (1771–1842), was the founder of the Medical Society of Wilno (cf. *Polski Słownik Biograficzny*, t. 7, pp. 84–85); Jan Śniadecki (1756–1830), mathematician, astronomer and philosopher, rector of Wilno University; Jędrzej Śniadecki (1768–1838), physician, biologist and philosopher, professor of chemistry and medicine at the Medical Academy in Wilno, pioneer of physical education in Poland.

² *Korespondencja Komitetu Naukowego z Towarzystwem Imperatorskiem Medycznym Wileńskim in materii medycyny popularnej* [Correspondence of the Scientific Committee with the Imperial Medical Society of Wilno on the issue of popular medicine] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności 1822*, p. 590.

³ *Korespondencja Komitetu Naukowego ...*, p. 591.

⁴ J. Jankowski, *O sposobach odświeżania i poprawiania zdrowiu szkodliwego powietrza i czynienia go zdarnem do oddychania* [On refreshing noxious air to make it better for health and possible to breathe] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności 1820*, p. 640.

that stone and iron be preferred to wood (while the floor should always be wooden, which was the rule at the time). The whole affair was to be complemented with separate extra empty rooms, to be used solely in case another room in ordinary use would have to be cleaned; a separate part for communicable diseases (*infectious fevers*) and separate rooms for convalescent patients. Such hospitals should be localised amidst vast squares or gardens, for the patients to stroll¹.

Feeding the poor

Authors publishing in the journal also paid a lot of attention to supplying cheap and nutritional food to the poor. As remarked in the above-mentioned translation of the French article called *Medical care of the poor*, clear distinction should be drawn between cases resulting from *food shortage and those obviously caused by disease*². They voiced their concern in the *History of Charitable works* that, as in France, starvation was pushing people to drinking³. Philanthropists were encouraged to distribute the Rumford soup, quoting the case of Geneva. In 1816, the city saw a model soup production facility installed in it, to distribute the soup the composition and preparation whereof was invented by the often-named Count Rumford. The modern facility was intended, in keeping with rationalist ideas of the Enlightenment, to make help to the poor better. Interested readers could find a reprint of the details of the undertaking, with solutions that saved fuel so made the soup so cheap⁴. The article suggested turf as the fuel to use, as it is quite common in that part of Poland, as well as the more expensive wood or coals. Up to 150 soup helpings could be produced in one go. So efficient a facility could be extremely useful in attempts to fight hunger that befell regularly broad masses of the people then.

At a time things were so expensive ways of making food cheaper were being sought, among other things by using jelly made of bovine bone. This idea was flaunted broadly by Jan Fryderyk Wolfgang (1775–1859), pharmacy professor at Wilno University, doctor of medicine and philosophy, who was also on the Scientific Committee of the journal, like the above-mentioned Jankowski. He translated for the *History of Charitable works*, and added his own comments, foreign language articles describing early 19th century attempts to use a forgotten device French doctor and physics professor Papin developed in 1681. Numerous experiments had shown that cheap bovine bone processed in tightly sealed boilers under steam will yield large amounts of

¹ Cf. A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, pp. 478–479.

² *Medycyna ubogich*, p. 81.

³ That habit was also attributable to insufficient *enlightenment* and disastrous habits making people to use in excess – as a medicinal drug – wine sweetened and cured with spices, and in Poland, vodka with pepper or pepper and honey (the *krupnik*), beer with ginger and honey with cloves. Cf. the translator's note by I. E. Lachnicki to: *Medycyna ubogich*, p. 82.

⁴ Cf. *Zakład czyli fabryka in Genewie do zup rumfordzkich ekonomicznemi zwanymi* [An establishment, or factory, in Geneva to make Rumford soups called economical] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1821, pp. 886–893.

nutritional *dry* stew which, when added to the Rumford soup instead of expensive meat could cut the cost of feeding the poor substantially¹. The *machine* in question, improved by several engineers in succession, was being used more and commonly in poorhouses and hospitals for the poor. Readers of the *History of Charitable works* could see on the illustrations printed along with the articles successive improved releases of the steam boiler that from 1818 began to be used in Munich hospitals and poorhouses as well. Using bovine bone became the call of the day not only for economic reasons but also in the belief that the semi-finished product was of high nutritional value indeed. It was only towards the middle of the 19th century that medical literature began to question that belief².

Other original ideas were put forward as well as to what products could be used to hold the broad masses of starving people from consuming grass or bark which were particularly *poor food*. The journal granted a request of the Wilno Medical Society to publish an article by T. Brandenburg, a pharmacist of Mohylev and member of many scientific societies, who proposed the use of a very common lichen, called Irish, to make flour and bake bread³. Much the same matter was indirectly touched upon in an article by Percy and Vauquelin entitled, in J. Wolfgang's translation, *Comparison of nutritional value of foods*, among other things, in potatoes and other vegetables or grains. The study, commissioned by the French government for use in French prisons, was a genuine *novelty*, as up to then such comparisons used to be done only for prices of products⁴.

The doctrine of new philanthropy

In the epoch preceding the introduction of social security in Germany (and then in England and France) philanthropic actions and public social security services were the only institutions liable to help the poorest⁵. They were

¹ Cf. J. Wolfgang, *Galareta z kości bydłowych, uważana jako obfite źródło pokarmu dla ludzi, z historią i sposobami jej wydobywania w wielkich masach* [Jelly made of bovine bone, considered to be an abundant source of food for men, with a history and ways of producing it quantity] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1820, pp. 586–594; J. Wolfgang, *Machina Papina o wydobywania galarety z kości na pokarm, przez profesora Muncke poprawiona* [The Papin machine to derive jelly from bone for food, improved by professor Muncke] in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* pp. 410–420.

² Cf. L. Natanson, *O pożywności galarety* [On the nutritional value of jelly] in: *Tygodnik Lekarski* 18/1850, pp. 142–143. The author quoted in his article findings of a commission the Paris Medical Academy appointed in January 1850 to study the value of jelly as food. The commission concluded that 1) *stew is not more nutritional, if it contains more jelly*; 2) *the nutritional value of stew is attributable mostly to other substances the water extracts from the meat which is being stewed in it*; 3) *a solution of the so-called food jelly does not contain those nutritional substances*; 4) *if jelly is served as food, then other foods cannot easily be dispensed with, so it yields no substantial savings*; 5) *by adding it to other foods many people get their digestion damaged and in that sense it may even be harmful*; 6) *for these reasons the use of devices to make jelly in establishments set up for the purpose of feeding the poor, is not the right thing to do*.

³ T. Brandenburg, *O pożytku używania na pokarm porostu irlandzkiego* in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1822, pp. 705–718.

⁴ Cf. L. J. Percy, N.–L. Vauquelin, *Porównanie własności pożywnych in pokarmach* [Comparison of nutritional value of foods], transl. J. Wolfgang in: *Dzieje dobroczynności* 1823, p. 65.

⁵ Cf. E. Leś, *Od filantropii do pomocniczości. Studium porównawcze rozwoju i działalności organizacji społecznych* [From philanthropy to subsidiariness. A comparative study of the development and activity of social organisations], Warszawa 2000, p. 48.

mutually complementary, yet the doctrine of the new philanthropy developed in the latter half of the 18th century clearly denied – as shown above – the sense behind repressive moves taken by social institutions as contradictory with the rule of human mercy, not worthy of the name of *true friends of mankind*. The journal discussed here was dominated by a similar Enlightenment perception despising the role of coercion.

Articles published in the *History of Charitable works* are pervaded by a commitment to the decent provision of care to the poor, its good understanding, because *the extent of poverty, combined with utter impossibility of satisfying first wants of life; with no help from the community, is undoubtedly the worst misfortune, for it entails the worst bodily misfortune (...) of humiliating debasement and despair without hope*¹. In keeping with the 19th century model of philanthropy it was held that along with *giving care and supplying employment to vagabonds who are able to work* responsibilities of any carer of the poor include *Christian vigilance*, which should *spread across through to the backyards of destitute homes*. Such a person shall seek to get to know all circumstances, to consider causes of suffering, to get to know the life of impoverished inhabitants and their wants, *which are proper to different conditions*, by *witnessing and trying them with his own eyes*.

Those calls, which had a paternalistic ring to them, existed alongside with a belief that the provision of help to the poor should be improved and entrenched habits in that changed. It was proposed that towns be divided into districts and taken care of by curators sent by societies of charitable works to do their jobs, who should visit the badly-off families living there². The above-mentioned Bohatkiewicz criticised that circumstance that *curators working for welfare institutions as a rule finish their generous officiation by patiently listening to the meek applicants and lend their help, but probably to those only whose greater shyness or desperate necessity drove them to seek help*. Even worse, most of the poor do not know the district curator or have no idea of the existence of such a person³.

It was necessary, the argument went, that any action has to be a long-term undertaking and that philanthropic actions had to be popularised among the well-off as the only way to fight misery and to get hold of financial means to be used for the purpose. As Rumford wrote, *cases of intentions materialised successfully are much more likely to win people's hearts and to provoke imitation than even the best speeches or words of encouragement*⁴. He believed that if inhabitants of a major city obligated themselves under signature to pay one half of amounts *importunate beggars dock them of*, then *with certain devices in place, a way could be found to give a decent living to all those generally badly-off*, especially as a majority of them, including those

¹ Cf. *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 770.

² Cf. W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa*, p. 1066.

³ Cf. W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa*, pp. 1067–1068.

⁴ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 648.

living a beggar's life as is their wont, can be given useful employment¹. Philanthropists, he said, should command an untarnished reputation and be honest in the discharge of their duties, for that does elevate their wards' morale².

Tasks of government care

Demands made regarding the improvement of the living conditions of people and fighting poverty emphasised not only the philanthropists' dedication or the need to improve help provided by welfare organisations but also government intervention was called for, however small³. Foreign and indigenous opinions on that issue articulated in the journal did differ though. Benjamin Thompson Count Rumford was sceptical, writing in his *Practical theoretical memoirs*, that *the only necessary and prudent resource the government can reach for, if they intend to found an institute for the poor in any, is for them to come up with a well-designed plan and to abolish or amend any law that may stand in its way*.⁴ His argument was – and that pertinently reflects the essential meaning of philanthropy – that *lawmakers can impose a tax to be levied for the upkeep of the poor, yet they cannot produce that benevolent care, that delicate sense so badly wanted in dealing with the poor*.⁵

August Bécu charged the state with greater responsibility than Count Rumford, especially where it comes to care of *the truly poor* and the ill. In his article he observed that care of the ill and old people being given by their relations would soon require government support in towns – as the poor and the ill kept growing in numbers. As various types of establishments are cropping up to take care of those people, it is perfectly natural to put the burden of running them *on the public purse*. So, he wrote, *a good government will seek to apply the most suitable resources to take care effectively of that public need*⁶. What he spells out as his position on the question of helping the poor is a good illustration of a contempt for *culpable* poverty so typical of 19th century philanthropy. In his view, all kinds of *humanitarian institutions* should serve seek, *by supporting the poor at large, to fulfil the duty of government to take care of them and to remove the hideous view from before the eyes of the general public, opening for them workhouses, homes for the crippled and correctional houses*. Establishing public hospitals for poor ill people could reduce, in the author's opinion, the number of diseases befalling them, which, without such effort, could threaten public health and *add to the crippleness and mortality in this class of the people, thus depriving the community of a great many working hands, hands need to do work*⁷. That mode of thinking reflects certain tenets of the Enlightenment, which Bożena Urbanek

¹ Cf. *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, pp. 773–774.

² Cf. *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 782.

³ Cf. Z. Jastrzębowski, *Spory o model lecznictwa*, p. 22.

⁴ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, p. 771.

⁵ *O udoskonaleniu instytucji dobroczynnych ...*, pp. 770–771.

⁶ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 477.

⁷ A. Bécu, *O doskonałości szpitalów*, p. 479.

says come through in the powerful call for government involvement in organising hospital care by establishing a so-called network of public hospitals and participating in their financing¹.

Bohatkiewicz for his part attributed a prominent role to the state in fighting beggary. He cautioned that beggary *should not be disparaged as unworthy of the government's attention, because should beggary be moved out of the way as a problem good manners would be restored and reinforced, without which no state can go on in permanence*². He also called for legal regulation of charitable works, because in his view *legislators have yet many facts to account for, a lot of precautionary measures to point out that vigilant philanthropists could keep to and apply on site in establishing new and keeping in place old hospitals, newly founded charitable inns and work houses, especially in parishes and small towns*³.

* * *

In the 19th century, subsistence of the people attracted the attention of the literary and journalistic professions, researchers (economists, lawyers and philosophers), physicians and churchmen. The *History of Charitable works* discussed herein was an unusual case. The above article quotes a number of issues taken up in the journal by the title *friends of mankind*, who propagated humanitarian ideas. They called for giving the poor with elementary education, genuine medical care co-funded by the government, and they urged the spreading of rules of hygienic life among the masses of the poor. They denounced beggary at the same time, demanding the rehabilitation of *idlers* through work.

Readers leafing through the *History of Charitable works* may be surprised at the pervading belief that the elites should have a right to control and intervene in the way of life, education and habits of people in poverty. The contents of articles published show that such a perception was bred by a sense of compassion, enlightened rationalism, yet also by justifiable fears of fatal diseases, especially smallpox, spreading. Today some of those practical indications, especially regarding education, mass nutrition practices or children work, are likely to turn off readers. But they should be viewed in their context of real conditions and intellectual currents of the late 18th and the former half of the 19th centuries many historians describe as the *epoch of philanthropists*.

¹ Cf. B. Urbanek, *Pismo społeczno-medyczne ...*, p. 46.

² W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa*, p. 1045.

³ W. A. Bohatkiewicz, *O sposobach ułatwiających wytepienie żebractwa*, pp. 1048–1049.