Charity in Warsaw in the Second Half of the XIXth Century

Janina Zurawicka
The Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw

The history of charitable institutions in Warsaw deserves particular attention for several reasons. Of all the Polish cities Warsaw had always been the biggest spender on charity and its provisions were also extended to non-Varsovians. The city's role as organizer and propagator of the campaigns to expand welfare provisions increased immensely during the XIXth century, and particularly in the period under Russian rule, when the independent Polish state had ceased to exist and the pressures exerted by the occupiers were growing steadily. The history of Warsaw's philanthropic institutions is also very closely connected with the political history of the city: the harsher the reprisals, the stronger the commitment of Varsovians to work to improve the fate of the needy. In contrast to earlier times, when the structure of charity institutions in Warsaw had not differed much from that prevailing throughout western Europe, the exceptionally difficult circumstances of the late XIXth century elicited a broad public response and resulted in the emergence of new forms of assistance for the needy which were on a scale without parallel internationally. The structure and role of charity institutions was a subject of particular concern amongst enlightened citizens of Warsaw, was extensively discussed in the press and even found its way into the pages of novels. The rapidly developing capitalistic city, which was struggling to overcome the heritage of backwardness, experienced rapid population growth accompanied by growing poverty and housing shortages, left virtually unassisted by a hostile state had to cope with these problems on its own.

* This paper is based on information drawn from the annual reports issued by the main charitable institutions, the Warsaw Charitable Society, and other philanthropic societies in Warsaw, as well as numerous monographs on the subject.

Let us first take a look into a more distant past. The history of charity in Poland began in the XIVth century, when the first hospitals modelled on similar west European institutions [Hotel de Dieu] were set up to serve as poor-houses for old people, cripples and pilgrims. They were based on the Christian concept of compassion for all paupers, not only those sick, and were intended to combine therapeutic and protective functions. They were set up near churches and monasteries and were run and supervised by the clergy. Later on, hospitals were also established by religious fraternities, or lay bodies engaged in charity work, like similar institutions in western Europe. They developed various forms of charity, including the so-called *montes pietatis*, and some of these survived until the beginning of the XXth century, like the fraternity of St. Benon. However, the expansion of the city and its inhabitants made such forms of charity insufficient. [There were only three hospitals-poor-houses in Warsaw in the XVIth century].

The XVIIIth century saw the secularization of philanthropic institutions, and new ventures were undertaken mainly by individuals with funds obtained from rich donors and contributors. One example was father Gabriel Baudoin who founded a home for waifs and strays in Warsaw, later transformed into the Christ-Child Infirmary, the biggest hospital in the city. Father Baudoin had ambitious plans for setting up a comprehensive, integrated philantropic institution modelled after the French *Hopitâl Général*, which would include a general and a pediatric hospital, a home for waifs and strays, a home for old people, and a poor-house for the disabled and incurably ill. Lack of means prevented this plan being realized and, as a result, Father Baudoin's institutions remained a home for waifs and strays with emphasis on providing education for its charges, combined with a hospital for the poor brought in from the streets. It was here that the first attempt was made to separate medical and welfare functions by providing separate wards for the sick and the destitute.

The age of Enlightenment brought new ideas on the organization of charity, and the concept of a controlling lay institution to organize comprehensive welfare provision for the poor gained prominence. The need for such an institution was argued by many social and political writers of the time [including P. Switkowski and Fr. Jezierski]. "The plague of beggary is still haunting Warsaw, and it is the task of the government to eliminate it completely or at least reduce its scope", Switkowski wrote in 1782.[1] He advocated two methods to eliminate beggary, both of which were practised in Germany [in Hamburg and Munich, among other]. He distinguished between those paupers who could not provide for themselves because of physical disability or old age or who also had no relatives to provide for them, and

[1] *Pamietnik historyczno-polityczny* [Historical-Political Diary], April 1782, p. 426.

those who were able bodied and should be made to work. The first group should be sent to hospitals, he argued, while the second were to go to workshops. Other Polish writers of the time urged the establishment of such workshops for the poor, and were inspired by the example of similar institutions in western Europe. They also tackled the question of waifs and strays and proposed that they be sent to factories and remain under the protection of workers until they reached the age of fourteen when they should be given jobs.

Such views were rooted in the ideas of mercantilism, and were designed to encourage domestic industry and agriculture by securing them adequate supplies of cheap labour. One attempt to implement the concept of forced labour for beggars was a proposal by baron Lefort, supported by King Stanislaw August, to set up a 'workers' home, a weaving shop combining the functions of a poor-house and a workshop. Such an institution come into being in 1783 and was taken over by the newly founded *Warsaw Charitable Society* in 1814. Lefort's proposals to open more workshops for homeless beggars modelled on similar workers' homes in Berlin, Bremen, Hamburg and Vienna were highly applauded by the social and political writers of the time, including Switowski.[2]

In late XVIIIth century, on the initiative of the last Polish King, the first state agency was established to deal with charity and supervise philanthropic institutions. This was the *Police Commission of Both Nations* [i.e the Polish and Lithuanian nations], which was formed in 1781. Following a round-up of beggars and vagabonds launched in the same year, the sick were placed in hospitals, with separate wards for the seriously ill and those simply in need of a shelter, while able-bodied were sent to workshops and factiories, like Rephan's cloth factory or Paulet's hat factory. The Commission's tasks included the provision of funds necessary to maintain charitable institutions and it organized lotteries and levied a tax to this end, but Poland's loss of independence in 1795 put an end to its activities.

In the first half of XIXth century, during the Napoleonic wars and the Congress Kingdom under Russian rule, its duties were taken over by the Police Directorate, and later by the ministry of home affairs. These were very hard times for the inhabitants of Warsaw. In the aftermath of the wars the number of the poor, cripples, orphans and the homeless increased. Successive governments proved unable to make significant financial contributions to charity, and it became imperative to set up a body which could provide a coherent frame-work for the entire welfare organization. Once again, social and political writers gave a lead, particularly Fr. Skarbek and J. Supinski.

[2] *Projekt Leforta. Pamietnik historyczno-polityczny* [Lefort's Proposal. Historical-Political Diary], 1784, p. 523.

Skarbek[3] argued that poverty should be countered not with philanthropy and alms but with the work of charity institutions. Hospitals and shelters for the old and disabled, mutual aid institutions such as provident funds extending interest-free loans for settlement, as well as farming settlements on the Dutch model [the Hague, 1818] and based on collective ownership of assets. All these institutions were to be geared to the moral and material uplifting of the poor. Philanthropic activity should be pursued by society through these specially created associations.

The idea of such associations was also advanced by J. Supinski. *The Warsaw Charitable Society*, founded in 1814, set about the task of providing a comprehensive solution to protect the needy. The Society's activities were especially important after 1870, when the entire burden of charity had to be assumed by the public, and it continued to exist until 1914. By 1870, it had opened orphanages for boys, for the old and disabled, as well as providing cheap five *groszy* dinners, and setting up 6 reading rooms which offered reading and writing courses in Polish. Before 1830 control over the philanthropic institutions had been partly in the hands of a general supervisory council set up by the authorities, but, in fact, charitable activities were pursued independently and separately by both the occupying power and the residents of Warsaw. But these earlier efforts by the authorities were running out of momentum and were basically limited to general supervision with very little financial assistance, while the scale of welfare provided by Varsovians themselves was growing systematically.

The structure of charity institutions changed with the collapse of the November uprising of 1831, when the reprisals by the Russian administration against the Varsovians were intensified. The decree of 1832 abolished the general supervisory council and introduced instead a main council with individual councils for each philanthropic institution. The latter were responsible for the supervision of hospital property and were composed of a hospital administrator, a doctor and two citizens. The main council, whose terms of reference were further limited in 1842, was subordinated to the Internal Affairs Commission in St. Petersburg. The majority on the council was made up of Czarist Russian civil servants who vastly outnumbered the Polish representatives. The occupying power did all it could to limit Warsaw's role to that of a provincial capital subordinated to the central authorities in St. Petersburg, and to deprive it of the function of the capital of a former independent state. The new decree was highly formalistic and made all the essential activities of the council dependent on the government commission in St. Petersburg, while part of the charity institutions came directly under the supervision of state agencies. These institutions, like the refuge and workshop

[3] Fr. Skarbek, *Prace o ubostwie i ubogich* (Writings on Poverty and the Poor), Warsaw 1827.

established by S. Staszic with a view to eliminating poverty and beggary, were liquidated for lack of means. Confronted with an average population increase of 1.5 per cent annually[4], which caused major increases in the number of people without means of subsistence [according to a report of the main council for 1844, Warsaw had one pauper in every 100 inhabitants], the charity institutions could not meet society's demands. Under its direct supervision the main council had three poor-houses for the old and disabled which were maintained by support from the municipal authorities and private contributions; they could provide shelter for only 80 people a year.[5]

The remaining two poor-houses for the old were supported by the Evangelical and Jewish communities. The poor-houses also had orphanages, and the council exercised control over a corrective institution for juveniles and an establishment for deaf mutes and the blind, the former founded in 1830 from the endowment of Jakubowiczowa and government and private contributions. The inmates were all under fourteen years and when they reached that age they were sent into service or employed by craftsmen. The institution released 344 former inmates over a 10-year period. The establishment for deaf mutes and the blind which is still in existence in Warsaw today, received relatively bigger government subsidies but its budget, like that of all other charities, was based on private donations and occasional income from concerts and performances. The inmates were given general primary education and taught a vocation [joinery, shoemaking, bookbinding, sewing]. The final category of charities directly dependent on the main council were the hospitals and Warsaw then had five general and three specialist hospitals. Although the hospitals had been transformed from poor-houses to medical institutions, the majority of their patients were still paupers and vagrants. The council must be given credit for reorganizing the budgets of these hospitals and charities by a scrupulous monitoring of all their receipts and expenditures.

The decades following the January uprising of 1863, brought exceptional hardship to the lives of Varsovians. The years were marked by increased reprisals, Russification, and a gradual elimination of the role played by the Poles in the administration and cultural life of Warsaw. This was a period of unprecedented pauperization of the people of Warsaw; poverty, which affected one fourth of the entire population of the city; and unemployment, aggravated by mass immigration to Warsaw by the landless peasants from nearby villages. According to a population census taken in 1882 in Warsaw, there were 376, 633 residents [excluding 41,736 Russian troops stationed in the city] and 11 per cent were unemployed. Forty-five per cent of all flats in the city had only one room, without a kitchen or lighting or water supply: these

[4] W. Zaleski, *Krolestwo Polskie pod wzgledem statystycznym* [The Polish Kingdom in Statistics], Warsaw, 1900, part one, page 10.

[5] Cf. reports of the main council for 1844 and the following years.

housed two thirds of the city's population, with an average of 4 to 5 people per room.[6] It was not until the end of the XIXth century, in 1898, that inexpensive and moderately comfortable flats began to be built in Warsaw for the working population, the idea and funding coming from a philanthropist named Hipolit Wawelberg. By 1900, some 400 families [approx. 2,000 people] had moved into these new apartment buildings.

Poverty, bad housing conditions, and low standards of education (according to the 1882 census 50% of Varsovians were illiterate) caused demoralization and the city became a haunt of vice and crime. "Our people are ignorant and hungry", wrote the statistician, Jozef Konczynski.[7] Statistics of crimes and offences showed a marked upward trend after 1877, and some 50% of all crimes were committed against property (i. e. robberies, thefts, and petty larceny resulting from poverty) or unwanted babies (infaticide and abandoning of babies). The perpetrators, Konopczynski showed, were chiefly people without employment and forced to live on charity extended by social and philanthropic institutions.[8]

After 1870, the situation of the Warsaw charity institutions deteriorated considerably. In June 1870, a Czarist decree dissolved the main council and all individual councils and replaced them with newly established *Municipal Council of Public Charity* in Warsaw and provincial councils, allowing even less freedom of action than their predecessors. Even the most trivial initiatives of the Council required the approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs in St. Petersburg, and were often rejected. The Municipal Council exercised control over hospitals and all philanthropic establishments in Warsaw. The majority of its members were Russian civil servants; it was chaired by the governor-general of Warsaw, and its members included the head of metropolitan police, the head of a municipal department for overseeing philanthropic institutions, the inspector of hospitals, and a school inspector. The few Poles on the Council were representatives of hospitals and philanthropic institutions, and were non-voting members who could only offer advice on questions directly relating to their respective institutions. Such an arrangement was intended to deprive the Poles of any say in the management of the charities, so that a society which paid voluntary contributions for charity was deprived of influence on the way these funds were spent. Subsidies by the authorities for charity and hospitals were unusually scant and took the form of grants-in-aid which contrasted with the situation in the rest of Europe and even in Russia,

[6] A. Suligowski, *Kwestia mieszkan* [Housing Question], Warsaw, 1889, p. 8; *Trudy Warszawskogo Statisticzeskogo Komitieta*, vol. 13.

[7] Jozef Konczynski, *Stan moralny spoleczenstwa polskiego na podstawie danych statystyki kryminalnej* (The Moral Condition of the Polish Society In the Light of Statistics on Crime), Warsaw, 1911, p. 131.

[8] *Ibidem*, pp. 32, 37, 88, 110, tables IV, XI, XIII.

where hospitals were maintained by state agencies or independent municipal governments. Moreover, the Russian authorities set up obstacles to the work of Polish philanthropic institutions by frequent refusals to approve donations or endowments made in their favour by individuals. Acceptance of a donation by its beneficiary required prior approval of the Ministry of Home Affairs in St. Petersburg.

Under these circumstances the entire burden of the maintenance of these welfare establishments had to be assumed by Polish organizations. Charitable societies sprang up, the most notable being the Warsaw Charitable Society. Its funds came basically from membership fees, which were set at 5 *roubles* annually, subsequently to be increased to 12 roubles. The revenue from membership fees showed a declining trend over the entire period of the Society's existence; in 1884, the Society had 564 members, only half of whom paid their fees regularly.[9] This was due to the class structure of the membership: in 1895, when the society had 1841 members, half of them came from the so-called working intelligentsia (white-collar workers). It was precisely this social class which, both economically and morally suffered the most, when they were denied employment opportunities in state administration and educational institutions in a period of enhanced Russification. Approximately 14% of the Society's members were of bourgeois background, while only 7% came from the gentry and aristocracy. The rest were craftsmen, minor bureaucrates, etc. Despite the considerable pauperization of the Warsaw intelligentsia at that time, its reprensentatives played a major role in social undertakings of all kinds, and demonstrated an unquestionable dedication. These people were the prime movers, organizers and unpaid staff of such ventures. Legacies, endowments and various other donations by private individuals accounted for a growing proportion of the Society's budget. Incidentally, the names of contributors to various social and cultural programmes repeated themselves, be it the Warsaw Charitable Society, the Society for Hygiene, the Society for Summer Camps for poor children, or Kasa Mianowskiego. Kasa served as a substitute for a superior institution to promote Polish science and culture as this did not exist in the Russian-occupied part of Poland. All these societies owed their existence to social philanthropy. Part of their income derived from proceeds from various entertainment events, lotteries, street collections as well as from the sale of theatre thickets, while the state subsidy amounted to only 2,000 roubles annually. In 1894 the authorities introduced a special "hospital tax" of 1 rouble annually levied on workers, craftsmen and day-labourers. The tax was intended to reduce the burden on the state of charity-related expenditure, and put a part of this burden on the shoulders of the poorest groups of Varsovians.

[9] W. A. Sulikowski, *Z dziejow dobroczynnosci publicznej Warszawy 1870-1886* [History of Warsaw Charity, 1870-1886], Warsaw, 1886, vol. 4, p. 26-46.

Thanks to a number of property legacies, the Warsaw Charitable Society's annual income increased to some 40,000 *roubles* by the 1880s, and to some 95,000 *roubles* by the end of the century. With funds of this magnitude the Society could now operate on a much broader scale than hitherto. It was able to maintain existing charity institutions and open new ones, as well as extend grants to the needy. Still, the Society's income continually failed to match its expenditures and forced it to appeal for more contributions.

The new statutes of the Society adopted in 1891 helped streamline its operations. The Society had 16 departments working through the intermediacy of tutelary councils. Each council member served as a patron of the needy from one metropolitan police district. As a result, they knew personally all the paupers in their respective districts which brought the needy and their protectors closer together. The Society's departments dealt with old people and cripples, orphanages and day nurseries, cheap eating-houses, medical aid, cheap baths, destitute hospital leavers, cash subsidies, reading rooms, and employment offers. The department for old people and cripples maintained two poor-houses which provided life-long shelter. The older of those two poor-houses still stands in Warsaw at Krakowskie Przedmiescie Street with the words *Res sacra miser*, inscribed on the frontal. The average number of inmates in both institutions hovered at about 300-400 annually. Of particular concern for the Society were poor children and adolescent, who were cared for by the department of orphanages and day-nurseries. The orphanages admitted children aged 3 to 9 who were taught reading, writing and arithmetic, as well as a trade. Upon reaching 14, the boys were apprenticed, and the girls went into service as soon as they reached 16. The number of children was steadily growing and reached 500 in a single institution in the 1890s. Thanks to a number of bequests (made by Rosa Zamojska née Kronenberg and Ludwika Benni, among others), the orphanages were successively expanded. There were 6 of them for boys and 10 for girls, plus 46 day-nurseries for children aged 3 to 7. Attendance at the day-nurseries reached 4,000 in 1884. The children received full board, and in order to help working-class mothers the day-nurseries opened creches for babies aged 6 weeks to 3 years. In 1882, the Society launched free sewing courses for girls leaving day-nurseries and orphanages at the age of 15. Admission was open to girls of all religions. They were simultaneously taught primary school subjects, hygiene and gymnastics. The sewing workshops, of which there were 6 with 600 students, had house-physicians and won great popularity among girls.

The Society's other departments ran cheap eating-houses for impecunious students and pensioners, and arranged for free distribution of soup for the poor (120,000 a year). In 1897 the Society opened a hostel for destitute hospital leavers, who could complete their convalescence there, and a poor-house for invalid workers and craftsmen. There were 26 reading rooms ran by the Society in 1891. Under the guise of propagating reading skills they engaged in clandestine teaching of national history and the Polish language, so

that in 1892 the authorities banned this activity. Overall, the institutions of the Warsaw Charitable Society provided shelter to 2,000 people annually.

An important area of the Society's activities lay in granting regular though modest financial aid, as well as aid in the form of fuel, clothing, medicines, loans to craftsmen for the purchase of tools, setting up savings banks for the poor and provident funds. At the beginning of the XXth century, the Society also established an employment agency for the poor, intended to protect them from exploitation by privately-owned employment agencies. Their children were admitted to day-nurseries and hostels for adolescents operated by the Society. The Society's employment agency made no charge on either the job-seekers or the employers.

There were other philanthropic societies operating in Warsaw at the time as well, but the scale of their activity was significantly smaller. The *Society for the Relief of Those Ashamed of Begging* set up homes for the disabled and old, and hostels which offered a night's lodging, a piece of bread and a glass of hot tea for as little as 4 *kopeks*. No less than 250,000 paupers a year entered the gates of these establishments. A *Society of Benefactrices of the Evangelical Community* regularly helped the poor, the sick and orphans of their parish, and great vigour characterized the activities of the *Jewish Mutual Aid Society* operating in the Jewish community in Warsaw, which helped to improve the material status of Jewish paupers, small merchants and craftsmen by supplying them with tools, offering financial aid and free medical advice. A special place was reserved for the care of orphans and children of the poor, and orphans under the age of fifteen were assigned to Jewish foster families, and their upkeep was covered by the charity. Impressive results were achieved in vocational education of children from poor Jewish families. The idea of setting up workshops where these children could learn and prepare for a trade was advanced in 1879 by a well-known social activist Dr Ludwik Natanson. After acquiring several legacies and donations for this purpose, the community set up workshops at Jewish primary schools, where skilled craftsmen trained eleven-year olds in joinery, mechanics, tailoring, shoemaking, and weaving. The courses were offered free. On average 225 pupils annually completed the training, and many of them went on to technical schools, while a dozen or so found employment abroad. Some of the pupils, expecially among the girls, received money grants for establishing their own shops.

In 1881 two medical doctors, S. Markiewicz and S. Kosminski,, founded the *Society for Summer Camps* of Warsaw, which also attracted private contributions. Starting in 1882 the Society organized 4-week free camps in the country for children from poor families. The number of campers increased with each year, growing from 286 in 1887, to 844 in 1892, to 1961 in 1896 and approaching 3,000 towards the end of the century.

The Warsaw *Society for the Care of Poor Mothers and their Children* came into being in 1884, to help poor women during pregnancy and after delivery, when they were unable to work to maintain themselves. The society granted

financial aid and set up homes for women in child-bed in several districts of Warsaw. The first Polish woman-doctor, Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska, took an unpaid job in one of such homes. 1897 saw the creation of the *Society for Care of the Incurably Ill*, and 1900 the *Society of Medical Assistance for the Mentally Disturbed*. Mention is also due to the ambulance service established in Warsaw in 1897, the second such service in all the Polish territories, which offered emergency medical aid free of charge. The initiative for its creation came from J. Zawadzki, J. Zweigbaum and other social activists from among physicians, and was supported by private contributions. Direct supervision over the service was in the hands of the Ministry of Home Affairs in St. Petersburg which also paid a regular subsidy towards its costs.

Although separated from poor-houses and concentrating solely on therapy medical treatment, the Warsaw hospitals of the time retained their character of charity establishments because the majority of their patients were paupers. The hospitals were subordinated to the Municipal Council for Public Charity, but the Council's money grants in behalf of the hospitals were minimal. There were 9 hospitals with two thousand beds in Warsaw in the last decades of the XIXth century, which fell far short of what was needed and resulted in appallingly cramped wards among other things. A doctor's pay was very poor, between 200 and 500 roubles per annum (an average Warsaw worker earned 400 roubles annually), and the majority of physicians worked without pay. Towards the end of the century, when members of the propertied classes also began to avail themselves of hospital treatment, hospitals were divided into four categories, depending on the fees they charged, which were in general high. Some infirmaries even offered the wealthy single-bed wards, which evoked protests from socially committed doctors.[10] The end of the century saw the emergence of privately-owned infirmaries. There were 16 of them in Warsaw at that time.

While describing the scope of charitable activity in Warsaw, one should finally mention the numerous initiatives taken by individuals, especially doctors. "Every time a noble-minded social initiative emerges, doctors are in the van of it", wrote Boleslaw Prus,[11] an out-standing writer of the second half of the XIXth century. The biographies of many Warsaw physicians appearing in the Slownik Lekarzow Polskich [Dictionary of Polish Physicians] by S. Kosminski, published in the 1880s, contain these characteristic remarks: "He shared his hard-earned income with the Warsaw poor" (referring to Roman Fijak), "He still is a protector of many workers" (about Henryk Jawurek), "It is thanks to his initiative and effort that the first Warsaw infirmary for the poor

[10] Z. Kramsztyk, *Pokoje dla pensjonariuszy w szpitalach* [Hospital Wards], in "Krytyka Lekarska" (Medical Critique), 1902, No. 11, pp. 233-236.

[11] B. Prus, *Kronika* (Chronicles), vol. 5, Warsaw, 1955, p. 349.

has been established" (referring to Stanislaw Kosminski), "Any venture aimed at the public weal has always found in him an ardent advocate" (referring to Ludwik Natanson), "A house-physician in a poor-house and workshop" (Ludwik Pogorzelski), "A house-physician in an old-people's home of the Charitable Society" (Adolf Rothe), "A house-physician and founder of a home for women in child-bed" (Anna Tomaszewicz-Dobrska), etc. Doctor philanthrophists included F. Rajkowski, W. Bieganski and E. Zielinski, among others, and a leading position among the socially committed physicians of Warsaw was held by Zygmunt Kramsztyk, an ophtalmologist, thinker and writer. He gave medical aid to the poor free of charge both in his private practice and as the head physician of the hospital for orthodox Jews and *Krytyka Lekarska* [Medical Critique], a journal of progressive medical thought edited and financed by Kramsztyk, argued for a restructuring of hospital facilities. In 1898 he wrote that medical assistance was like a jewel of the rich instead of being like purest quality water equally available to all people. Another outstanding Warsaw physician, neurologist and scholar, Samuel Goldflamm, set up a neurological clinic offering aid free of charge, a hospital for the mentally sick and a pediatric hospital. Social activists among doctors were so numerous those days that many such characters entered the pages of *belles lettres*. Mention is especially due to novels and novelettes by Stefan Zeromski.

It might seem that the scope of charitable activity in XIXth century Warsaw was large. However, in proportion to the needs it was insignificant. One must also keep in mind that the philanthropic institutions of Warsaw had to serve, to some extent, the needs of inhabitants of all the Polish territories under Russian occupation. Apart from a few big cities, philanthropic institutions were rare. The number of homes for the poor, shelters and hostels of various kinds was insufficient, and, moreover, the living and housing conditions of the inmates were mostly bad, especially in the case of the old and the disabled. Small, cramped rooms inadequately ventilated, bursting with beds, and cheap food were the everyday realities of those establishments. It could not have been different, as the daily allotment for food amounted to 15 or 20 kopeks, a very meagre sum compared to the prices of food in Warsaw in that period. No wonder then that the paupers of Warsaw were often bitter about charity, and the progressive press critized it frequently and put forward alternative solutions. Somewhat better housing conditions prevailed in orphanages and day-nurseries for chidren, but even there the food was miserable. Some of them had modern sanitation equipment and gymnasiums. Better conditions were provided by hostels ran by the Evangelical and Jewish communities.

Nonetheless, one should not underestimate the importance of public charity in Warsaw of the time. "Charity, which in other countries plays a supplementary and auxiliary role in support of government activities, repre-

sents the mainspring in Poland", wrote Aleksander Swietochowski, an outstanding Polish writer. "Were it to cease today, a large number of wheels on the machine of public life would tomorrow slow down or come to a complete halt".[12]

[12] A. Swietochowski, *Ofiarnosc obywatelska* (Public Charity), Warsaw, 1911, p. 15.