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The Everyday Life of a Young Landowner on the Example of the Roman Bniński Junior

Abstract. The Everyday Life of a Young Landowner on the Example of the Roman Bniński Junior

This article has been written based on previously unpublished correspondence of the Bniński family, carried on between August 13, 1876 and May 5, 1890. The sender was Roman Bniński (the father), and the addressee was his son, also Roman. One of the letters was written to his sons Roman and Hilary. This remarkable correspondence allows to recreate daily life of the landed gentry living in Podolia. It also provides an opportunity to look into everyday matters and witness life in Vinnytsia palace. The father's correspondence with his son enables to recreate aspects of Roman Bniński's life, his relations with the family members, his attitude towards education, friendships and the forms of spending free time.

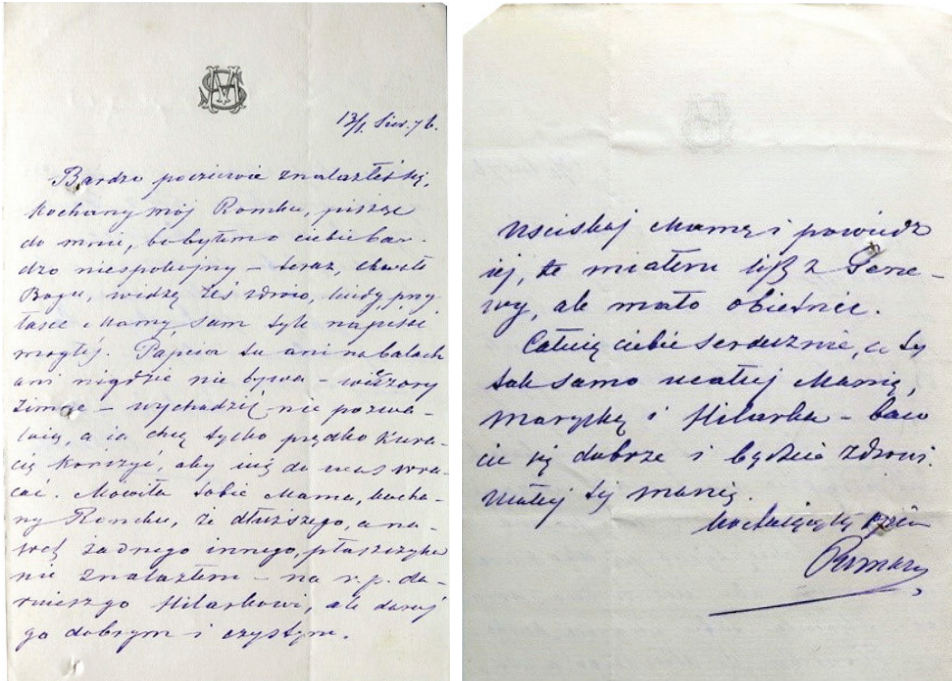
Keywords: Roman Bniński, letter, father, son, daily life

In the Dictionary of the Polish Language, the term youth is defined as:

1. «the period of life between childhood and adolescence»
2. «a group of characteristics and behaviours specific to that period»
3. «early stage of development of something» (Dictionary of Polish Language, 2019).

The definition options proposed in the dictionary indicate that this is adolescence time. A time of change in the biological, psychological and social sphere. Thus an extremely dynamic period (Wolański 1986, 43–48). This period will be presented on the basis of the picture of everyday life of Roman Bniński junior (Miszczuk 2016, 36).

The query in the Regional Archive in Vinnitsa (Ukraine), made it possible to obtain many source materials showing the everyday life of the Podolia region. The construction of the image of the landed gentry made it possible to read, among others letters from Roman Bniński senior (Janik 1936, 147–148) to Roman Bniński's son. Several dozens of letters were analyzed, which were being written between 13 August 1876 and 5 May 1890. Letters addressed mainly to Roman's son.

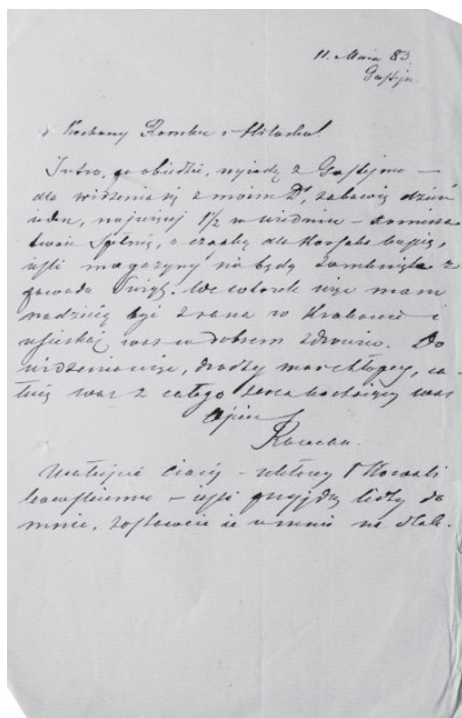


Fot. 1–2. The letter of Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński (Jr)

Source: Regional Archive in Vinnitsa, The legacy of Bniński's family, without signature.

However, it should be noted that this collection also includes a letter addressed simultaneously to two sons: Roman and Hilary (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa).

Roman junior's life was typical for a young man from a landed gentry family at the time. The letters under analysis has been written at a time when the father was absorbed by economic and management responsibilities, while the mother and her children lived in Kraków (Janik 1936, 148), as Roman and Hilary, who studied at the local schools. The education model of the time was traditional. The mother was responsible for organizing the childcare. It was also to provide the basis for education. Therefore, most often, until 12–14 years of age, learning took place at home. After this period, the boys

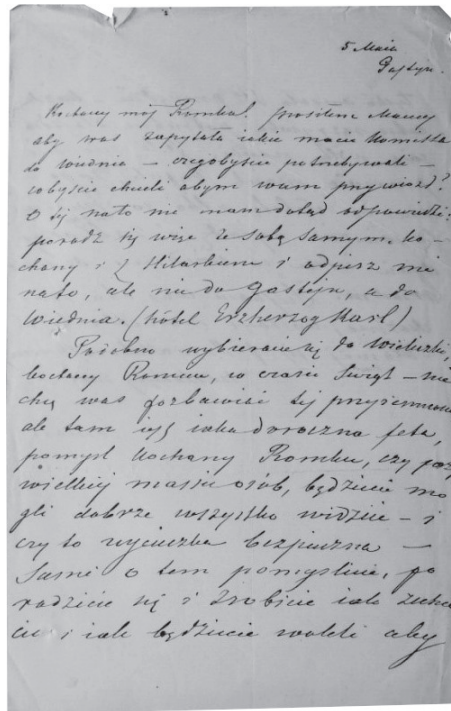


Fot. 3. The letter of Roman Bniński to his sons – Roman and Hilary

Source: Regional Archive in Vinnitsa (Vinnitsa), The legacy of Bniński's family, without signature.

began their education at the junior high school (Epsztein 1998, 37–51). This was due to the belief that even the best home education could not replace schooling. Schooling was to provide universal knowledge. I know ‘what well-bred people should have’. The schooling was to be an introduction to life. It was supposed to teach people how to communicate. This is because there was a conviction then, ‘that if you learn to listen and make yourself older when you are young, you will be able to later grow up with the second command’ (ibidem, 52).

It should therefore be stressed that the correspondence has been created during the adolescence of Roman junior. Although during this period, the young man’s social contacts were becoming more and more lively and expanding, the narrative of the letters shows that the family ties between parents and son were close. This thesis is important for the rest of the narrative, as it undoubtedly determines it (Rembowski 1986, 214). The family is the first and best developmental environment for the child. The family should provide all the stimuli needed for his proper psychophysical development, shape patterns of behaviour and the ‘basic motivations of his attitudes towards people, objects, processes and phenomena of the surrounding world’ (ibidem, 214). However, as the child develops, his or her



Fot. 4–5. The letter of Roman Bniński to his sons Roman and Hilary

Source: Regional Archive in Vinnitsa, The legacy of Bniński's family, without signature.

social contacts expand, which affects family relationships. Despite this, the relationship with Roman Bniński's junior parents seems to be close.

It should be stressed, however, that we know little about the son's relationship with his mother. The narrative of the letters shows that it was the mother who was with her son every day. However, the narrative of the letters does not allow for the construction of their daily relations. It provides us with only fragmentary facts. Facts that are not supplemented by a description of their ties (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa).

The letters', rescuing character focuses on Roman Bniński's junior relationship with his father. It emphasizes the closeness of the father and the son, although sustained primarily by the father. A closeness that was maintained by correspondence. In the letters we find many elements indicating that the father is trying to keep in touch with his son, although by correspondence. Therefore, the father in the first sentences of the letters he writes thanks the child for the correspondence received (ibidem). Particularly noteworthy is this group of thanks, which has been enriched by the emotions of its father's companion as the addressee of the letter. So we'll find in them, among others. care for the child, joy and pride.

Father was trying to keep in exchanged letter. Therefore, first of all, he did not hesitate to answer. The letters therefore contain phrases that indicate that he was writing to his son's letters on the same day, the next day or at the earliest possible moment. There were also delays. It should be stressed that they had different reasons. Bniński indicates in the text of his letters that communication through letters was very often hindered by external factors. This is because not always the correspondence was delivered as fast as the sender and the recipient wished. One of the reasons for this was the way the mail works. However, in order to receive letters, they first had to be written, and the son did not always write letters systematically. Therefore, another reason was the disrespectfulness of the son (*ibidem*).

The Father was very impatient, so he wrote to this son in the following way:

Your last letter was given back to me yesterday – for the Matura exam you are completely relieved from writing, my Romek – you have classes – you better use your free time for a walk, for entertainment – the Matura exam is necessary, but not easy, which does not stop you from thinking about your health. This year your's holidays will be much longer – you will rest, eat country air, but it is always better to arrive completely healthy (Regional Archive in Winnica).

The narration of the letters shows that the most important duty of a son was to learn. However, this young man, had a nonchalant attitude to the school (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa). Roman Bniński began his studies in Krakow. He attended (consecutively) the 1st St. John's Gymnasium. The St. Anne's Secondary School, St. Anne's Secondary School. Jack and the 3rd Junior High School. kr. John III Sobieski. He took his high school final exam – for the first time – in June 1888. But he didn't pass. He took the exam again in September this year. He's passed those second exams. So he got his Matura exam in the autumn. He started studies at the Faculty of Philosophy, Jagiellonian University. He also studied at the Agricultural College of the Jagiellonian University. In July 1891, he passed the agricultural exam (Miszczuk 2016, 36). Roman junior's free attitude towards school duties caused that the father often reminded his son about the right approach to education. He was writing:

At the end of this writing, my dear Romek, I will remind you of the upcoming exam – I don't doubt that you remember them – As a junior high school student, you must already be in Krakow on a date, i. e. September 1 – shorter holidays – you can only extend them by speeding up the exam – leaving for the countryside, wherever you meet, not at the end of June, but at least 15, and this, i. e. these 2 weeks of longer holidays, depends on good preparation for the exam – because Mom will always be ready in time to leave, to expedite you to the countryside sooner, so from our side there will be no obstacle (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa).

Father wanted his son to learn and also gain experience in various situation. He wanted to gain from his knowledge, which was given to him by everyday life. So we read in next letter:

I am very happy that in the village you have found a real benefit – write down everything, dear Romek – you know what a lack of special news in various branches of the economy is here, and every day you can feel a greater need, be able to take advantage of everything, not to leave anything that increases the income – harder and harder – difficult business – small prices,

farm costs are increasing – the only difference will be the more profitable production, in land processing and in bigger and better grain production (ibidem).

Hunting was then a very popular pastime among the landowners. However, it was not only entertainment, but also an element of custom, which consisted of lively social gatherings and a colourful ceremony. The whole hunting life was subordinated to a ritual that included: preparation of the hunt, detailed organization, proper course and proper ending (Kwilecki 1998, 209).

Hunting was not only an entertainment for the gentlemen, but also for the ladies. While the gentlemen were hunting, the ladies were enjoying their time outdoors. Therefore, hunting was the subject of socializing, and with time the most interesting events became legends and anecdotes. Thinking also had economic functions. It provided food, leather and fur. Both meat, hides and skins and furs were also traded (Studnicka-Mariańczyk 2014, 193–195). Roman Bniński was probably fascinated not only by the hunt, but also by the whole surrounding area that accompanied him. However, it should be remembered that social encounters were associated with countless temptations waiting for a young person. My father was aware of that too, so he wrote:

My dear Rom, please don't drink beer on everything. 1) you'll become obese and heavy 2) the thing is that nothing spoils your stomach as much as beer: Szaszkiewicz's proof: Dorpathians – here too they stop drinking beer for the same reasons, if you're tired you need a glass of wine, take a glass of wine with you from Krakow, and explain yourself to the Germans with medical hygiene (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa).

This fragment was complemented by information included in the postscript of the next letter. His father wrote:

Do you remember not drinking beer – it is not a prejudice – but the advice of doctors who generally discourage this very beverage, and as I wrote, the Dorpathians proved how badly it affects health (ibidem).

So the father, although by letter, tried to protect his child. That's why he was vigilant. He reacted to every information. His father proposed to avoid danger.

The father mentions them, but does not impose his will (Ziemska 1980, 186). He wrote:

I don't want to deprive you of this pleasure, but there's an annual feast, think about it, dear Romek, if you have a lot of people, you'll be able to know everything – and if it's a safe trip. Think about it yourself, you will advise and do as you wish and how you will prefer to just cheerfully chase away the Christmas – any good entertainment needed for health and science (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa).

Father Bniński was trying to direct his son in purposeful way. His son:

How's it going with the high school diploma? Aren't you learning too much after the nights? – Remember, my Romeo, that in 6. In half a year it is better to get rid of some daytime entertainment, how to sit through the nights – health suffers from it, and with body and mind fatigue, little remains in the memory (ibidem).

It should be noted that Roman junior's everyday life was also determined by the weaknesses of his father. The one that has taken the greatest toll seems to be the father's exceptional economy. Roman senior was a very frugal man. He's been analyzing all the shopping. He only did what he thought was necessary. Therefore, he did not decide for example to purchase a haystacking machine, because he considered it unnecessary for him (Regional Archive in Vinnitsa). In one of his letters to his son he wrote:

I sold the muce, because it's a pity to feed for a year: you have for muce with a carriage and with [...] hammers. 150, for oats for 262, total 212. For this you can have for your holiday, adding the cost of not eaten oats, I will buy a carriage and a couple of younger horses. The upkeep of your horse can be paid for with savings on small expenses for the Rom, theatre, circus etc. How are you doing? Here it's getting worse and harder and not for the better (ibidem).

In the letters, unfortunately, we find only a few fragments devoted to the relationship between the son and his mother. An extremely important relationship, as it was the mother who was staying with her son/children in Krakow. So it was the mother who took care of her son every day. Nevertheless, we only find out that the father asks his son to take care of his mother (ibidem).

The everyday life of Roman junior also includes interactions with his peers. It should be remembered that during adolescence, this is the time when the child's relationship with its parents is relaxed. The young man wants to be accepted, above all by his peers. He wants to have friends. He wants to gain their recognition. The father is aware of the changes that are taking place, yet he expects his son to be 'mature'. That's why he or she directs the child through suggestions made by letter. He explains and explains. But he tries not to impose his will. Not forcing a certain behavior, but undoubtedly directing your son. He was writing:

Noblesse oblige – and nowadays hardly anyone remembers it – and for that, my dear Rom. Whoever has a good name, who has no good family tradition at all, should not be proud of it, but trying to be always ahead in all his own work and his own merit, to set a good example and encourage others to keep his way. Remember, dear Romek, that those who have a better position in the company, whether by name or fortune, have more duties to fulfil, less can only think about themselves, about their pleasures, but also have more real merit, leave a better memory. Today, unfortunately, the opposite is happening – and for that I repeat, it is wrong. Entering public school is the first step you take to public life, to the world in which I have a right and duty to go. In high school you will meet, naturally, colleagues whose way of being, separate from the one you are used to, may even be unpleasant for you, but don't be discouraged, my Gypsy, with all understanding, leniency, try to get to know the character, the heart of colleagues, which are often very honest with a very even unpleasant rubbish and with a complete lack of a salon advertisement. Don't count on many friends, but be a good, honest colleague for everyone, with no difference in condition or origin: camaraderie is often a lifelong friendship – or in any case, camaraderie puts on those who are better in the world to help those who are worse, harder to help, and to help them throughout their lives, whether with money, advice or relationships, If help goes from the heart, each one will accept it, and no one will insult or annoy anyone, nor annoy their own dignity or love. With your good heart you will easily understand it and these your activities will be well directed (ibidem).

The riot of young age, was being increased by relationships with peers (Regional Archive in Winnitsa). Father wrote:

It is naturally unnecessary and sad that your occupation in the classroom – but this happened even in my time – I doubt whether it can be otherwise – complete unity and harmony will generally occur after the trumpet of the Archangel – these are the sorrows, dear Romek, which are more painful that it is not your fault, but it does not prevent comradeship, and it makes it more difficult today, but also today, without ever giving up the principles of honesty and honour, you have to be more forgiving in the face of worse currents, as in my time, in the face of meeting on the school bench of all social strata – this used to not be the case in the past, so today you are even more exposed to the contact with different concepts, superstitions, even different manners – this makes it difficult to position yourself, but it also makes it difficult to do so often without knowing, sometimes without bad thoughts, but only under the influence of different upbringing, different ideas, different environment in which you have lived since childhood – It's not his fault, so it's sooner to consider how he deserves to be condemned. But for this I firmly blame my superior, who in such cases is obliged to be a reasonable and just mediator, and never something else. I regret that I will not be at your evening, it is because of you, my Rom and the evening and they care about me very much (Regional Archive in Winnitsa).

One such situation was described by the son, the father. Not only did the father not underestimate his son's words, but he also used them to motivate the child to reflect. The history of the Polish landed gentry has become in the last three decades not only an attractive research field, but also extremely important for Polish researchers. It should be noted, however, that this is a difficult subject (Kwilecki 2004, 13). Andrzej Kwilecki wrote:

The history of the Polish landed gentry [...] is an attractive topic [...] because of the place once occupied by the landed gentry in the social hierarchy and the multitude of roles played by their representatives in public life. An important topic – because none of the social processes taking place in that epoch, nor the subsequent major events in the life of the nation and the state, can be fully described or explained without showing the role of the landed gentry. The topic, on the other hand, is difficult, even very difficult, because the 19th and 20th centuries (until 1945) are not a uniform epoch; this period consists of a number of historical periods in which: (a) the living conditions of the landowners and their role in social and political processes changed greatly; (b) the property base of the landowners'; exhibition gradually shrank; (c) in the structure of the landownership, initially uniform in terms of (noble) origin, the share of people and families of non-precious or ethnically alien origin increased. In the structure of the landed gentry, initially homogeneous in terms of (noble) origin, the share of people and families of non-gentle or ethnically alien origin increased; (d) great differences between the landed gentry living in the three partitions grew; (e) the source base for research into the landed gentry was severely depleted or dispersed during and as a result of World War II and political changes (ibidem, 13–14).

Despite these difficulties, the growing interest in the landed gentry has been reflected in the number of source materials published in recent years. Materials of different nature. This is because we will include mainly diaries, memoirs and lists of people who belong to the landowner's layer (ibidem). However, despite intensified research, the history of the Polish landed gentry is still characterised by factual gaps. One such gap is filled by the analysis of materials obtained in the Archive in Winnitsa.

The image of a young man's everyday life, constructed above, is one-sided. The archival search made it possible to explore only letters from a father to his son. Therefore, the letters analysed allowed only to construct an image of Roman junior's everyday life, based on his father's accounts. However, it is so exhaustive as to distinguish the most important planes of everyday life. The most important of these were undoubtedly family relationships. However, the narrative of the letters was primarily focused on the father-son relationship. Therefore, we only learn from them that there were also interactions between the son and his mother, brother, and further family members, but unfortunately we do not have the opportunity to analyse them.

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