The recipe for upbringing in light of correspondence of the Bniński family

Abstract. The recipe for upbringing in light of correspondence of the Bniński family. Several dozen letters written between August 13th, 1876 and May 5th, 1890, were analysed. Their sender was Roman Bniński (father). They were mainly addressed to his son, Roman. The analysed letters only allow a basic characterisation of the father’s attitude towards his son. It is supposed to shape/bring up his son. Thus, the correspondence displays acceptance, cooperation, reasonable freedom and recognition of the child’s rights.

The letters constitute a direct source presenting the family’s everyday life, relations within it, family affinities and relations with neighbours, acquaintances and friends... Such is the nature of the letters written by Roman Bniński to his son. Like all direct written sources, the letters allow for the development of a new image of the landed gentry. This image is confronted with its stereotypical images, established mainly on the basis of positivist and Marxist literature.

Keywords: Roman Bniński, Bnińscy, the Binński family, letter, father, son

“A child’s plea”, or 20 commandments for parents:
1. Do not spoil me. I know very well that I should not have everything that I demand. It’s just a tug-of-war on my part.
2. Do not be afraid to be firm. That is just what I need – a feeling of security.
3. Do not downplay my bad habits. Only you can help me overcome evil as long as this is still possible.
4. Do not make me an older child than I am. This will mean that my attitude will be stupidly adult.
5. Do not admonish me with others present if this is not absolutely necessary. I care much more for what you say if we speak in private.
6. Do not protect me from consequences. It is sometimes good to learn painful and unpleasant things.
7. Do not insist that the errors I am making are sins. This threatens my perception of values.
8. Do not worry much if I say that I hate you. It is not you who is my enemy, but your crumbling superiority!
9. Do not be bothered much by my minor complaints. I sometimes use them to attract your attention.
10. Do not whine. Otherwise I will have to defend myself from you, and I will turn deaf.
11. Do not make promises that will not be kept. I feel utterly devastated when nothing would come of it all.
12. Do not forget that it is still difficult for me to express my thoughts precisely. This is why we don’t always see eye to eye.
13. Do not test my honesty so persistently. Fear makes me lie all too easily.
14. Do not be inconsequent. This confuses me and then I lose all faith in you.
15. Do not reject me if I bother you with questions. It might turn out that instead of asking you for explanations I will look for them elsewhere.
16. Do not suggest that my fears are stupid. They’re just there.
17. Do not turn me into a flawless ideal. The truth about you would be unbearable in the future. Do not think that if you apologise you lose your authority. I can repay fair play with love you have never dreamed of.
18. Do not forget that I adore all kinds of experiments. That’s just my way of life, so turn a blind eye to this.
19. Do not be blind and admit that I also grow. I know it’s hard to keep up with me at this pace, but try your best so we make it.
20. Do not be afraid of love. Ever.

The history of Polish landed gentry has in the last three decades become not only an interesting field of study for Polish researchers, but also one of uncommon importance. It must be stressed, however, that this topic is very difficult to work with. Indeed, Andrzej Kwilecki wrote:

The history of Polish landed gentry [...] is an interesting topic [...] due to the position once taken up by landed gentry within the social structure and the multitude of roles played by their representatives in public life. An important topic – as none of the social processes of that era or the momentous events taking place one after another in the life of the nation and the state can be fully described or explained without showing the role of landed gentry. It is, however, a difficult or very difficult topic, as the 19th and 20th centuries (up to the year 1945) are not a unified period; this time is made up of a multitude of historic periods, in which: (a) the living conditions of landed gentry and their role in social and political processes changed; (b) the landed gentry would see the financial basis of their existence gradually reduced; (c) the structure of this social stratum, once unified in origin (nobles), would see a rise in the share of people and families of non-noble or ethnically alien origin; (d) great differences emerged between landed gentry living in the three partition areas; (e) the primary source base for studies on landed gentry underwent during and as a result of World War II and political transitions a significant reduction or dispersal.

1 http://swiadomaedukacja.pl (access on: 18.07.2018).
2 KWILECKI, A., Źywe jest zainteresowanie problematyką ziemiańską. Zamiast wstępu, in: Ziemiaństwo wielkopolskie. W kręgu arystokracji, ed. A. KWILECKI, Poznań 2004, p. 13.
3 Ibidem, pp. 13–14.
Despite these difficulties, the increase in the interest in landed gentry translated significantly into the number of source materials published in recent years. It must be stressed that these are varied. They will include primarily diaries, memoirs, and letters of persons included among landed gentry. However, despite the intensification of studies, the history of Polish landed gentry is still characterised by gaps in knowledge about facts. They are the result of many factors. It seems that the most important of these is the necessity of intensification of archive queries, the result of which is access to sources unused hitherto.

A query at the archives of Vinnytsia (Ukraine) allowed the acquisition of many source materials showcasing the daily life of landed gentry in the Podole region. The construction of the image of landed gentry was enabled by, among others, the letters of Roman Bniński to his son, also named Roman Bniński.

The analysis spanned several dozen letters written between August 13th, 1876 and May 5th, 1890. The letters were addressed primarily to his son, Roman. It must be noted, however, that the collection also includes a letter addressed to two sons equally: to Roman and Hilary.

The analysed letters were created in the period, when the Bniński family resided in Kraków. In the period when Roman and Hilary attended the local schools, this prevented the family from travelling together. The education model at that time was traditional. The mother was responsible for arranging care for the children. She was also to provide the educational basis. Hence, most frequently until the 12th-14th years of age, the children were primarily homeschooled. After this period, the boys would commence education at the gymnasium. This stemmed from the conviction that even the best home education cannot replace school education. School education was meant to provide universal knowledge. Knowledge “that cultivated people should have”. School education was to be an introduction to life. It was primarily supposed to teach dealing with people. The conviction at the

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4 Ibidem, pp. 13–14.
5 See: JANIK, M., Bniński Roman (1826-1912), in: Polski słownik biograficzny, vol. II, Kraków 1936, pp. 147–148; MISZCZUK, M., Bniński Roman Piotr herbu Łodzia (1869–1948), in: Harcerski Słownik biograficzny, vol. IV, ed. J. WOJTYCZ, Warszawa 2016, p. 36; MINAKOWSKI, M.J., Genealogia potomków Sejmu Wielkiego, http://www.sejm-wielki.pl/b/1.1122.113 (access on: 1.06.2018).
6 See: SEDLACZEK, S., Harcerstwo na Rusi i w Rosji: 1913–1920, Warszawa 1936; KORZENIOWSKI, M., Za Złotą Bramą. Działalność społeczno-kulturalna Polaków w Kijowie w l. 1905–1920, Lublin 2009; MISZCZUK, M., op. cit., pp. 36–37; MINAKOWSKI, M.J., Genealogia potomków Sejmu Wielkiego, http://www.sejm-wielki.pl/b/1.1122.117 (access on: 1.06.2018); ZIAJA, A., Wybrane przejawy aktywności społeczno-kulturalnej Polaków na Ukrainie Nadprzeczną w okresie rządów ukraińskiej Rady Centralnej (marzec 1917 – kwiecień 1918), http://www.irekw.internetdsl.pl/aktywucr.html (access on: 1.06.2018).
7 Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his sons Roman and Hilary Bniński, 11 May [18]83 Gastein. Vide: MISZCZUK, M., op. cit., p. 36.
8 JANIK, M., op. cit., p. 148.
9 EPSZTEIN, T., Edukacja dzieci i młodzieży w polskich rodzinach ziemiańskich na Wołyniu, Podolu i Ukrainie w II połowie XIX wieku, Warszawa 1998, pp. 37–51.
time was that if one would learn to listen to elders and follow them when you are young, you will better be able to command others when you grow up\textsuperscript{10}.

Roman Bniński commenced learning in Kraków. He attended (in order): The 1st gymnasium of St. Anne, the 2nd gymnasium of St. Jack and the 3rd king John III Sobieski gymnasium. He approached the maturity examination – for the first time – in June of 1888, however, he failed. He made his second attempt in September of that same year. This second attempt was successful. Thus, he passed the maturity exam with the autumn session. He subsequently took upon studying at the Faculty of Philosophy of the Jagiellonian University of Kraków. He also studied at the College of Agricultuer of the Jagiellonian University. He passed the agricultural exam in July of 1891\textsuperscript{11}.

The archive query only allowed the analysis of the letters by the father to the son. Hence, the analysed letters only allowed the characterisation of the attitudes of the father towards the son. Attitudes that were to shape/educate the son.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibidem, p. 52.

\textsuperscript{11} MISZCZUK, M., op. cit., p. 36.
Contemporary science has at its disposal may lists of parental attitudes\textsuperscript{12}. The analyses of letters by Roman Bniński used the model published in the paper *Rodzina i dziecko* [*The Family and the Child*], edited by Maria Ziemska\textsuperscript{13} (Fig. 1).

\textsuperscript{12} The key typologies of parentl attitudes can be found in the text by Maria Ziemska entitled *Postawy rodzicielskie i ich wpływ na osobowość dziecka*, see: ZIEMSKA, M., *Postawy rodzicielskie i ich wpływ na osobowość dziecka*, in: *Rodzina i dziecko*, ed. M. ZIEMSKA, Warszawa 1980, pp. 184–191.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibidem, pp. 182 and subsequent.
The figure presents proper and improper parental attitudes and their mutual relations. The proper ones (presented around the circle) are: acceptance, cooperation, reasonable freedom and acknowledge of the child’s rights. The corners of the square in turn describe the main types of improper attitudes. These include: avoidance of contact with the child, rejection of the child, excess demands of the child, and overprotection.

The letters by Roman Bniński to his son only include the proper attitudes. The wording of the letters indicates that the most important attitude characterising the father’s letters was the attitude defined as acceptance.

M. Ziemska wrote: The acceptance of the child entails at accepting the child the way they are, with all their properties of physical image, attitude, mental capacities and ease of achievements in some fields with limitations and difficulty to succeed in others. Accepting parents actually like their child and do not hide this feeling from them. Sadly, the letters of the father provide no information on the majority of the indicated categories. They leave no doubt, however, that the father loves his son. Roman Bniński did not hide his feelings. He wrote already in the first letter that he loved his son.

Acceptance also translates to contact of the parent with the child. The letters by Roman Bniński indicate that the father was satisfied with contact with the child. Almost in every letter the father stressed the will to communicate with his son or sons. Due to circumstances, however, this contact was limited to exchange of correspondence.

In the first sentences of his letters, Roman Bniński thanks the child for the correspondence received. This gratitude has varied volume. We shall find both short and extensive expressions of gratitude. This second group is of particular note, as it is complex. It includes gratitude along with the description of emotions that accompany the father as the addressee. We find in them, among others, care for the child, joy and pride.

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14 Ibidem, pp. 184–191.
15 Ibidem, p. 184.
16 Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński, 13/1 Aug[ust] [18]76.
17 ZIEMSKA, M., op. cit., p. 184.
18 He wrote: “Thank you very much for your letter” – Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński, 16/28 Feb[ruary] 1886 Kyiv.
19 He wrote: “Dearest Romek! After I have sent a letter to Mother today, a letter from you and Mother was delivered to be from the post office. I am happy that you play when taking breaks from learning and that you have found time to write to me, because every message from you is in demand” – ibidem, 8/20 Oct[ober] Cheremoshno.
20 He wrote: „It is kind of you, dearest Romek, to write to me, as I was very worried about you – now, thank God, I see that you are well, when thankfully and diligently you wrote so much yourself” – ibidem, 13/1 Aug[ust] [18]76.
21 He wrote: “I thank you wholeheartedly, my dearest Romek, for your kind letter” – ibidem, 28. May 1879.
22 He wrote: “I thank you wholeheartedly, my dearest Romek, for your kind letter – it brought me the more joy that it is so well written. I would like to be back with you already – so following my last bath I depart for
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Caring for the correspondence, the father made all effort to maintain it. For instance, he did not wait to reply. In the letters we will find phrases that indicate that he replied to his son’s letters on the same day, on the following day or as soon as he was able to. Delays had various causes.

In his letters, Bniński indicates that communication by letters is very frequently hampered by external factors. Correspondence was not always delivered as quickly as the

Kraków. I am happy that I went to Gastein so early – as I could stay with you all Summer, they would have let me go home – which I doubt” – ibidem, 28. May 1879.

He wrote: “I was given your letter today and I reply immediately to thank you for your words” – ibidem, 17. May 86. Gostyń.

He wrote: “I got your letter before yesterday, you described great hunting-carriages, and today I reply to you” – ibidem, 6/18 September [18]85 Cheremoshno.

He wrote: “I received your last letter of 17/29 of the current month today – I am very happy with this kindness of yours, with all your duties now I did not expect you to find time, and so I thank you even more, dearest Romek.” – ibidem, 24 September/6 October 1887 Waclawówka.
sender and recipient would have wished it\textsuperscript{26}. One of the reasons for this was the way the post operated\textsuperscript{27}. However, in order for letters to be received, they had to be written first, and the son did not always write regularly. Hence, another reason was the son’s lightheartedness\textsuperscript{28}.

The parent was so thirsty for correspondence with the child that he childes him for not writing\textsuperscript{29}. It should be stressed that the father was able to be sympathetic in this regard. If

\textsuperscript{26} He wrote: „I do not blame you or Mother for not writing – this is due to the local post office – I was given your last letter yesterday – you can count yourself how long it took to get here – it is difficult to handle, hence my frequent worries about you, my dearest” – ibidem, 8/20 April 1888 Wacławówka.

\textsuperscript{27} He wrote: “I received your letter when away, and hence I did not reply immediately, although I didn’t lack the will, because you deserved it for such a well-written letter. I reply to you today from home – may be you shall only received it after I return – but that won’t be my fault – the local postal arrangements are not easy to change” – ibidem, 4/16 March [18]86 Cheremoshno.

\textsuperscript{28} He wrote: „Beside a single letter from home and another from lovely Mother, I received nothing – and you write, dear Romek, that you mailed me – where would they be? This happens frequently where we live, but not here. If you were to mail it but forgot – it’s not all bad – during my therapy I avoid business – send them to me to Vienna so I don’t miss them” – ibidem, 17. May [18]86. Gostyń.

\textsuperscript{29} He wrote: “Dearest Romek! I would rather never have to blame you for anything, but knowing for certain that you will always accept all my remarks and advice, I must tell you now that over the three days since Dmytr came until he departed straight for Cheremoshno you should have written at least a few words to me – you know how uneasy I am always about us, when no news arrive. I now know that you will be more attentive in the future” – ibidem, 28/9 Aug[ust]/S[eptember] Cheremoshno.
the son has many duties, he expressed understanding. He would insist for the son not to write too often\textsuperscript{30}.

However, even most frequent correspondence could not replace personal contact\textsuperscript{31}. Hence, the narrative of the letters indicates that the father longed for direct contact. It was hindered, however, by management duties\textsuperscript{32} and health issues\textsuperscript{33}. It is most likely that for this reason he believed that the best form of reflection of the day would be a diary, however, he stressed at the same time that this would be single-sided contact, which most likely did not appeal to him\textsuperscript{34}. Hence, the cultivation by the father of contact with the son allows the conclusion that contact with the child (even by correspondence) brought joy and satisfaction to the parent.

The acceptance of a child also entails their approval. The parent praises the son\textsuperscript{35}. When so deserved, he could chide his behaviour\textsuperscript{36}. It must be stressed, however, that he chides the action, not the child as a person\textsuperscript{37}.

Roman Bniński does not only accept the son, but he also tries to cooperate with him. Cooperation with the child proves the engagement for their good. The father shows

\textsuperscript{30} He wrote: “I was given your last letter yesterday – until your maturity exam, I relieve you of all your writing duties, my Romek – you have enough to do – better use your spare time for walks or entertainment – the maturity exam is necessary, but not easy, but not as difficult so as to forget one’s health. This year your Summer holiday will be much longer – you will rest, relish the country air, but it’s always best to come fully healthy” – ibidem, 25 April/7 May 1888 Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{31} He wrote: “It is no fun being home alone, mmmy Romek – I miss you – the property can and should take up time, true, but minor house chores, thinking about the kitchen, etc., calamitate par trop [excess misery]” – ibidem, 9/21 March 1887 Cheremoshno.

\textsuperscript{32} He wrote: “hoping to see you even for a few days when June begins – beside ploughing, there will be no more work in the fields until the harvest” – ibidem, 8/20 April 1888 Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{33} He wrote: “I would like to be back with you already – following my last bath I depart for Kraków. I am happy that I went to Gastein so early – as I could stay with you all Summer, they would have let me go home – which I doubt” – ibidem, 28. May 1879.

\textsuperscript{34} He wrote: “I would prefer to write to you, dearest Romek, and to Mother, in the form of a diary – it would be like talking with you every day, but to send a diary from here would mean changing our correspondence to boring and tiring stories” – ibidem, 14/26 October 1887 Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{35} He wrote: “I am very happy that you found something for yourself in the village – write down everything, dear Romek – you know how we lack special knowledge in various areas of the economy – and everyday we feel greater need to be able to make use of everything, let go of nothing that improves profit – it is becoming more and more difficult – business is hard – prices low, costs ever higher – the difference may turn out to be more advantageous production, in handling and land, and in better production in terms of grain” – ibidem, 18/30 October [18]89. Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{36} He wrote: “I don’t know anything about Ada? Filimowski, who remained with you? Was Hilary immatriculated? Who will be teaching him? Remember, dearest Romek, do not talk around the house (and Hilary should, too) otherwise than in French – otherwise you will not learn, and it’s difficult for you now to take a few more hours of private lessons, and without French or German it is difficult anyway” – ibidem, 28 August/9 September 1885. Cheremoshno.

\textsuperscript{37} ZIEMSKA, M., op. cit., p. 184.
interest in various aspects of the son’s life. Hence, he is interested in both work, interpersonal relations as well as play. The father also includes his son in the affairs of the family, the parents and the house/property. However, this is not single-sided, as he fulfils the wishes of his son and takes care of the property. It must be noted, however,

38 He wrote: “To conclude this writing, my dearest Romek, I remind you you of the impending examina – I do not doubt that you remember them – I only remind you that this year, as a pupil of the gymnasium, you have to be in Kraków on time, on September 1st – the Summer holidays will be shorter – you can only extend them if you take the exam earlier – and depart for the country, anywhere you would go, not in the end of June, and at least on the 15th, meaning, two weeks more of Summer holidays, it depends on good preparation ahead of the exam – as Mother will always be ready on time to travel, to get you to the country earlier, so there will be no obstacles from us” – Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński, 4/16 March [18]86 Cheremoshno.

39 He wrote: “Your event in class is naturally unnecessary and sad – but it did happen in my day as well – I doubt whether it could be otherwise – full agreement will, I believe, only take place when the Archangel sounds his horn – these are difficulties, dear Romek, the more difficult that you are to blame, but this does not preclude friendliness, but perhaps makes it more difficult today, but today, not departing any time from rules of honesty and honour, one has to be more tolerant of worse tendencies than back in my day, in light of all social strata meeting in the school ranks – it was not the way back in the day, so today you are more threatened by contact with various concepts, customs, maybe even manners – this makes the position more difficult, but the one making it difficult also frequently does this unknowingly, sometimes without ill will, but only due to bad upbringing, due to other beliefs, other surroundings, in which they lived since childhood – after all, this is not their fault, so it should rather be considered than damned – do remember this. But I decidedly blame the superior, who should specifically in such cases be a reasonable and just mediator, and not anything else. I regret not being able to attend your evening, it is because of you, my dear Romek, both the evening and them are so important to me” – ibidem, 14/26 October [18]87 Wacławówka.

40 He wrote: “I am very happy that the hunt went so well, I regret that you didn’t get this opportunity in Cheremoshno, but I always congratulate on killing a boar – it is a serious step among hunters’ ranks” – ibidem, 28 August/9 September 1885. Cheremoshno.

41 He wrote: “Remember, dearest Romek, do not talk around the house (and Hilary should, too) otherwise than in French – otherwise you will not learn, and it’s difficult for you now to take a few more hours of private lessons, and without French or German it is difficult anyway” – ibidem, 28 August/9 September 1885. Cheremoshno.

42 He wrote: “Tell Adam (I do not write to him, since I don’t know when he will be back) that I found his Father’s belongings – I shall send them via the shipment unit to Orenburg[?], or will bring them with myself – but I rather think I will send them, this time by a certain agent” – Ibidem, 16/28 February 1886 Kyiv.

43 He wrote: “I started the threshing that you built last time, today – it works great – tomorrow we will make a day-long trial – the treadmill is already set, so I will start up my threshing for good” – ibidem, 24 September/6 October 1887 Wacławówka.

44 He wrote: “I sent a letter to Mother yesterday, dear Romek, and today replying to your letter, I will tell you that I hid away the measure for the ice-skates, and if I only get [them] in Vienna, I will bring them to you, but be wary and careful with this new fun” – ibidem, 15 May [18]82. Gastein.

45 He wrote: “Your hounds have grown a lot – I have them chained because they are starting to roam – I forbid hunting this year here and in Malinki[?] – If you could come, perhaps you will have more luck than last year; leave Achilles in Kraków – I am looking for a good hunting-horse for you here that would be strong for the run, but not expensive, so that you could be an official – what good is a scrounger – and Juchta will continue to serve Hilarek well – and we will surely find a pair for the carriage – and if it would be impossible to come for the Summer – Achilles will be of good use to you in the mountains, and we will have to get a small horse for Hilary” – Ibidem, 9/21 March 1887 Cheremoshno.
that the father bestows upon his son tasks suitable for his age, hence, appropriate for his capacities and development.46

A further positive attitude is the acknowledgement of rights. Roman Bniński acknowledges his child’s rights. Accordingly, he accepts various forms of his activity. This, however, concerns activity suitable for the child’s development level. The father allows the child to be active [...] at his own responsibility. He expects mature behaviour.48 Hence, he guides the child through suggestions. He explains and clarifies. He does not impose or force his will. Without a doubt, the father is willing to guide the son.49 The father’s

46 ZIEMSKA, M., op. cit., p. 184.
47 Ibidem, p. 185.
48 He writes: My Romek, do not neglect yourself and follow very precisely the Doctor’s advice, there is nothing worse than these seemingly minor bruises if they go neglected – dearest Mother must be very worried and uneasy about this, and you are already a grown boy, so take care of yourself” – Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński, 4/16 March [18]86 Cheremoshno.
49 He wrote: “Noblesse oblige – and very few remember this today – and that’s why it’s getting so bad in the world, my dearest Romek. Who is well-named, who has quite good family traditions, should not boast of this, but, aiming to always be on top in everything with own work and merit, set a good example for others, and en-
expectations are adapted to the son’s capacities. Moreover, the father determines them on the basis of mutual negotiations and rationality\textsuperscript{50}.

The last attitude to be analysed is reasonable freedom. Roman Bniński is aware that his contact with his son is limited\textsuperscript{51}. However, physical distance wasn’t in this case the cause for the loss of a mental bond with the child. The father trusts the son. He gives the son an ever broader degree of freedom. However, despite this freedom, he cares for his health. There is a very interesting fragment in one of the letters, in which the father warns his son against the health consequences of drinking beer. The father wrote: \textit{Dearest Romek\textsuperscript{52}, I ask of you, do not drink beer. 1) you will become obese and heavy; 2) It was proven that nothing spoils the stomach as much as beer: the proof of Szaszkiewicz: Inhabitants of Tartu – are already ceasing to drink beer for these same reasons; when tired, you need a glass of wime; take it along from us in Kraków, and explain yourself in front of Germans with hygiene of a physician\textsuperscript{53}. This statement was amended by a note in the postscript of the next letter. The father wrote: \textit{Do you remember not to drink beer – this is not prejudice – but physicians’ advice, as they generally advise against this drink, and as I wrote, people from Tartu had proven how bad it is for one’s health\textsuperscript{54} and safety. He strives to avoid hazards\textsuperscript{55}. He knows how to guide a child\textsuperscript{56}.}

courage others with this example, keep them on the right path. Remember, dear Romek, the better position one has in company, by name or wealth, the worse they are off in the world, the more duties they have, the less they can think of them, of their own pleasures, but the more true merit they have, the better memory they leave behind. It is the opposite today, sadly – and I repeat, it is bad because of this. Entering a public school is your first step to public life, to a world, in which the rights and duties have their place. At the gymnasium you will naturally meet friends, the demeanour of whom, different to what you are acquainted, can be difficult for you, but do not despair, my Romek, and try with all your tolerance and good will to get to know the character, the heart of your friends, which will turn out to be very decent even with their very coarseness and a complete lack of manners. Do not hope to have many friends, but be kind to everybody, be a good friend, irrespective of the stratum or birth: Friendship frequently lasts for life – anyway, friendship is a duty to those who have it better in the world, to wholeheartedly and truly help those who are worse off, have it mode difficult – and this means help throughout the entire life, be it with money or advice or relations, if true, then everyone will accept it and nobody will be offended, no dignity or ego will be scarred. With your kind heart you will certainly understand this and this will guide your actions well” – ibidem, 28 Aug[ust]/9 Sep[tember] 1885. Cheremoshno.

\textsuperscript{50} ZIEMSKA, M., op. cit., p. 185.

\textsuperscript{51} He wrote: “Nothing new beside longing for you” – Oblast Archives of Vinnytsia, heritage of the Bniński family, unsigned, Letter by Roman Bniński to his son Roman Bniński, undated, no location given.

\textsuperscript{52} The form \textit{Romek} is a diminutive of \textit{Roman} and would normally be used by a father to refer to a son [translator’s note].

\textsuperscript{53} Ibidem, 1/18 October [18]89. Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibidem, 18/30 Oct[ober] [18]89. Waclawówka.

\textsuperscript{55} He wrote: “I hear you are going to Wieliczka, dear Romek, during the Holidays – I do not want to strip you of this fun, but there is an annual feast there, think, dear Romek, if with the great mass of people you will be able to see everything well – and whether this trip will be safe. Think about it yourselves, get some advice and do as you please to spend the Holidays joyously – all good entertainment is necessary to keep health and to learn – ibidem, 5 May, Gastein.

\textsuperscript{56} He wrote: “How are your maturity exams? Aren’t you learning too much in the night – remember, my Romek, that in the sixth semester it’s better to avoid certain day activities than to learn nights – your health would
Family ties – considered from the perspective of the history of Polish landed gentry – are a research area that is not alien to Polish historians. Particular attention should be paid to the volume issued under the editorship of Cezary Kuklo, entitled *Rodzina i gospodarstwo domowe na ziemiach polskich w XV–XX wieku* [The family and the household in Polish lands between the 15th and 20th centuries]. This is a paper that is not only of research value (as it constructs the daily life of e.g. landed gentry), but it also profiles further research in this regard. Of particular importance is specifically the development of further research, as the recent decades have fruited in unparalleled interest in the history of Polish landed gentry. A renewal and even wild interest is enjoyed by research and studies in genealogy and heraldry. It is significant that not only professional historians are active in this field, but also scores of amateurs who research the roots of their families.

This could make history laugh, if we note the motivation behind this increase in interest. Society, mostly stemming from the lower strata, once peasants in servitude, minor craftsmen or tradesmen, is starting to look for roots in the hope that their forefathers also belonged to the nobles. It turns out that the education system, the choice of reading at school and the signs of noble culture represented in them, rather postulated than implemented by this social stratum in practice continue to be attractive. After half a century, when official teaching and propaganda burdened the nobles with all possible social vices and political sins, all the way to accusations of contribution to the demise of Poland, suddenly origins among nobility have become desired. In this regard we are dealing with a specific psychosocial phenomenon. Society, mostly made up of lower strata, has begun to gain its subjectivity as a result of changes in the social structure and mobility, caused by political revolutions. Wealth and social progress, particularly past the year 1945, have brought people of limited political culture to public offices, and hitherto they were not party to power. After the euphoria due to the feeling of power and after the stabilisation of the system, representatives of various elites started to seek substantiations for their social standing not in the Marxist ideology, but drawn to tradition that was hitherto alien to them. In this way, a phantom noble system forms, covering both nobility „by birth”, as well as elites from the lower ranks. This process is ongoing and we should hope that in an unspecified future Polish society, torn by various contradictions, will develop a commonly accepted system of values; that it will become truly equal and free, without the usage of prostheses of identity.

Interest in landed gentry translates to editions of source materials. Among these, diaries, memoirs and letters take up a unique space. They described the daily life of the immediate family. Thus, they showed: the daily life, the relations within it, family relations, relationships with neighbours, acquaintances and friends... this is the character of the letters by Roman Bniński to his son. Like all direct, primary materials, they allow the

suffer, and if the body and the mind is tired, not much remains in memory” – ibidem, undated, no location given. Vide: ZIEMSKA, M., op. cit., p. 186.

57 Vide: *Rodzina i gospodarstwo domowe na ziemiach polskich w XV–XX wieku: struktury demograficzne, społeczne i gospodarcze*, ed. C. KUKLO, Warszawa 2008.

58 ZAKRZEWSKI, A.J., STUDNICKA-MARIAŃCZYK, K., *Wprowadzenie*, in: *Rodzina, przyjaciele, sąsiedzi, znajomi. Fotografia jako źródło do dziejów ziemianstwa w zbiorach Korabitów Ostrowskich z Maluszyna*, t. I: *Rodzina Ostrowskich h. Korab z Maluszyna w zbiorach fotografi z XIX i XX wieku* (text under ownership of the authors).
construction of a new/ more detailed image of landed gentry. An image confronted with stereotypical perceptions about it, established mainly on the basis of positivist and Marxist literature59.

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59 Vide: TOPOLSKI, J., Metodologia historii, Warszawa 1984; GRABSKI, A.F., Zarys historii historiografii polskiej, Poznań 2000.