

Stanisław Skalski (1870–1937): an eminent Łódź doctor

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Abstract: Stanisław Skalski was an eminent Polish specialist in internal medicine. He lived at the turn of the 20th century. He received his medical doctor's diploma at the Kiev University. His professional career and social activity were associated with Łódź where he performed a variety of management functions, among others he held the office of the Chancellor of the City School Board and the Head of the Health Department of the Provincial Office of Łódź. It was the accomplishment of doctor Stanisław Skalski to introduce obligatory anti-smallpox vaccinations in Łódź (1914) and to promote activities for the improvement of school hygiene and children health.

Key words: biography, history of medicine, medicine in Lodz, smallpox, Stanisław Skalski

Stanisław Skalski, a specialist in internal medicine and a social worker, is undoubtedly one of the prominent figures in the history of Polish medicine. Stanisław Skalski was born into the family of Teofil and Lucy Rogozinski on the 31st of December, 1870 in Brojce, near Kurowice, in the province of Łódź [1]. He was raised in the atmosphere of patriotism created by his parents. His father who fought as a captain in the January Insurrection (1863) played a special role in forming his patriotic attitudes. In 1891 he graduated from the secondary school in Kielce. A year later he was admitted to the Medical Department of the Warsaw University. Then he studied at the Kiev University. While studying in Kiev he held the position of the Head of the Polish Student's Organization [2]. Having received the doctor's diploma he returned to the Kingdom of Poland "...with few rubles in his pocket and abundance of ideas in his mind". Initially, he worked in Piotrków Trybunalski and then in a sanatorium in Tuszyn, near Łódź. Apart from his job as a doctor, he devoted himself to social work. It was at his suggestion that the Loans and Savings Society as well as numerous so called "farmers' sets" came into being in the Kingdom of Poland. Doctor Skalski was also engaged in introducing the science of hygiene into primary school curricula.

In 1882 he started publishing his first scientific reports in medical journals and articles for the general public in popular daily press (e.g. *The Daily News*, *The Sobriety*, *The Harbinger*, *The Voice*, *The Week*, *The Link*).

The turning point in doctor Skalski's life came with the year 1905, when he decided to move to Łódź. "He found himself in a huge crowd of people who were overworked, sick and undernourished. They abused alcohol too frequently. They inhabited congested, overpopulated flats and their living conditions seemed to break all the rules of hygiene, being potential epidemic sources of infectious diseases" [3]. In the same year he became a cofounder of the first Polish grammar school called "The High School" and worked in the Education Promoting Society – an underground movement for maintaining Polish national identity. He also founded the society "The Future" whose goal was to support the ideas of sobriety. Apart from that, he participated in the activities of numerous public societies: the Touring Society, the Hygienic Society, as well as "The Lute", the Antitubercular League, the Polish School Board and the Lodz Nest of the Child Care Society [4]. It was at his suggestion that the City Museum, which was later transformed into the Bartoszewicz Museum and the Ethnographic Museum, was founded in Łódź. The General Committee for supporting the lock out workers was founded in the years 1906–1907 under the leadership of doctor Skalski. As soon as World War I had broken out doctor Skalski was sent with other Poles to an internment camp in Kletschkau near Wrocław. When he returned to Poland he participated in the workings of the General Committee of Citizens in Łódź and he also took the chair of the Hospital Sanitary Division of the Local Committee of Citizens, thus giving rise to the city health service.

Following the example of doctor Karol Jonscher and doctor Seweryn Sterling, Stanisław Skalski engaged himself in a fight

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Fig. 1. Stanisław Skalski (reproduced from: Berner W, Supady J. Działalność Lekarsko-Społeczna na rzecz zdrowia publicznego w Łodzi w latach 1876–1914. Łódź, ADI, 2001)

against the causes and effects of contagious diseases. It was in 1914 that he carried out the first obligatory preventive vaccinations against smallpox in the city of Łódź and performed statistical assessments of deaths due to the epidemic of smallpox in 1911 [5]. Estimated calculations revealed that at least 4000 people in Łódź got infected in 1911.

At the meeting of the Łódź Doctors' Society in 1912 doctor Skalski presented a speech devoted to the epidemic. He postulated restoring the law on free and obligatory inoculations of infants, which had been introduced at the time of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw (1811) and then abolished by the Russian occupants after the national insurrection in 1863, as a means of restrictions against Polish people. In his speech he also demanded organizing anti-smallpox vaccinating stations in Łódź, popularizing inoculations through free distribution of leaflets and setting of posters, informing factory superintendents about the necessity of vaccinating the newly employed workers and carrying out secondary vaccinations. Doctor Skalski applied to the city authorities for intensifying the control over hygienic conditions of the suburbs, introducing obligatory vaccinations among all residents of houses in which cases of smallpox had been noted, increasing the number of beds in the city hospital of infectious diseases, founding an institute of anti-smallpox vaccinations in Łódź and, finally, organiz-



Fig. 2. Stanisław Skalski's obituary notice (reproduced from: Życiorys S.P. Dr. Med. Stanisława Skalskiego. Dziennik Zarządu Miejskiego w Łodzi. 1937; 2: 85)

ing school doctor posts for carrying out prophylactic actions to protect primary school pupils from infectious diseases. Moreover, doctor Skalski demanded informing the police or quarter doctors about any case of smallpox noted by practicing doctors or the owners of houses. He firmly supported the idea of creating the post of the sanitary doctor and restoring the duty of recording death causes in Łódź [6].

Until 1918 doctor Skalski held the position of the head of the Hospital Sanitary Division, which was subsequently transformed into the Department of Public Health. Later he was appointed as the regional doctor and director of the Regional Health Office as well as the head of the Health Department of Łódź Regional Office.

Doctor Skalski was a member of the City School Board (Rada Szkolna Miejska – RSM) since April, 1918. On the 4th of December 1919 he was offered the honorable office of the RSM vice-president and on the 15th of January 1924 he was elected its president. He held this position for 13 years, being re-elected in 1928 and 1934. In the meantime Skalski worked as a member of the Disciplinary Board for primary school teachers and he was also appointed to be the head of the Appeal Committee for irregular school attendance. Doctor Skalski paid much attention to problems of the educational system, among others he was engaged in getting grounds for new

school buildings, and supported health care of the youngest pupils by promoting outdoor classes. He was also determined to fight against alcoholism by organizing courses for teachers and supporting distribution of books on anti-alcoholic issues. He was deeply engaged in improving the school hygiene status by getting funds for fighting against trachomatous conjunctivitis. It was in 1932 that he made a great success of the campaign for providing school pupils with supplementary food [7].

He was married to Karolina Wagner who was born on the 10th of December, 1887; they had 3 daughters: Maria (born on the 13th of September, 1912), Jadwiga (born on the 23rd of October, 1916) and Wanda (born on the 8th of June, 1918).

Doctor Stanisław Skalski died on the 5th of February, 1937 at the age of 67. A large number of the doctor's students and friends attended the funeral ceremony which took place at the Catholic Old Cemetery in Ogrodowa St. in Łódź. Doctor Skalski was commonly regarded an outstanding, committed and dedicated person and was honored by naming one of the Łódź streets after him. The street was situated between Srebrzyńska St. and Mania St. (it was pulled down towards the end of the 1960s due to the city development) [8].

On the 26th of February, 1937 a meeting of the School Board devoted to the memory of doctor S. Skalski was held in Łódź. The head of the School Board, F. Michejda, began the meeting with the words which were the essence and the summary of the late doctor's achievements, "On the 5th of February, 1937, Stanisław Skalski, a longtime and distinguished leader of the Łódź School Board departed. He was a medical doctor and the former head of the Health Department of the Lodz Regional Office, awarded the Bachelor Cross of the Polonia Restituta and decorated with the Golden Cross of Merit..." [9].

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