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**HEALTH PROBLEMS IN VICTORIAN BRITAIN AND
THEIR DEPICTION IN CHARLES DICKENS'S
NOVELS**

**VIKTORIJAS LAIKMETA VESELĪBAS PROBLĒMAS UN TO
ATTĒLOJUMS ČĀRLZA DIKENSA DARBOS**

BACHELOR THESIS

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ANOTĀCIJA

Bakalaura darba tēma ir Viktorijas laikmeta veselības problēmu attēlojums Čārlza Dikensa romānos. Darba mērķis ir salīdzināt Dikensa romānus „Pikvika kluba piezīmes”, „Dombijs un dēls” un „Saltais nams” ar vēsturisko informāciju par veselības problēmām un veselības aprūpes sistēmu 19. gadsimta Lielbritānijā, lai atklātu, kādas medicīniskās tēmas ir attēlotas romānos, un cik precīzi atainojums atbilst 19. gadsimta situācijai. Pētījuma rezultāti atklāja, ka Dikens attēloja ne tikai dažādas Viktorijas laikmeta veselības problēmas un to ārstēšanu, bet arī pieminēja medicīnas jomā strādājošos un apkārtējo attieksmi pret viņiem. Tomēr ārstu un slimību atainojumu varēja ietekmēt konkrētais varonis, viņa rakstura īpašības, kā arī autora, lasītāju vai citu tēlu attieksme pret šo varoni.

Atslēgvārdi: Dikenss, Viktorijas laikmets, veselības problēmas, veselības aprūpes sistēma, salīdzinājums

ABSTRACT

The theme of the Bachelor thesis is the depiction of the Victorian health problems in Charles Dickens's novels. The purpose of the paper is to compare Dickens's novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* with the historical information about health problems and health care system in the 19th century Britain in order to find out what medical aspects are depicted in the novels and how precisely the depiction corresponds to the situation of the 19th century. The results of the research revealed that Dickens depicted not only various health problems of the Victorian era and their treatment, but also referred to the medical professions and the attitudes linked with them. Nevertheless, the depiction of doctors and diseases could be affected by the particular characters, their characteristics and the way the writer, readers or other characters felt about them.

Key words: Dickens, Victorian era, health problems, health care system, comparison

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INTRODUCTION

The 19th century Britain experienced a number of innovations and changes in various fields; nevertheless, life differed greatly from what people are used to nowadays. Thus, modern readers have to look for different sources of information in order to have a glimpse into the lives of the 19th century Victorians, including the novels of that period of time. Probably one of the most popular and recognized English writers of the Victorian era was Charles Dickens (1812-1870). The English author and literary critic David Lodge thinks that, ‘Charles Dickens is arguably the greatest of all writers in the English language after Shakespeare [...]’ (Lodge, 2002:114), so a number of people base their views and beliefs about the 19th century England on what they have read in Dickens’s novels. In addition to writing about relationships, society and other relevant themes, Charles Dickens was interested in medicine; hence, there are many references to the Victorian era health care system and medicine in Dickens’s books. It’s not only health problems and diseases, which Dickens looks into, but also medical profession, since the novels have different characters who work in the field of medicine. However, for a modern reader to understand the 19th century health problems, their causes, treatment, as well as people’s attitude towards that time health care system as they are depicted in the novels, it is necessary to know the historical background of the particular period of time, since Dickens above all was a fiction writer, so in some cases the creation of an interesting character or an extraordinary or humorous situation might have been more important than the precise depiction of facts. Hence, it is important to look at the depiction of medicine in Dickens’s novels not only to compare it with the historical information in order to gather precise information about the 19th century health problems and health care system, but also to see how various characters and their characteristics can change the depiction of certain historical events or facts.

The goal of the Bachelor thesis is to compare Charles Dickens’s novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* with the historical information about health problems and health care system of the 19th century Britain in order to find out what medical aspects are mentioned in the novels, how correctly they correspond to the real situation of that time and how various characters and situations in the novel could affect the depiction of the actual situation.

The research questions of the Bachelor thesis are as follows:

1. What were the main health issues, their causes and treatment in the 19th century Britain?
2. What kind of was the health care system and medical profession in the 19th century, and what changes did they undergo during the century?
3. What medical aspects are discussed in Charles Dickens's novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*?
4. How correctly Dickens's depiction corresponds to the actual situation of medicine in the 19th century Britain?
5. How the portrayal of particular characters or situation affects the depiction of the health problems and health care system of the Victorian Britain?
6. Did Dickens's personal experience influence the depiction of medicine in his novels?

The enabling objectives:

1. To read and analyze the historical background on health problems and health care system of the Victorian era;
2. To read and analyze the information available on Charles Dickens's biography, paying particular attention to the events of the author's life linked with medicine and health care system;
3. To apply the found material to the medical information found in Dickens's novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House*;
4. To draw relevant conclusions.

The method of the research will be the qualitative research based on the historical approach in order to give an insight into the historical background of the field of medicine of the 19th century, contrasting it with the information found in the novels, as well as drawing conclusions of how Dickens has described the medicine of the Victorian era.

The Bachelor thesis consists of four chapters. The first chapter is divided into three subchapters. The first subchapter looks into the main causes of health problems in the 19th century, including industrialization and lifestyle; the second subchapter provides information about the major health problems of the 19th century; and the last subchapter gives information about the making of diagnosis and the treatment possibilities available to the Victorians.

The second chapter consists of three subchapters as well. The first subchapter looks into the medical professions of the 19th century, their duties and possibilities; the second subchapter deals with the 19th century hospitals and people's attitudes towards them; and the third subchapter gives information about the reforms in the 19th century health care system.

The third chapter consists of two subchapters and concentrates on some aspects of Charles Dickens's life. The first subchapter looks into the health problems experienced by the author and his family; while, the second subchapter provides information about Charles Dickens's involvement and connection with medicine.

Finally, the fourth chapter is divided into three subchapters and compares the historical background with the medical information found in the novels. The first subchapter looks into the diseases depicted in Dickens's novels; the second subchapter provides information about the treatment used in the 19th century and mentioned in the novels; and the last subchapter deals with Dickens's portrayal of the Victorian doctors.

1. HEALTH PROBLEMS AND THEIR TREATMENT IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND

Victorian era was a period of great changes. As stated by a Victorian physician Sir Henry Holland, it was ‘an age of transition, a period when changes, deeply and permanently affecting the whole condition of mankind, are occurring more rapidly, as well as extensively, than any prior time in human history.’ (Schomp, 2011:7) Even though Victorian era experienced different innovations also in the field of medicine and health care, it still was a dangerous period of time for the British. They were not only threatened by various perilous diseases, but also the lifestyle and the process of industrialisation had a negative impact upon the health of the Victorians.

1.1. Main Causes of Health Problems

1.1.1. Consequences of Industrialization

The industrialization process might have improved England’s economics and advanced it before other countries, but the rise of factories and the life conditions of factory workers did not improve the health of Britons.

First of all, industrialization urged people to move to the cities in order to find work, which resulted in overpopulated areas. According to Virginia Schomp, the industrial cities were ‘noisy, dirty, smelly, and downright hazardous to the health.’ (Schomp, 2011:19) Besides, the crowded cities helped epidemic diseases to spread more quickly. (Mitchell, 2009:200) The increase of the people affected also the accessibility of fresh water, since the water supply sufficient to previous number of inhabitants could not provide two or three times more people. (Schomp, 2011:14) In addition, the cesspits overflowed polluting the ground and the water supplies. (Schomp, 2011:14) Throughout the whole 19th century unpolluted water supply remained a major concern for the Victorians. (McLean, 2006:2) Thus, the increase of the population linked with industrialization led to the lack of fresh, unpolluted water, as well as helped various infectious diseases to spread more quickly.

Another consequence of industrialization that endangered the health of Britons was air pollution. The numerous factories and workhouses created a stream of smoke, dirt, gasses and odour that caused such health problems as headaches, sore throats and nausea. (Schomp,

2011:25) For instance, in winter, few days with a dense fog that trapped the smoke always lead to a greater number of deaths from pneumonia and bronchitis. (Mitchell, 2009:201) In addition to other by-effects of industrialization, air pollution in the cities was one of the reasons why wealthier people began to move to the suburbs (McLean, 2006:4) to escape the unhealthy living conditions.

In contrast to air and water pollution, and crowded cities that affected also those who were not directly involved in the factory work, workers of the factories were subjected to much greater health risks. Factories with cotton dust or metal fragments in the air was the cause of many lung diseases, as well as it was one of the main hazards for the coal miners. (Mitchell, 2009:201) The phosphorus that was used to make matches damaged workers' teeth and jawbones, likewise mercury and arsenic was frequently used in different industries, for example, colour printing and bookbinding, leading to numerous health problems. (Mitchell, 2009:201) Hence, the work in a factory was not only hard, but also very dangerous to the health of the workers.

To sum up, industrialization strengthened Britain's position in the world. However, it was also connected with crowded living, the lack of fresh water, polluted air, as well as a number of health problems created by the working conditions of the factory workers.

1.1.2. Unhealthy Lifestyle of the Britons

The majority of the 19th century health problems were connected with causes hard to change or avoid for an individual. Nevertheless, also the Victorians themselves were responsible for many health problems or weak health in general.

One of the reasons for different health problems was the lack of proper hygiene. The main problems were linked with the working class. Working class houses did not have toilets or running water, so sometimes around forty families had to use one privy, which led to the fact that people simply collected their waste and threw it out of the window. (Schomp, 2011:24) Even though in the Victorian era more attention to bathing and washing clothes was turned, piped water and public washhouses became available only towards the end of the century. (Mitchell, 2009:199) Thus, the uncleanliness and the absence of sanitary measures weakened people's health and helped the spread of infectious diseases.

Probably the most important cause for health problems was the lack of proper food. Even though hunger and the absence of proper food are mostly considered to be the

problems of the poor, the 19th century diet influenced also the upper classes, particularly women. In Victorian era it was believed that a good appetite was not ladylike. (Mitchell, 2009:195) For instance, beef was considered a masculine food, so upper class women usually chose chicken, fish or lamb. (Mitchell, 2009:197) The lack of iron-rich food resulted in tiredness and anemia or the so-called 'green sickness' characterizing the skin tone of women with anemia. (Mitchell, 2009:197) In addition, it was assumed that people from the upper classes could not digest the same coarse food that the working people ate (Mitchell, 2009:196), so the wealthy rarely ate fresh vegetables (Mitchell, 2009:197), but consumed large quantities of meat, wine and rich sauces leading to various health problems. (Mitchell, 2009:201) Hence, the decisions about the food made in the name of being fashionable, could damage the health of the Victorians.

Furthermore, the health of the women from middle and upper classes was affected by other conditions determined by the society. In contrast to men, women lacked physical exercises that could strengthen health. Even though at the end of the 19th century some girls' schools required participation in hockey, tennis or gymnastics, many private schools still considered a decorous walk as a proper exercise. (Mitchell, 2009:197) Another threat to the health was the use of corsets; however, during the 19th century the danger of too tight lacing was already known, so it did not influence the health of a too great number of women. (Mitchell, 2009:198) Nevertheless, women of the Victorian era still went through a number of sacrifices to live up to the standard.

In addition, the Victorians tended to view certain illnesses and everything connected with them almost positively. According to Miriam Bailin, diseases became linked with delicacy, sensibility and personal distinction, for instance, tuberculosis was viewed as 'a sign of specialness, of consuming passion, genius, or beauty' (Bailin, 1994:10); it was considered a 'beautiful death' and it was even fashionable to have the appearance of an ill person – to be extremely thin, languid and pale. (Carpenter, 2010:55) Moreover, the nursing of a sick person and the suffering connected with it coincided with the Victorian domestic ideal, so it was considered to be 'as sanctified an act as suffering itself.' (Bailin, 1994:11) These views could probably lead to the fact that the Victorians did not even try to be healthy, since being sick or taking care of a sick person was more fashionable than healthy lifestyle and appearance.

All in all, the health problems of the 19th century were forwarded by the lack of proper hygiene and wholesome food that was linked with the poverty or the rules imposed by the

society. Moreover, the Victorians used to idealize illnesses and efforts to relieve them, so that being ill was considered to be more fashionable than being healthy.

1.2. Major Health Problems in the 19th Century

There were different threats to the health of the British during the 19th century depending on their lifestyle and social status. However, the main diseases all Victorians were afraid of at that time were tuberculosis, smallpox and cholera.

Firstly, tuberculosis was probably the most dangerous disease of the Victorian era. According to Carpenter, tuberculosis was the single biggest killer of the 19th century. (Carpenter, 2010:7) Even though there is no exact mortality rate from tuberculosis in the 19th century, it was estimated that in Britain the disease took about 500-600 people per 100,000 population. (Carpenter, 2010:60) For instance, in 1838 tuberculosis was responsible for one-sixth of all deaths. (Mitchell, 2009:199) There were different opinions of how the disease spread. In countries like Italy tuberculosis was believed to be contagious; while, in France and England people believed that the illness was inherited from other family members. (Carpenter, 2010:55) Tuberculosis had a number of different cases, for instance, another term for chronic pulmonary tuberculosis was consumption; the term had already appeared in 1660 to describe how the body is consumed by the fever; (Carpenter, 2010:58) while, other forms were harder to recognize, like when the illness affected bones and joints. (Mitchell, 2009:199) The main symptoms were fatigue, sweating, loss of appetite, wasting and coughing. (Mitchell, 2009:199) In the 19th century it was not very clear how to deal with tuberculosis. From today's perspective the most acceptable treatments used at that time probably would be rest, healthy diet and visits to the seaside or a stay in a warmer climate that helped to slow the disease. (Mitchell, 2009:199) Nevertheless, there existed a belief that consumption was connected with an overly large consumption of material goods, food and drinks, or even fashion; thus, some treatments involved strict diet, (Carpenter, 2010:59) for example, the English poet John Keats' diet was limited to a single anchovy and a bit of bread. (Carpenter, 2010:67) Only at the end of the 19th century it was discovered that tuberculosis was caused by a bacillus. (Mitchell, 2009:199) Due to that hospitals usually refused to take in the sick people, so those who could not be treated at home were sent to workhouse infirmary. (Mitchell, 2009:199) In addition, by 1900 tuberculosis was linked with poverty, and the spread was connected with the unhygienic life of the poor. (Carpenter,

2010:70) Tuberculosis in the 19th century was viewed differently in terms of causes or the best treatment; however, the one thing that everybody agreed upon was the fact that it was a dangerous and lethal disease.

Another peril for the British during the 19th century was the epidemics of smallpox. The illness progressed starting with an incubation period, during which no symptoms appeared, then followed symptoms, such as headache, backache, fever, convulsions and delirium; in addition, a number of patients suffered from nightmarish dreams for about three or four days. (Carpenter, 2010:95) The most characteristic symptom of smallpox appeared later – flat reddish spots that turned into pustules, and the severity of the illness depended upon the type and density of the pustules. (Carpenter, 2010:95) Smallpox was an extremely contagious disease, since the patients were contagious for about three weeks and the illness spread not only by contact, but also breathing the same air. (Carpenter, 2010:95) Luckily, smallpox was a disease that was eliminated already at the end of the 19th century. (Mitchell, 2009:200) For instance, by 1839 Britain experienced 30,000 deaths from smallpox (Carpenter, 2010:103); however, the numbers decreased after the vaccination became available, leading to only 10 deaths per million in London in 1891. (Carpenter, 2010:102) The vaccination for smallpox was free and available already from 1940, and since 1853 it became compulsory. (Carpenter, 2010:11) However, at first there was a great resistance against the vaccination, due to the fact that the Victorians did not fully understand the process of receiving the disease to create immunity. (Mitchell, 2009:200) Smallpox was as dangerous to the rich as to the poor. Nevertheless, it is considered that the rich suffered more, due to wrong treatment methods, like putting the patients near the fire and under a number of blankets to stimulate sweating or not changing the bed linens which were full germs. (Carpenter, 2010:96) In addition to many other illnesses also smallpox in the 19th century was mostly believed to be connected with the poor, since the wealthy just managed to hide the illness better. (Carpenter, 2010:103) Altogether, smallpox affected all layers of society, and even though it was mostly linked with the lower classes, the rich people sometimes suffered even more because of a wrong choice of treatment.

The third disease that struck Britain in the 19th century was cholera. There were four epidemics of cholera during the 19th century – from 1831 to 1832, from 1848 to 1849, from 1853 to 1854 and during 1866. (McLean, 2006:3) Cholera was originally found in India and was spread due to the British military campaign there. (Carpenter, 2010:38) The spread of cholera probably frightened the British so much because the development of the illness was very rapid. A person could have been healthy, but when the illness, with great loss of body

fluids, began the death could be just a matter of few hours. (McLean, 2006:2) The panic of the British called forth a number of doctors who claimed to have found the cure for the illness; these treatments included blood transfusion, electricity applied with a 'galvanic method', heat or simply a dose of brandy, and so on. (Carpenter, 2010:44) Certain treatments could give the patient a possibility to survive, like replacing the fluids and keeping the patient warm and clean (McLean, 2006:4); nevertheless, if the patient was already weakened and the collapse had occurred the death was mostly inevitable. (McLean, 2006:3) Even though cholera took a great number of lives – 32,000 people during the first epidemics, 62,000 in the second epidemics, 20,000 in the third epidemics and 14,000 during the last outbreak, it killed less people than tuberculosis and smallpox. (Carpenter, 2010:41) In addition to negatively affecting the British population, the cholera epidemics also managed to improve public health. After doctor John Snow in 1854 traced many cases of cholera to one pump in London and declared that the illness spreads with contaminated water (Mitchell, 2009:200) there began various campaigns for the water companies to set up filtering systems, as well as benefits of drinking boiled water were promoted, (Carpenter, 2010:51) leading to the ability to control the spread of the illness. Hence, even if cholera was not the disease that took the greatest number of lives, the rapid development and sudden death made it the biggest dread for the Victorians.

To sum up, the 19th century was a dangerous period of time. The diseases took a great number of the British population, due to the lack of proper hygiene and knowledge about ways to treat them. Even though the health problems were mostly linked with the poor, also the upper classes did not escape tuberculosis, smallpox or cholera. Nevertheless, the British learned from their mistakes and the illnesses made them think of better ways to improve their own and public health.

1.3. Treatment of Health Problems

1.3.1. Diagnosing

Diagnosing has always been one of the most important steps towards recovery, since without a proper diagnosis it is impossible to cure health problems accurately. In contrast to the previous centuries, the Victorian age experienced relevant changes in the field of diagnosing.

Before the 19th century people had less medical knowledge; thus, the process of diagnosing was not very sophisticated. Previously and even at the beginning of the 19th

century diagnosis was made based upon what the patient told, or what the doctor could see with his own eyes. (Carpenter, 2010:5) Hence, many illnesses could not be traced, or were noticed only when it was too late to try any treatment.

During the 19th century diagnosis was affected by a number of new instruments that made the process more rapid and accurate; as well as changed the way the patients were viewed. There began to be used such instruments as stethoscope, the microscope, the thermometer, the x-ray machine and many more that helped to notice the illnesses earlier. (Carpenter, 2010:5) The patients were no longer the main authority when it came to their health and bodies; moreover, they were seen as cases demonstrated to and studied by medical students. (Carpenter, 2010:5) Thus, in addition to various technical innovations in the field of medicine, in the 19th century doctors became the most valid source of information about one's health.

All in all, the innovations of the Victorian era influenced also medicine, allowing to produce a more correct and rapid diagnosis; hence, making doctors a greater authority in the eyes of the patients.

1.3.2. Treatment

Similarly to nowadays, also in the 19th century there were many different treatments. While some patients gave preference to the medicine prescribed by doctors, others relied on alternative forms of medicine.

Firstly, the way the 19th century doctors treated their patients depended on the doctors' and patients' beliefs and willingness to accept innovations, since in the Victorian age appeared new medicines. Chloroform was begun to be used during operations in 1847; however, the society accepted chloroform only after Queen Victoria had used it in childbirth some years later. (Hughes, 1998:63) Another innovation in the field of medicine was the antiseptics. In the middle of the 19th century a doctor Joseph Lister started to experiment with the use of antiseptics that greatly improved the recovery and avoidance of new health problems. (Hughes, 1998:63) These discoveries not only improved the life during the Victorian era, but also made the foundation for the modern medicine.

Even though certain changes improved the health care system of the 19th century, the medical treatment was limited. There was not much doctors could do to help the patients, since surgeries were very rare due to the risk of an infection. (Carpenter, 2010:4) According

to Mitchell, even until the middle of the 20th century those who aimed to become doctors were told that '90 percent of the practice of medicine lay in keeping patients comfortable while nature took its course'. (Mitchell, 2009:207) The majority of the 19th century patients were treated by bloodletting, purging and some tonic to stimulate the health. (Carpenter, 2010:4) As well as cleanliness, rest and nourishing food was frequently prescribed by doctors. (Mitchell, 2009:207) While some methods of treatment did not usually help the patients, many medicines even did more harm than good. For instance, in the 19th century a very frequently used medicine was laudanum – an opium tincture that was used as a sleeping pill, painkiller and cough suppressant; nevertheless, only at the end of the century people were warned about the addiction created by opium. (Mitchell, 2009:208) Another dangerous medicine was cinchona – it contained quinine which was used to cure malaria; however, cinchona could damage eyes and ears (Whorton, 2010:229) and calomel that caused ulceration of the mouth, loss of teeth and destruction of jawbone. (Whorton, 2010:230) The Victorians were treated also by various solutions with arsenic, and they were used for the patients with asthma,(Whorton, 2010:236) chorea, skin diseases (Whorton, 2010:237), diphtheria, anemia, rheumatism, tuberculosis, typhus, diabetes, heart diseases and so on. (Whorton, 2010:238) According to Whorton, the 19th century doctors knew about the dangers of the drugs, but prescribed them anyway because they believed in their ability to cure. (Whorton, 2010:230) In addition to being poisoned by various medicines, some patients were suggested to have a change of air and to visit mountains or seaside. (Mitchell, 2009:209) In addition, drinking sea water and bathing in it were popular cures, even though already at the beginning of the century it was proved that spa waters contained little minerals in comparison with the common pump water; however, people still believed in their healing power, for instance, up to 1880 very popular was a story of a blind man who drank the sea water and bathed in it and as a result regained his sight. (Hassan, 2003:38) Hence, the 19th century treatments in most cases did not help the patients; nevertheless, people still believed in the healing ability of the used treatment.

Not all the 19th century Victorians could afford or wanted to visit a doctor when being ill; thus, there were a number of alternative forms of medicine. According to Mitchell, the majority of Victorians depended upon traditional medicine and different herbs, and almost in every household there was a person that could provide these cures. (Mitchell, 2009:195) These remedies usually included various draughts. For instance, chamomile tea with honey was used to strengthen the digestive organs; for the cure of asthma was suggested a mixture of aqua vitae, one ounce of aniseed, one ounce licorice and half pound of stoned

raisins, then the mixture was left for ten days and finally two spoonful of sugar was added. (Hughes, 1998:67) There were also other, more extraordinary methods. For example, a paste of goose grease, horse radish juice, mustard and turpentine was put on an area affected by rheumatism, while a nosebleed was stopped by putting a nettle leaf on the tongue and pressing it against the roof of the mouth. (Hughes, 1998:69) Even though some of the traditional cures did not help the patients at all, in certain cases the experience and knowledge in traditional medicine of those people was more useful than any treatment prescribed by the 19th century doctors. (Mitchell, 2009:195)

To sum up, the 19th century offered different treatments; however, only some of them did patients any good. Even though the Victorian era experienced various innovations in the field of medicine, the majority of doctors still treated their patients by poisoning them with arsenic and other substances. Traditional medicine was widely used, and even though in most cases it did not cure the problem, it was less dangerous to the patients' lives and health.

To conclude, the Victorian era was a dangerous period when speaking about the health. The industrialization and factories not only polluted the environment, but also invited many workers to the cities making them overpopulated. Also the British themselves did harm to their health in terms of diet, the lack of exercises and the wish to be fashionable. The 19th century was characterized by such health problems as tuberculosis, smallpox and cholera that took a great number of the population, since in most cases the only thing a doctor could offer was to make the patient more comfortable, not to cure the illness. Even though it was a century of important innovations in the field of medicine, doctors sometimes did more harm than good and people still relied on traditional medicine to deal with their health problems.

2. HEALTH CARE SYSTEM IN THE 19TH CENTURY

In the 19th century Britain people still did not put great trust in the field of medicine or hospitals. However, the Victorian era experienced changes in connection with the health care system. During the century there were different reforms regarding the medical professions, as well as public health and hygiene, leading to better results in maintaining the nation's health and well-being.

2.1. Medical Professions in the 19th Century

Even though it might seem that during the 19th century the patients only had a choice between a doctor and a person practising traditional medicine, the real hierarchy of medical professions was more complicated. There were different medical professions that not only had different duties, but also received different attitude from patients.

Firstly, there were a number of professions that were similar to one another. According to Carpenter, at the beginning of the century medicine was practiced by surgeons, apothecaries and practitioners. (Carpenter, 2010:4) In addition, there were also physicians who were the only ones with a university degree. (Mitchell, 2009:202) At the beginning of the 19th century with the Apothecaries Act, and later with the Medical Act, which will be discussed in the following subchapter, the duties and possibilities of these professions went through changes. (Carpenter, 2010:16) Thus, one of the 19th century's contributions to the field of medicine was the distinction between the people practising medicine.

As already mentioned before, physicians were the only ones with a university education. They attended Oxford or Cambridge studying ancient Greek and Galenic medicine; however, the lack of university hospitals at the beginning of the century did not allow them to practice medicine until they began to work. (Carpenter, 2010:15) Only later the study of medicine was linked with practising it. In 1838 the University of London linked the theoretical knowledge with supervised hospital experience. (Mitchell, 2009:202) Hence, at the end of the century patients were demonstrated to and studied by medical students. (Carpenter, 2010:5) In contrast to physicians, apothecaries and surgeons did not have a university degree, and they were trained by being an apprentice to an already practising medical worker. (Mitchell, 2009:202) The difference in education influenced also their further lives. The physicians were gentlemen, who in aristocratic families were invited to

dinner and did not receive their fee directly – it was wrapped in a paper and put near their hand; while, apothecaries and surgeons or the so-called general practitioners were not viewed so highly because they did not have a university education and they did manual labour – sold drugs, set bones, pulled teeth, treated wounds and so on. (Mitchell, 2009:202)

For the most part of the 19th century the study of medicine was unavailable for women, since only in 1878 women were admitted to study medicine at the University of London. (Mitchell, 2009:203) Nevertheless, also before that those willing to work in the field of medicine could do that as midwives or nurses. Midwives not only delivered babies, but also gave advice about infant care as well as helped to treat some ordinary illnesses. (Mitchell, 2009:204) Later in the 19th century midwives were replaced by obstetricians who were allowed to use drugs, for instance, chloroform that was used to make childbirth less painful. (Mitchell, 2009:204) Another possible profession for women was that of a nurse. The most famous nurse of that time was Florence Nightingale who not only promoted hygiene and the importance of well-ventilated and clean hospitals, but also linked nursing with femininity, by saying, ‘You cannot be a good nurse without being a good woman.’ (Carpenter, 2010:166) Nurses changed dressings, gave medicine, and followed doctors’ instructions taking care of about six to eight patients. (Mitchell, 2009: 207) By the end of the century nursing was depicted as a glamorous career for a woman. (Mitchell, 2009:206) Thus, also women could put their contribution in the health care system in the 19th century.

To sum up, the 19th century offered various possibilities for people interested in medicine. While women’s choices were limited, from male profession the one of a physician was valued the most.

2.2. Hospitals and People’s Attitude towards Them

Similarly to today, also in the 19th century England hospitals played an important part in the recovery of the health. Even though Victorians did not have the medical knowledge of present days, hospitals during the 19th century went through considerable changes becoming more suitable to fight illnesses and other health problems.

Firstly, the hospital system was different at the beginning and end of the 19th century. At the beginning of the 19th century hospitals were mostly meant for the sick poor; while, during the century hospitals gradually became a place where all classes of people were treated by surgeons and physicians. (Carpenter, 2010:30) From the 18th century up to 1825

154 hospitals were opened throughout Great Britain and from 1859, when the first cottage hospital was opened in Surrey, there was a hospital in every county. (Hughes, 1998:64) During the Victorian era the importance of keeping the hospital clean was understood (Mitchell, 2009:211) as well as there appeared the pavilion design with vast rooms and large windows, so that the patients could receive fresh air and sunlight. (Carpenter, 2010:33) All in all, according to Hughes, during the 19th century hospitals became as modern and sanitary as the period could allow, (Hughes, 1998:64) improving the patient chances of recovery.

Despite the improvements in hospitals, people still were reluctant to stay there. Middle and upper class were mostly treated at home, and until the end of the century, even certain surgeries were performed at home (Mitchell, 2009:211) showing that those who could afford it, avoided hospitals. Hospitals were even feared, since various infections spread there with the help of bacteria from hands, doctors' clothing, air or bodies of other patients. (Carpenter, 2010:25) However, later along with the changes in the hospital system also middle and upper class patients began to seek treatment in hospitals. (Carpenter, 2010:31) Hence, with the development of hospitals people slowly overcome their prejudice against these health institutions.

To sum up, the 19th century changes and innovations influenced also hospitals making them more modern and more likely to help people recover. Even though people still feared to go to a hospital, during the 19th century the attitude changed making also wealthy people seek medical help in hospitals.

2.3. Reforms in Health Care System in the 19th Century

The 19th century could not solve the majority of health problems; however, different innovations in the field of medicine highlighted the importance of hygiene and the necessity for changes in the health care system. These changes were carried out in the form of various reforms.

During the 19th century there were reforms that influenced the work of the medical workers. The first reform was the Apothecaries Act passed in 1815 to set a standard for qualification and licensing of an apothecary. (Carpenter, 2010:14) The apothecaries had to attend lectures as well as hospital practice for five years and take an exam to receive the license; nevertheless, the majority of apothecaries still performed other functions than providing with medicine, since they also treated patients. (McLean, 2006:29) In addition to

apothecaries treating patients, surgeons sometimes prescribed their own medicine, so there was not a clear borderline between the two professions. (McLean, 2006:29) Unqualified medical practice became illegal with the Medical Act of 1858 (McLean, 2006:29) which registered all qualified practitioners and only those registered could sign death certificates, work in hospitals and use the title Doctor of Medicine or General Practitioner. (Mitchell, 2009:203) However, this act did not protect people from unqualified medical workers, since also those without a license could practice medicine, for instance, as a herbalist or a homeopath, as long as they did not claim to have a license. (Mitchell, 2009:203) Only after 1886 and the Medical Act Amendment Act medical profession became governed by national standards, (Carpenter, 2010:23) making the visit to a doctor safer and more effective for the patients.

Another major field for reforms in the 19th century was the public health and hygiene. The main reform leading to better life standards was the Public Health Act in 1848. (Carpenter, 2010:43) The act was initiated by an English social reformer Edwin Chadwick and his investigations in the unhealthy life conditions, the poor water supply and crowded housing. (Mitchell, 2009:213) Due to the act a General Board of Health was created to reduce poverty and improve public health. (Carpenter, 2010:43) Because of the reform in the following years life quality in England was improved – clean water was supplied, tax on soap was abolished, towns had regular garbage collection, purity standards were applied to food, overcrowded housing was reduced, and houses began to have ventilation and so on. (Mitchell, 2009:213) So by the end of the 19th century due to the reforms life in Britain was much healthier and better.

Even though there were also other reforms during the 19th century, the Apothecaries Act, the Medical Act and the Public Health Act influenced the people the most, leading to a safer and healthier life.

To conclude, the 19th century can be characterized by great changes in the health care system. The distinction between medical professions was made, as well as they were qualified and licensed making sure that patients could rely on the given advice and prescribed treatment. The Victorian era also changed the way hospitals worked and people's attitudes towards them, so that also wealthy people began to be treated in hospitals. Probably the most important change in the health care system was brought with reforms that improved the public health and life conditions making Britons a healthier nation.

3. CHARLES DICKENS AND MEDICINE

The 19th century health problems, innovations in medicine and changes in the health care system affected all Britons, also the famous novelist Charles Dickens. However, while other people's attitudes and feelings have mostly remained in past, Dickens's experience of the 19th century health care system and medicine can be traced even today through his novels. Even though the reasons for Dickens's interest in medicine can differ, it cannot be denied that the author touched upon the subject of medicine a great deal in his novels. According to Cosnett, in Dickens's 14 major works there are mentioned more than 27 members of medical profession (Cosnett, 1992:1540); while, in almost all his novels there is a character struggling with some health problem.

3.1. Health Problems Experienced by Dickens and His Family

One of the main things that influence the works of an author is the personal experience. Similarly to other Victorians, also Charles Dickens during his life could not avoid health problems that affected not only the author himself, but also his friend and family.

First of all Dickens himself wrestled with health problems throughout his whole life. According to Payne, Dickens's interest in medicine could have come from his own sickly childhood. (Online 1) Dickens was a delicate child who suffered from spasms in his side that kept him from joining in the games of other children. (Tomalin, 2011:42) Also as an adult the author experienced spasms (Tomalin, 2011:70), in addition to what Tomalin calls 'peculiarly lowering colds'. (Tomalin, 2011:95) As well as his health problems involved rheumatism, problems with teeth and swelling of feet. (Tomalin, 2011:194) Even though Dickens appreciated the benefits of exercises and fresh air, (Tomalin, 2011:78) similarly to other Victorians he also relied upon medicine that could do more harm than good. As a treatment he used calomel and mercury (Tomalin, 2011:68) and the amount of the medicine usually was 'as much as would be given to an ordinary-sized horse'. (Tomalin, 2011:78) Like the rest of Britons, Dickens also used laudanum the amount of which was increased when the pain in his foot became more intense. (Tomalin, 2011:250) Thus, Dickens's personal experience of medicine and illnesses was rich enough to base his books upon.

Nevertheless, not only the author himself, but also people close to him suffered from various health problems. Already from childhood Dickens was influenced by health

problems and death, since two of his younger siblings died very early. (Tomalin, 2011:34) One of them – his two-year-old sister Harriet died with smallpox. (Tomalin, 2011:46) Later his sister Fanny died of tuberculosis (Tomalin, 2011:96) and after some years the same was the fate of his brother Alfred who died of tuberculosis of the lung. (Tomalin, 2011:209) In 1863 Dickens's son Walter died of an aneurism. (Tomalin, 2011:219) The death that affected Dickens very strongly was the death of his sister-in-law – Mary Hogarth. The seventeen-year-old and healthy girls collapsed suddenly and died within fourteen hours, without the doctors being able to make any diagnosis or suggest any possible treatment. (Tomalin, 2011:80) Dickens was so affected by Mary's death, that a number of his characters became modelled on his sister-in-law, like Rose in *Oliver Twist*, Agnes in *David Copperfield*, in addition, Mary was the direct inspiration for the character of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. (Callow, 2012) The Dickens's family experienced many health problems, including the major diseases of the 19th century such as tuberculosis and smallpox, providing the author with enough material for the novels.

To sum up, Dickens's personal experience could provide a lot of background for the medical themes in his novels. Not only did the author himself struggle with various health problems, but the diseases suffered by his family could have had an influence upon his writing.

3.2. Dickens's Involvement in Medicine

Charles Dickens's connection with medicine did not just confine itself with being ill or witnessing his family members dying of different diseases. Dickens himself took part propagating the importance of health care in the 19th century by joining in reforms, promoting innovations and trying to treat people.

Firstly, Dickens supported the changes in Britain's health system. Dickens was one of the first early supporters of the use of chloroform. (Online 1) The author himself went through a surgery before the chloroform was available, so he insisted that his wife would use it giving birth to their eighth child. (Tomalin, 2011:95/96) Dickens was also involved in various reforms to improve the living conditions of the poor; thus, decreasing the risk of health problems and limit the spread of epidemics. He gave a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association criticising the housing conditions of the poor, and during the autumn of 1854 published a number of articles about public health in *Household Words* where he spoke

about the necessity of money to deal with health issues as well as touched upon the problem of sewerage in London. (Tomalin, 2011:160) According to David Frum, the death of Mary Hogarth turned Dickens's attention towards the high rate of early deaths in the 19th century Britain (Frum, 2013) which could have been one of the reasons why he was interested in improvement of public health and medicine in general. Dickens's popularity could have helped him to promote or criticize certain health related issues, making him a valuable reformer in the field of health care.

However, Dickens's involvement in medicine did not involve only supporting various ideas and innovations, since the author himself tried to treat with the help of mesmerism. The interest in this alternative method of treatment began in 1838 when Dickens attended a mesmerism demonstration. (Online 1) Later Dickens had a chance to try mesmerism when he met Augusta, the wife of a Swiss banker Emile De La Rue, who suffered from nervous disorder, so when De La Rue asked Dickens to try and help his wife, Dickens, according to Tomalin, 'was eager to try what he could do'. (Tomalin, 2011:123) He put Augusta in a sleep-like trance, questioning her about her experiences or fantasies. (Tomalin, 2011:124) After the treatment Augusta seemed to have slept better; however, when Dickens left and the mesmerism sessions ceased her health problems returned. (Online 1) Hence, Dickens's interest in medicine urged the author to try it out by himself.

To conclude, Dickens had an influence upon the health care system of the 19th century. Even though the mesmerism allowed him to try an alternative method of treatment, his support to chloroform and promotion of public health probably were more important contributions to the improvement of the health care system of the 19th century.

Finally, Charles Dickens's experience of the 19th century medicine not only had an impact upon that time health care system, but was also reflected in his novels, since they contain a number of mentions of health problems and health care system. The particular health problems and other references to the Victorian era's medicine in Dickens's works will be discussed in the following chapter, linking the author's fictional plots with the real situation of the 19th century England.

4. DEPICTION OF HEALTH PROBLEMS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S NOVELS

Charles Dickens's interest in medicine did not just include the involvement in various health related reform or the attempt to try out hypnosis. Based either on the author's personal life, experience and beliefs or the situation in the 19th century England the depiction of medicine, health problems and health care system can be found in the majority of Dickens's works. The author's characters experience a number of health problems which they treat with the help of medicine as well as more alternative means. In addition, in almost every novel there can be encountered a character whose profession is linked with medicine, allowing the reader to become acquainted with the 19th century doctors or at least Dickens's interpretation of this particular profession. The following chapter will look at three novels by Charles Dickens – *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837), *Dombey and Son* (1846-1848) and *Bleak House* (1852-1853), and the descriptions of health problems, medicine and medical professions found in them.

4.1. Depiction of Diseases

4.1.1. Major Diseases in Charles Dickens's Novels

Almost all of the analysed novels contain a depiction of some serious, life-threatening disease. The novels include not only diseases that ended the lives of particular characters, but also mention the major health problems of the 19th century. In addition, Dickens in some cases does not name the diseases; thus, it is left for the reader to understand what is wrong with the character's health, based on the description and symptoms.

Firstly, one of the main health threats of the Victorian era, as well of Dickens's novel *Bleak House* is smallpox. Just as mentioned before the author does not use the name 'smallpox' in the novel; however, based on the description of the illness and its consequences it can be concluded that Dickens meant exactly this dangerous disease of the 19th century. Similar to other illnesses also smallpox due to the poor living condition and the lack of proper hygiene was considered to be an illness linked mostly with the lower social classes; thus, Dickens portrayed exactly the poor boy Jo as the cause of the problems linked with smallpox in *Bleak House*. When Charley and Esther find Jo, his symptoms include the main symptoms of smallpox – headaches, bone aches, delirium and fever. (Carpenter, 2010:95) As Dickens writes

‘I’m a-being froze,’ returned the boy, hoarsely, with his haggard gaze wandering about me, ‘and then burnt up, and then froze, and then burnt up, ever so many times in a hour. And my head’s all sleepy, and all a-going mad-like – and I’m so dry – and my bones isn’t half so much bones as pain.’ (Dickens, 1993a:368)

The Victorians knew how fast smallpox could spread and the importance of avoiding from the sick person, for instance, if a servant of an upper class family got ill he or she was either sent to the fever hospital or simply put out on the street. (Carpenter, 2010:104) Thus, when Esther brings Jo home, she is suggested by Mr Skimpole to send Jo away

‘You had better turn him out,’ said Mr Skimpole.

‘What do you mean?’ inquired my guardian, almost sternly.

‘My dear Jarndyce,’ said Mr Skimpole, ‘you know what I am: I am a child. Be cross to me, if I deserve it. But I have a constitutional objection to this sort of thing. I always had, when I was a medical man. He’s not safe, you know. There’s a very bad sort of fever about him. [...] I you put him out in the road, you only put him where he was before. He will be no worse off then he was, you know. Even make him better off, if you like. Give him sixpence, or five shillings or five pound ten – you are arithmetician, and I am not – and get rid of him!’ (Dickens, 1993a:370/371)

Dickens, as a social reformer, probably was against this practice; thus, after a discussion about the fate of the sick Jo in the end it is decided that the boy will stay the night. (Dickens, 1993a:372) Even though the suggestion of Mr Skimpole sounded cruel and heartless, and putting Jo out on the street would not improve the public health of the Victorians, avoiding close contact with the sick person would have been the right decision, due to the consequences this kind of situation could have in the real life and the consequences it had further in the novel. The next person to become ill was Esther’s maid Charley. Accordingly to the progress of the illness, Charley did not become ill right after the contact with Jo, since there had to be an incubation period without any symptoms. (Carpenter, 2010:95) It is easy to notice the existence of such period because after Jo runs away from their house; five days had passed, as Dickens writes, ‘The search continued for five days.’ (Dickens, 1993a: 374) Only then Charley begins to experience some symptoms – ‘Looking up, I saw my little maid shivering from head to foot.’ (Dickens, 1993a: 374) In addition to the symptoms suffered by Jo, Charley is the one who experiences another characteristic symptom of smallpox – nightmarish dreams. (Carpenter, 2010:95) As Dickens writes

When she was at the worst, and her mind rambled again to the cares of her father’s sick-bed, and the little children, she still knew me so far as that she would be quiet in my arms when she could lie quiet nowhere else, and murmur out the wanderings of her mind less restlessly. (Dickens, 1993:376)

Due to the fact that Esther is the one taking care of Charley during her illness, it is only natural that she becomes ill as well. Just when Charley has recovered, Esther begins to

experience the first symptoms of smallpox and becomes aware that she is going to be ill with the dangerous disease

Happily for both of us, it was not until Charley was safe in bed again and placidly asleep, that I began to think the contagion of her illness was upon me. I had been able easily to hide what I felt at tea-time, but I was past that already now, and I knew that I was rapidly following in Charley's steps. (Dickens, 1993a:377)

In addition to the symptoms of other patients, Esther experiences also temporary blindness, as she says to Charley – 'For I cannot see you, Charley; I am blind.' (Dickens, 1993a:378)

Nevertheless the dangers and the mortality of smallpox, all its victims in *Bleak House* in the end manage to recover. Even though it can be considered that neither Esther nor her guardian knew what was wrong with Jo, when Esther first brought Jo to her home, once the characters understood the dangers of the disease, a lot of attention was paid to isolation of the sick person. Thus, when Charley begins to experience the first symptoms, Esther locks the door, so that her friend Ada could not enter and become infected – 'I heard Ada's voice outside, and hurried to the door of communication between my room and our pretty sitting-room, and locked it.' (Dickens, 1993a:374) Also later everything is arranged so that Ada could not be infected with smallpox

There was not a servant, in or about the house, but was so good that they would all most gladly have come to me at any hour of the day or night, without the least fear or unwillingness; but I thought it best to choose one worthy woman who was never to see Ada, and whom I could trust to come and go with all precaution. (Dickens, 1993a:376)

While it is not that hard to avoid Ada during the illness of Charley, Esther during her own illness is the most worried about the fact that Ada could come in and; accordingly, become ill as well. As Esther begs Charley to keep Ada away – 'Now, Charley, when she knows I am ill, she will try to make her way into the room. Keep her out, Charley, if you love me, truly, to the last! Charley, if you let her in but once, only to look upon me for one moment as I lie here I shall die.' (Dickens, 1993a:378) Nevertheless, surviving smallpox did not mean an end to the problems linked with the illness, since another major feature of the disease were the scars that could be seen afterwards. Even though also Charley experiences these negative consequences of smallpox – 'The hope that never had been given, from the first, of Charley being in outward appearance Charley any more, soon began to be encouraged; and even that prospered, and I saw her growing into her old childish likeness again.' (Dickens, 1993a:377), Esther is the one who suffers the most from the appearance of the scars. The first evidence of the fact that Esther's looks have changed is the fact that others are hiding the mirror from her. As Esther notices a mirror missing from her room

‘And yet,’ said I, ‘I miss some familiar object. Ah, I know what it is, Charley! It’s the looking glass.’
Charley got up from the table, making as if she had forgotten something, and went into the next room; and I heard her sob there. (Dickens, 1993a:420)

And even though Esther asserts that the loss of her looks does not matter – ‘It matters very little, Charley. I hope I can do without my old face very well.’ (Dickens, 1993a:420), she still understands that it does change certain things. For instance, her relationship with Mr Woodcourt, so Esther is glad that he had not confessed his feelings towards her, since otherwise she would be obliged to end any kind of relationship they could have. As it is written, ‘What should I have suffered, if I had had to write to him, and tell him that the poor face he had known as mine was quite gone from me, and that I freely release him from his bondage to one whom he had never seen.’ (Dickens, 1993a:429) However, despite the loss of her beauty, Esther still was more fortunate than other victims of smallpox, who in addition to gaining scars on their faces also lost their hair. As Esther contemplates her looks after the illness

My hair had not been cut off, though it had been in danger more than once. It was long and thick. [...] I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now. Heaven was so good to me, that I could let it go with a few not bitter tears, and could stand there arranging my hair for the night quite thankfully. (Dickens, 1993a:430/431)

In addition to the feeling Esther had about her looks, also other people noticed her changes and treated Esther differently. However, while she might consider scars as a disadvantage, for others it was a sign of her goodness and willingness to help others. As it is being reproached to Jo

And that young lady that was such a pretty dear, caught his illness, lost her beautiful looks, and wouldn’t hardly be known for the same young lady now, if it wasn’t for her angel temper, and her pretty shape, and her sweet voice. Do you know it? You ungrateful wretch, do you know that this is all along of you and of her goodness to you? (Dickens, 1993a:537)

Considering the fact that *Bleak House* was published between 1852-1853, it can be seen that none of the characters had used the opportunity to vaccinated against the illness which was possible from 1840 (Carpenter, 2010:92); thus, it can only be guessed how the plot and the lives of the characters could have changed if the compulsory vaccination had started earlier than in 1853.

Similarly to smallpox, also the particular illness of little Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* is not named. In contrast to the disease of *Bleak House*, its symptoms and later scars, little Dombey’s illness does not have any symptoms that could help to identify it so quickly. According to the modern doctors, it is concluded that based on the symptoms and description

of the illness Paul had leukemia (Online 2); however, considering that leukemia as a disease was first recognized only a year before the publishing of *Dombey and Son* in 1845 (Online 3), Dickens probably did not have time to refer to leukemia intentionally. However, little Dombey's illness could have been based on certain people who had leukemia without them knowing about it at that time. Thus, it can be assumed that during the period of writing the novel, Paul Dombey was supposed to have one of the most frequent diseases of the 19th century – tuberculosis or consumption. Similarly to other consumption patients Paul Dombey experienced such symptoms as fatigue and wasting, in addition, the illness could also affect bones (Mitchell, 2009:199), and Paul suffered from bone aches as well. As little Paul characterizes the symptoms to his father by comparing himself with his older sister Florence

‘Florence is older than I am, but I’m not as strong and well as Florence, I know,’ returned the child; ‘but I believe that when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself. I am so tired sometimes,’ said little Paul, warming his hands, and looking in between the bars of the grate, as if some ghostly puppet-show were performing there, ‘and my bones ache so (Wickam says it’s my bones), that I don’t know what to do.’ (Dickens, 1995:92)

In addition to the conversation with his father, little Dombey also contemplates his symptoms by connecting them with the word ‘old-fashioned’, since he was sometimes being called ‘old-fashioned’ by others – ‘And now it was that Paul began to think it must surely be old-fashioned to be very thin and light, and easily tired, and soon disposed to lie down anywhere and rest; for he couldn’t help feeling that these were more and more his habits every day.’ (Dickens, 1995:184) As little Paul’s illness progresses, he experience also headache and dizziness. As these symptoms are described

But Paul’s head, which had long been ailing more or less, and was sometimes very heavy and painful, felt so uneasy that night, that he was obliged to support it on his hands. And yet it dropped so, that by little and little it sunk on Mr Toots’s knee, and rested there, as if it had no care to be ever lifted up again. (Dickens, 1995:178)

As well as – ‘But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn’t stand upon it steadily; and with the walls too, for they were inclined to turn round and round, and could only be stopped by being looked at very hard indeed.’ (Dickens, 1995:179) In contrast with other diseases that progressed quite rapidly, consumption did last much longer. For instance, when Walter asks Susan how long little Paul has been ill; Susan replies - ‘Ailing for a deal of time, but no one knows how much.’ (Dickens, 1995:206) In contrast to other Dickens’s characters, for instance, Dick in *Oliver Twist*, little Dombey does not represent an illness linked with bad living conditions or the lack of proper food; however, Paul’s death probably can be linked with Dickens’s interest in the high rate of mortality of

young people which began after the death of the author's sister-in-law. (Frum, 2013) While little Dombey's illness is portrayed negatively and produce a melodramatic effect, the 19th century also viewed consumption as a sign of genius. (Bailin, 1994:10) As *The Pickwick Papers* shows these views

What do *you* know of the time, when men shut themselves up in those lonely rooms, and read and read, hour after hour, night after night, till their reason wandered beneath their midnight studies; till their mental powers were exhausted; till morning's light brought no freshness or health to them; and they sank beneath the unnatural devotion of their youthful energies to their dry old books? Coming down to a later time, and a very different day, what do *you* know of their gradual sinking beneath consumption, or the quick wasting of fever – the grand results of 'life' and dissipation – which men have undergone in these same rooms. (Dickens, 1993b:264/265)

Thus, *The Pickwick Papers* connects consumption with scholars, who generally can be considered more brilliant than ordinary people, linking the disease not only with tragic events, but also with an event that could bring immortal fame to the sick person.

Another health problem that changed the lives of Dickens's characters was apoplexy, nowadays mostly called stroke, which lead to paralysis. Even though stroke and paralysis was not a health problem particularly linked with the 19th century, Dickens allotted a number of pages to this problem that had an effect upon the plot and not only the patient, but also other characters. The two characters who suffer the most from this ailment are Mrs Skewton from *Dombey and Son* and Sir Leicester Dedlock from *Bleak House*. The first one to notice something strange happening to Mrs Skewton was her maid. As the maid says to Edith, 'She's making faces!' (Dickens, 1995:488) At first the condition of Mrs Skewton is not very hopeful – '[...] there she lay speechless and staring at the ceiling, for days: sometimes making inarticulate sounds in answer to such questions as, did she know who were present? and the likes: sometimes giving no reply, either by sign or gesture, or in her unwinking eyes.' (Dickens, 1995:488) Even though there is no clear description of how Mrs Skewton is treated, Edith's mother manages to recover in some degree

It was a tremendous sight to see this old woman in her finery leering and mincing at Death, and playing off her youthful tricks upon him as if he had been the major; but an alteration in her mind that ensued on the paralytic stroke was fraught with as much matter for reflection, and was quite as ghastly. (Dickens, 1995:489)

However, later Mrs Skewton's health becomes worse again

Without having undergone any decided second attack of her malady, the old woman seemed to have crawled backward in her recovery from the first. She was more lean and shrunken, more uncertain in her imbecility, and made stranger confusions in her mind and memory. Among other symptoms of this last affliction, she fell into the habit of confounding the names of her two sons-in-law, the living and the deceased;

and in general called Mr Dombey either ‘Grangeby’ or ‘Domber’, or indifferently both. (Dickens, 1995:527)

In addition, she had more trouble with the speech – ‘“you must positively prom,” she cut some of her words short, and cut out others altogether, “some down very soon.”’ (Dickens, 1995:528) and her ability to orientate – ‘[...] she made a dab at the major with her fan, but overset Mr Dombey’s breakfast-cup instead, which was in quite a different direction.’ (Dickens, 1995:528) Just as the major had predicted when calling Mr Dombey ‘soon to be an orphan-in-law’ (Dickens, 1995:530) and saying that ‘your wife’s mother is on the move’ (Dickens, 1995:530), Mrs Skewton does not recover from the illness and eventually dies.

Another victim of paralysis was Sir Dedlock after Lady Dedlock’s disappearance. As Dickens writes, ‘There has been a discovery there, today. Family affairs have come out. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, has had a fit – apoplexy or paralysis - and couldn’t be brought to, and precious time has been lost.’ (Dickens, 1993a:649) Similarly to Mrs Skewton, also Sir Leicester’s stroke affects his ability to speak – ‘Sir Leicester lying in his bed can speak a little, though with difficulty and indistinctness.’ (Dickens, 1993a:666) In contrast to the portrayal of Mrs Skewton’s illness, Dickens seems to have depicted Sir Leicester’s illness with more dignity - ‘He is propped with pillows, his grey hair is brushed in its usual manner, his linen is arranged to a nicety, and he is wrapped in a responsible dressing-gown. His eye-glass and his watch are ready to his hand.’ (Dickens, 1993a:668) While Mrs Skewton is characterized more mockingly

The rose-coloured curtains blushed, in course of time, on Cleopatra’s bodily recovery, and on her dress – more juvenile than ever, to repair the ravages of illness – and on the rouge, and on the teeth, and on the curls, and on the diamonds, and on the short sleeves, and the whole wardrobe of the doll that had tumbled down before the mirror. (Dickens, 1995:491)

The difference in the portrayal of the characters during their illness might have resulted from the fact that Mrs Skewton as a character always had been less likable and sympathetic than Sir Leicester Dedlock; thus, after the illness Dickens portrays Edith’s mother as disfigured in her appearances, as she had always been on the inside. In addition to the more serious cases of stroke, *The Pickwick Papers* mention apoplexy in a more humorous context and manner. As Dickens writes, ‘He died one day of apoplexy, as he was going to open his outer door. Fell with his head in his own letter-box, and there he lay for eighteen months. Everybody thought he’s gone out of town.’ (Dickens, 1993b:266) Thus, a serious illness can be portrayed in a less serious manner.

To sum up, Dickens had precisely depicted certain serious illnesses in his novels. Even though nowadays these descriptions can be analyzed from the point of view of the

modern medicine, Dickens's novels mostly contain references to the main 19th century health problems. As well as the depiction of the patient and the progress of the illness could depend upon the fact how likable the character is to the readers; while, context could influence a portrayal of a serious illness, so that it seems less serious and even humorous to the readers of the novel.

4.1.2. Depiction of Other Health Problems

In addition to more serious diseases that affected the characters and the plot of the novel, Dickens's novels mention also other health problems. Even though also these illnesses could have a negative effect upon the health, they are not mentioned in-depth, making them seem less serious and perilous to the health, as well as they were individual health problems, linked with particular people, not the whole population of the 19th century Britain, as did the previously mentioned epidemic diseases.

The most frequently mentioned health problems in *Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* are rheumatism and gout that are linked with problems in bones and joints. Rheumatism is firstly mentioned in *Pickwick Papers* in *The Bagman's Story* when the old gentleman speaks about being the last of his family – ‘Gone, Tom, gone. We had hard service, Tom, and they hadn't all my constitution. They got rheumatic about the legs and arms, and went into kitchens and other hospitals [...]’ (Dickens, 1993b:182) Also Mr Pickwick becomes a victim of rheumatism after having spent a great deal of time outside the seminary in order to warn that one of the ladies was about to elope

The constitution of Mr Pickwick, though able to sustain a very considerable amount of exertion and fatigue, was not proof against such a combination of attacks as he had undergone on the memorable night, recorded in the last chapter. The process of being washed in the night air, and rough-dried in a closet, is as dangerous as it is peculiar.

Mr Pickwick was laid up with an attack of rheumatism. (Dickens, 1993b:218) Moreover, Mr Pickwick's attack of rheumatism did not allow him to leave the bed for two days (Dickens, 1993b:218) as well as had some further consequences – ‘“And the attack of rheumatism which I caught in that garden,” said Mr Pickwick in conclusion, “renders me lame at this moment.”’ (Dickens, 1993b:232) In *Dombey and Son* rheumatism is mentioned in the conversation between Mr Toodle and Miss Tox

‘How do you find yourself, ma'am? Do the rheumaticks keep off pretty well, ma'am? We must all expect to grow into 'em as we gets on.’

‘Thank you,’ said Miss Tox. ‘I have not felt any inconvenience from that disorder yet.’

‘You’re wery fortunate ma’am’ returned Mr Toodle. ‘Many people at your time of life, ma’am, is martyrs to it. There was my mother –’ But catching his wife’s eye here, Mr Toodle judiciously buried the rest in another mug of tea. (Dickens, 1995:498)

Hence, in this case rheumatism is used more to create a comical situation by pointing out Miss Tox’s age, not to depict an existing health problem. In addition, Dickens in *Bleak House* also points out the link between rheumatism and weather. As it is written in the conversation between Richard and Mr Jarndyce

‘The wind’s in the east.’

‘It was in the north, sir, as we came down,’ observed Richard.

‘My dear Rick,’ said Mr Jarndyce, poking the fire; ‘I’ll take an oath it’s either in the east or going to be. I am always conscious of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east.’

‘Rheumatism, sir?’ said Richard.

‘I dare say it, Rick. I believe it is. [...] oh, Lord, yes, it’s easterly!’ said Mr Jarndyce. (Dickens, 1993a:57)

Gout in Victorian age was generally viewed as a malady brought on by too good living; thus, others were not very sympathetic towards the patient. (Online 4) As Mr Weller characterises gout and its causes in *The Pickwick Papers*

‘The gout, sir?’ replied Mr Weller, ‘the gout is a complaint as arises from too much ease and comfort. If ever you’re attacked with the gout, sir, jist you marry a wider as has a good loud voice, with a decent notion of usin’ it, and you’ll never have the gout again. It’s a capital prescription, sir. I takes it reg’lar, and I can warrant it to drive away any illness as is caused by too much jollity.’ (Dickens, 1993b:260)

Thus, people who were complaining about gout were generally suggested to pull themselves together without any sympathetic feeling from friends, family or even doctors. For being linked with overly comfortable living, gout was mostly considered to be a health problem characteristic to the wealthy. Therefore, also in Dickens’s novels the person who suffers from gout is Sir Leicester Dedlock in *Bleak House* who could not complain about the lack of money or low status in the society. As Dickens writes when speaking about Sir Leicester, ‘He has a twist of gout now and then and walks a little stiffly.’ (Dickens, 1993a:10) Also Sir Dedlock himself does not view gout as an illness that one should be ashamed of, but a sign of specialness, belonging to the higher society and being a Dedlock

Sir Leicester receives the gout as a troublesome demon, but still a demon of the patrician order. All the Dedlocks, in the direct male line, through a course of time during and beyond which the memory of man goeth not to the contrary, have had gout. It can be proved, sir. Other men’s fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying, by dying of their own family gout. It has come down, through the illustrious line, like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire. It is among their dignities. Sir Leicester is, perhaps, not wholly without an impression, though he

has never resolved it into words, that the angel of death in the discharge of his necessary duties may observe to the shades of the aristocracy, ‘My lords and gentlemen, I have the honour to present to you another Dedlock certified to have arrived per the family gout.’ (Dickens, 1993a:188)

Similarly to rheumatism, also gout attacked people’s extremities. As the feelings of a gout patient is characterized by Sir Leicester – ‘[...] to be laid upon his back and spasmodically twitched and stabbed in his extremities.’ (Dickens, 1993a:188) Even though rheumatism and gout both were diseases with similar symptoms, gout was linked with a number of different attitudes about the social characteristics of the illness that were not connected with the medical side of the health problem.

Another health problem mentioned in Dickens’s novels was hysteria, which was one of the most popular health problems in the 19th century. Moreover, the 19th century was considered the golden age of hysteria; even though, the term was applied to a number of different conditions. (Online 5) The majority of references to hysteria can be found in *The Pickwick Papers*. Hysteria was generally classified as a ‘female’ disease and the main symptoms were fainting, whims and tempers described as ‘vapors’. (Online 6) and in the novel hysteria is mostly linked with elderly ladies, as well as is portrayed slightly exaggerated leaving an impression that it was meant to provide a comical effect, not to depict the Victorian beliefs and attitudes towards the particular mental health problem. For instance, as Dickens writes, ‘The spinster aunt uttered a piercing scream, burst into an hysteric laugh, and fell backwards in the arms of her nieces.[...] Here the spinster aunt burst into fit number two, of hysteric laughter interspersed with screams.’ (Dickens, 1993b:86/87) The best treatment according to the Victorian doctors was to keep to the living suited to the feminine temperaments that meant the avoidance of too much stimulation from dances, entertainments or novel reading. (Gorham, 2013: 89), since, for instance, Mrs Pott, whose symptoms as well seem slightly exaggerated leaving doubt that a Victorian lady could act like that, fell into hysteria after finding out some overly stimulating news – ‘Mrs Pott read the paragraph, uttered a loud shriek, and threw herself at full length on the hearth-rug, screaming, and tapping it with the heels of her shoes, in a manner which could leave no doubt of the propriety of her feelings on the occasion.’ (Dickens, 1993b:228) Probably the best known symptom of hysteria was fainting, even though it was not linked with so emotional outbursts as mentioned in the previous quotes. Similarly to other instances of hysterics, also fainting was linked with receiving unexpected news. As it is written, ‘Communicating his intelligence to the old lady with characteristic impetuosity, she instantly fainted away [...]’ (Dickens, 1993b:739) Hysteria can probably be blamed for Mrs Skewton’s behaviour and

whims in *Dombey and Son*, for instance, in the following case – ‘Don’t come too near me, for I am frightfully faint and sensitive this morning, and you smell of the sun. You are absolutely tropical.’ (Dickens, 1995:340) In addition, hysteria was mostly linked with women from the upper-middle class in contrast to the working class women, (Online 6) probably due to the fact that the working class women did not have enough time to worry about being properly feminine. A number of Dickens’s characters suffered from hysteria; however, the portrayal of the particular situation and their symptoms does not arouse feeling of sympathy, especially for the modern readers, since the attitude towards hysteria, as it was known in the 19th century, has changed.

In addition to rheumatism, gout and hysteria, Dickens’s characters suffer from other individual health problems relatively unimportant to the plot of the novels. One of such health problems portrayed by Dickens was asthma. Asthma is mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers* when providing a portrayal of Mr Solomon Pell

His forehead was narrow, his face wide, his head large, and his nose all on one side, as if Nature, indignant with the propensities she observed in him in his birth, had given it an angry tweak which it had never recovered. Being short-necked and asthmatic, however, he respired principally through this feature; so, perhaps, what it wanted in ornament, it made up in usefulness. (Dickens, 1993b:561)

In *Dombey and Son* asthma is referred to during the christening of little Paul Dombey

After another cold interval, a wheezy little pew-opener afflicted with an asthma, appropriate to the churchyard, if not the church, summoned them to the front. Here they waited some little time while the marriage party enrolled themselves; and meanwhile the wheezy little pew-opener – partly in consequence of her infirmity, and partly that the marriage party might not forget her – went about the building coughing like grampus. (Dickens, 1995:57)

Also in *Bleak House* asthma is mentioned superficially when speaking about a lady found in a Chandler’s shop. As Dickens writes, ‘In it, was a good-natured-looking old woman, with a dropsy, or an asthma, or perhaps both.’ (Dickens, 1993a:179) Apart from asthma, Dickens mentions also other health problems. A number of diseases are enumerated in *The Pickwick Papers* in *The story of the goblins who stole a sexton* – ‘[...] Gabriel smiled grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he thought of measles, scarlet-fever, thrush, hooping-cough, and a good many other sources of consolation besides.’ (Dickens, 1993b:372) Many health problems are also referred to when speaking about delicate health of little Paul Dombey, especially during the childhood of the boy

This dangerous ground in his steeple-chase towards manhood passed, he still found it very rough riding, and was grievously beset by all the obstacles in his course. Every tooth was a break-neck fence, and every pimple in the measles as stone wall to him. He was down in every fit of the hooping-cough, and rolled upon and crushed by a

whole field of small diseases, that came trooping on each other's heels to prevent his getting up again. (Dickens, 1995:88)

In addition *Dombey and Son* refers also to cramps – “Don't you over-exert yourself, Loo,” said Mr Chick, “or you'll be laid up with spasms, I see.” (Dickens, 1995:14) and “Everything that a child could have in the way of illnesses, Betsey Jane had come through. The cramps was as common to her,” said Mrs Wickam, “as biles is to yourself, Miss Berry.” (Dickens, 1995:103) Thus, Dickens's characters experience a number of various health problems, even though not all the diseases are that important to the plot or particular to the 19th century.

To sum up, Charles Dickens portrayed a great number of health problems in his novels. There were the epidemic diseases of the 19th century as well as various maladies characteristic to particular individuals. The major illnesses that influenced the plot and the lives of the characters are depicted in precise detail showing that Dickens was well-informed about the diseases and their symptoms. However, the depiction of certain diseases and the way the patient dealt with them depend upon the particular character and their characteristics, since in some cases, otherwise serious health problems, are depicted with a tinge of humour or irony.

4.2. Depiction of Treatment Used in the 19th Century

4.2.1. The Use of Medicine and Doctors' Prescribed Treatment

Just like the Victorians, also a number of Dickens's characters during their illnesses trusted doctors and the medicine prescribed by them. Although in some cases the particular treatment seemed more harmful than the health problem.

Firstly, in the novels there was a mention of medicine – particularly opium. Opium is mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers* by Mr Weller when addressing the fat boy – “Vere does the mince pies go, young opium eater?” (Dickens, 1993b:360) Nevertheless, this reference to opium is not used because the boy were sick or were addicted to opium, but because the boy generally was very lazy and sleepy, and could manage to fall asleep anywhere, so Dickens linked the particular characteristics of the boy with the by-effect of opium. In addition, *The Pickwick Papers* has a reference to laudanum – a tincture of opium, and the fact how recklessly the British used this addictive substance. As it is being promoted by Mr Weller, “There's nothin' so refreshin' as sleep, sir, as the servant-girl said afore she drank the egg-

cupful o'laudanum.' (Dickens, 1993b:204) Dickens and some of his characters also were aware of the dangers linked with opium. For instance, *Bleak House* mentions a man whose death is blamed upon opium – ‘ ‘He has died,’ said the surgeon, ‘of an over-dose of opium, there is no doubt. The room is strongly favoured with it. There is enough here now,’ taking an old teapot from Mr Krook, ‘to kill a dozen people.’ (Dickens, 1993a:121) Apart from opium, Dickens's novels mention also physic that was a medicine mostly used as a laxative. Physic is given to Jo when he is taken home by Esther – ‘[...] I gave him broth and physic [...]’ (Dickens, 1993a:369) Even though physic probably did not help in the case of smallpox, purging was one of the most popular treatments of the 19th century. (Carpenter, 2010:4) Altogether, Dickens's characters used the popular drugs of the 19th century; however, the author was not ignorant to the consequences of some of these medicines.

In addition to opium and other more serious medicines, in Dickens's novels there are also different medicine used for fainting or hysteric ladies. Dickens does not name the particular medicines in every occasion, but simply mentions them as restoratives. However, the 19th century restoratives for fainting included such substances as restoratives made from vinegar, smelling salts, lavender water, hartshorn, as well as the previously mentioned laudanum. (Online 7) *The Pickwick Papers* mention both – vinegar and smelling salt that can be used as a restorative. As it is offered to the spinster aunt

[...] the landlady, assisted by a chamber-maid, proceeded to vinegar the forehead, beat the hands, titillate the nose, and unlace the stays of the spinster aunt, and to administer such other restoratives as are usually applied by compassionate females to ladies who are endeavouring to ferment themselves into hysterics. (Dickens, 1993b:128)

Also smelling salt was a popular restorative. As it is mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*

Meanwhile Mrs Cluppins, with the combined assistance of Mrs Bardell, Mrs Sanders, Mr Dodson, and Mr Fogg, was hoisted into the witness-box; and when she was safely perched on the top step, Mrs Bardell stood on the bottom one, with the pocket-handkerchief and pattens in one hand, and a glass bottle that might hold about a quarter of a pint of smelling salts in the other, ready for any emergency. (Dickens, 1993b:446)

Various means to restore consciousness are also administered by Mrs Chick to Miss Tox in *Dombey and Son*

Rather like the executioner who restores the victim to sensation previous proceeding with the torture (or was wont to do so, in the good old times for which all true men wear perpetual mourning), did Mrs Chick administer the smelling-bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of cold water on the face, and the other proved remedies. (Dickens, 1995:386)

In addition, fainting and other similar health problems were so frequently encountered among the 19th century ladies that the majority carried various restoratives with them all the

time. For instance, Esther is loaned a smelling bottle – ‘I was so bewildered that Miss Donny thought the cold had been too severe for me, and lent me her smelling-bottle.’ (Dickens, 1993a: 22) Thus, various restoratives were one of the most frequently used remedy that a lady could not do without.

Besides drugs, there were also other treatments favoured by doctors. One of the standard 19th century treatments was bloodletting. (Carpenter, 2010:4) As it is eagerly offered to Mr Winkle by the medical student Mr Benjamin Allen in *The Pickwick Papers*

‘I wish you’d let me bleed you,’ said Mr Benjamin Allen, with great eagerness.

‘No, thank you,’ replied Mr Winkle hurriedly.

‘I really think you had better,’ said Allen.

‘Thank you,’ replied Mr Winkle; ‘I’d rather not.’ (Dickens, 1993b:387)

The attitude of the young doctor towards bloodletting shows that it was a procedure favoured by the majority of doctors. Another way to deal with health problems were leeches. For instance, leeches can be found in the medical practice of Mr Allen and Mr Sawyer – ‘Hardly anything real in the shop but the leeches, and *they* are second-hand.’ (Dickens, 1993b:498) In addition, leeches are mentioned by Mr Bob Sawyer when speaking about the treatment usually chosen by the poor

‘It’s wonderful how the poor people patronise me,’ said Mr Bob Sawyer, reflectively.

‘They knock me up, at all hours of the night; they take medicine to an extent which I should have conceived impossible; they put on blister and leeches with perseverance worthy of a better cause [...]’ (Dickens, 1993b:621)

However, not all doctors supported such aggressive methods of treatment. For example, as it was suggested by Mr Skimpole in the case of the sick boy – ‘You can tell them to sprinkle a little vinegar about the place where he sleeps, and to keep it moderately cool, and him moderately warm.’ (Dickens, 1993a:372) Mr Skimpole’s advice probably was more based on the wish to have nothing to do with Jo, not the medical beliefs of the person. Nevertheless, even if the proposed actions could not help in the case of smallpox, they still did less harm than, for instance, bleeding a person who was already weakened by different health problems.

To sum up, Dickens’s characters use different medical ways to regain the health. In the novels there is mentioned the use of opium, bloodletting and leeches, as well as various restoratives for hysteric or fainted women. Nevertheless, in some cases the characters seem to understand the danger of using certain treatments, showing that Dickens did not support all views of the Victorian era doctors.

4.2.2. The Importance of Fresh Air and Exercises

In addition to medicine and other methods of treatment, the Victorians began to understand the importance of exercises and fresh air. Also a number of Dickens's characters in *The Pickwick Papers*, *Bleak House* and *Dombey and Son* use these methods to regain or strengthen the health.

Firstly, sea resorts and visits to seaside were extremely popular. In the novels Dickens refers mostly to the popular watering places in Bath and Brighton. In the 18th century Bath was Britain's and even Europe's most famous spa; however, in the 19th century it began to lose its popularity to other spas and seaside resorts. (Cornfield, 1990)

Nevertheless, Mr Pickwick spends some time in Bath (Dickens, 1993b:473), while little Paul Dombey is sent to Brighton (Dickens, 1995:94), hoping that he could regain his health there

But as Paul himself was no stronger at the expiration of that time than he had been on his first arrival, though he looked much healthier in the face, a little carriage was got for him, in which he could lie at his ease, with an alphabet and other elementary works of reference, and be wheeled down to the seaside. (Dickens, 1995:105)

In addition, later in the novel a visit to Brighton is also suggested for Mrs Skewton – ‘‘I have learnt from your mother, Mrs Dombey,’’ said Mr Dombey with magisterial importance, ‘‘what no doubt you know, namely, that Brighton is recommended for her health.’’ (Dickens, 1995:523) As well as Mrs Pott is in a need of visiting a spa

[...] Mr Pott descending, for a few moments, to domestic topics, informed Mr Pickwick that the air of Eatanswill not agreeing with his lady, she was then engaged in making a tour of different fashionable watering-places with a view to the recovery of her wonted health and spirits [...] (Dickens, 1993b:669)

Apart from simply staying at the seaside, the sea resorts offered other activities that should strengthen the health, for instance, drinking the waters. This activity was very favoured by Mr Pickwick during his stay in Bath. As Mr Pickwick's experience with the waters is described

[...] when Mr Pickwick began to drink the waters with the utmost assiduity. Mr Pickwick took them systematically. He drank a quarter of pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter of pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill; and after every fresh quarter of pint, Mr Pickwick declared, in the most solemn and emphatic terms, that he felt a great deal better: whereat his friends were very much delighted, though they had not been previously aware that there was anything the matter with him. (Dickens, 1993b:473)

As well as in the sea resorts there was a possibility to bathe. As the bathing process in Bath is described in *The Pickwick Papers*

There are baths near at hand, in which a part of the company wash themselves; and a band plays afterwards, to congratulate the remainder of their having done so. There is another pump-room, into which infirm ladies and gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them; and there is a third, into which the quiet people go, for it is less noisy than either.

(Dickens, 1993b: 473)

The 19th century spas had a mineral water pump room, bathroom complex, a place for inhalation and a place for communication that was the centre of social life. (Online 8)

According to the depiction of Mr Pickwick's daily routine in Bath, he seems to enjoy almost all of the offered activities

Every morning the regular water-drinkers, Mr Pickwick among the number, met each other in the pump-room, took their quarter of a pint, and walked constitutionally. At the afternoon's promenade, Lord Mutanhed, and the Honourable Mr Crushton, the Dowerage Lady Snuphanuph, Mrs Colonel Wugsby, and all the great people and all the morning water-drinkers, met in grand assemblage. After this, they walked out, or drove out, or were pushed out in bath chairs, and met one another again. (Dickens, 1993b:474)

Probably also Master Bitherstone during his stay at Brighton with Mrs Pipchin's experienced certain bathing procedures – 'That done, Miss Pankey was born away to be shampooed; and Master Bitherstone to have something else done to him with salt water, from which he always returned very blue and dejected.' (Dickens, 1995:100) However, in contrast to Mr Pickwick, Master Bitherstone did not enjoy the particular activity.

In addition, to walks and other procedures at the seaside, fresh air and exercises in other places of England were equally popular. For instance, the necessity of exercises is pointed out to the fat and sleepy boy in *The Pickwick Papers*

'I'll tell you what it is, young boa constructor,' said Mr Weller, impressively; 'if you don't sleep a little less, and exercise a little more, when you come to be a man you'll lay yourself open to the same sort of personal inconveniences as was inflicted on the old gen'l'm'n as wore the pigtail.'

'What did they do to him?' inquired the fat boy, in a faltering voice.

'I'm goin' to tell you,' replied Mr Weller, 'he was one o' the largest patterns as was ever turned out – reg'lar fat man, as hadn't caught a glimpse of his own shoes for five-and-forty-year.' (Dickens, 1993b:365)

Thus, obesity and the lack of physical exercises was viewed negatively also in the 19th century. The fresh air was important for children as well. As it was a part of the daily routine of little Paul Dombey – 'The two interlopers, however, blissfully unconscious of the young lady's sentiments, saw little Paul safe through all the stages of undressing, airy exercise, supper and bed [...]' (Dickens, 1995:49) Also the elderly people were brought out to have some fresh air, as it can be seen with Mr Smallweed in *Bleak House* – [...] the venerable Mr Smallweed out for an airing, attended by his grand-daughter Judy as body-guard.' (Dickens,

1993a:317) The importance of fresh air is highlighted also by Esther after suffering from smallpox. As she explains to her guardian Mr Jarndyce

If Charley and I were to go to some country lodgings as soon as I can move, and if I had a week there, in which to grow stronger and to be revived by the sweet air, and to look forward to the happiness of having Ada with me again, I think it would be better for us. (Dickens. 1993a:422)

Even though Esther's decision is partly based upon the fact that she does not want Ada to see her scars, Esther still chooses to go to the countryside where the air is fresher, not stay in some other part of the city. In addition, exercises, particularly walking, are suggested to Lady Dedlock to avoid the frequent headaches

Is not quite healthy, Mercury informs her. Suffers much from headaches. Really? That's a pity! Walking, Mr Bucket would recommend for that. Well, she tries walking, Mercury rejoins. Walks sometimes for two hours, when she has them bad. By night, too. (Dickens, 1993a:612)

Thus, similarly to nowadays, also in the Victorian age some minor health issues were believed to be eliminated with the help of a simple walk in the fresh air.

To sum up, just like the real Victorians, also Dickens's characters tried to strengthen or regain their health in various sea resorts not only by simply staying there, but also by drinking the waters and bathing in them. Also ordinary walks in the fresh air were believed to be healthy and beneficial to one's health.

4.2.3. Alternative Methods of Treatment

Not all health problems were as serious to acquire the help of a doctor or a visit to the seaside resorts. As well as not all people could afford the previously mentioned methods of treatment. Hence, there were other, more alternative ways of dealing with various health problems.

In certain cases alcohol was used to deal with health issues. Firstly, alcohol is given in order to calm Mr Pickwick

'Leave him alone,' said the green-coated stranger – 'brandy and water – jolly old gentleman – lots of pluck – swallow this – ah! – capital stuff. [...] There was a short pause; the brandy and water had done its work; the amiable countenance of Mr Pickwick was fast recovering its customary expression. (Dickens, 1993b:47)

The next time alcohol is used for health purposes in *The Pickwick Papers* it is given again to Mr Pickwick after his falling into the cold water. As Mr Pickwick's treatment is described

Sam Weller lighted a blazing fire in the room, and took up his dinner; a bowl of punch was carried up afterwards, and a grand carouse held in honour of his safety. [...] A second and a third bowl were ordered in; and when Mr Pickwick awoke next morning, there was not a symptom of rheumatism about him: which proves, as Mr

Sawyer very justly observed, that there is nothing like hot punch in such cases: and that is ever hot punch did fail to act as a preventive, it was merely because the patient fell into the vulgar error of not taking enough of it. (Dickens, 1993b:391)

Another alcoholic treatment was suggested by Mr Sawyer in the case of nervousness – ‘Nervous,’ said Bob Sawyer complacently. ‘Camphor-julep and water three-times a day, and composing draught at night.’ (Dickens, 1993b:624) The drink suggested by Bob Sawyer – julep, being an alcoholic drink with mint. In contrast to the use of something alcoholic in the case of uneasiness, in *Dombey and Son* Captain Cuttle is recommended to have something else – ‘Sleep, and soda water, are the best cures for such uneasiness as that.’ (Dickens, 1995:431) Thus, alcohol was used for a number of medical purposes.

In addition to alcoholic drinks in cases of nervousness or cold, other health problems required other methods of treatment. For instance, raw meat is suggested for bruises, ‘[...] eye damaged, sir? Waiter! Raw beef-steak for the gentleman’s eye, - nothing like a raw beef-steak for a bruise, sir; cold lamp-post very good, but inconvenient – damned odd standing in the open street half an hour, with your eye against a lamp-post –eh, -very good – ha! ha!’ (Dickens, 1993b:14) Hence, in the case of bruises not much has changed over the last two hundred years, since it is still believed that on the bruise there has to be put something cold.

To sum up, apart from the usual medicine, in the novels there is mentioned mostly alcohol, as well as a raw meat for a bruise. Even though these treatments could not be used in serious cases, in sensible doses they mostly did less harm than the medicines prescribed by the majority of the Victorian doctors.

4.3. Dickens’s Portrayal of the Victorian Doctors

In addition to the depiction of health problems and their treatment, Dickens’s novels have characters whose profession is linked with medicine. In the novels there can be traced not only the description of doctors and medical students, but also hinted the attitude that other people had towards them.

First of all, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* provide different portrayals of all types of the Victorian era’s medical attendants. There are doctors who most probably were physicians, due to the others’ admiring attitude or their importance that can be sensed throughout the description. As physicians are described, ‘Doctors were called in – great men who rolled up to my door in easy carriages, with fine horses and gaudy servants. They were at her bedside for weeks. They had a great meeting, and consulted together in low and solemn voices in another room.’ (Dickens, 1993b:142) The greater

importance of a physician, in contrast to a family surgeon is highlighted in *Dombey and Son* during the birth of little Paul Dombey

Doctor Parker Peps, one of the court physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families, was walking up and down the drawing-room with his hands behind him, to the unspeakable admiration of the family surgeon, who had regularly puffed the case for the last six weeks, among all his patients, friends, and acquaintances, as one to which he was in hourly expectation day and night of being summoned, in conjunction with Doctor Parker Peps. (Dickens, 1995:7/8)

The higher status of Doctor Parker Peps, in contrast to the family practitioner, is also emphasised in doctor's conversation with Mr Dombey and the way the family practitioner addresses the doctor. For instance, it is pointed out by the doctor himself that physicians looked after the health of aristocratic people – ‘ ‘Good! We must not disguise from you, sir,’ said Doctor Parker Peps, ‘that there is a want of power in her Grace the Duchess – I beg your pardon; I confound names; I should say, in your amiable lady.’ (Dickens, 1995:8) As well as the family practitioner looks at the doctor as a person more important than him. As Dickens writes, ‘ ‘Stimulated as it were,’ said the family practitioner faintly: bowing at the same time to the Doctor, as much as to say, ‘Excuse my putting in a word, but this is a valuable connection.’ (Dickens, 1995:8) and ‘Then, on the motion – made in dumb-show – of Doctor Parker Peps, they went upstairs; the family practitioner opening the room door for that distinguished professional, and following him out, with most obsequious politeness.’ (Dickens, 1995:9) Another group of prominent doctors is mentioned during the final days of the lasting illness of little Paul Dombey

He was visited by as many as three grave doctors – they used to assemble downstairs, and come up together – and the room was so quiet, and Paul was so observant of them (though he never asked of anybody what they said), that he even knew the difference in the sound of their watches. (Dickens, 1995:208)

In addition to physicians, Dickens's novels portray also other medical professions, as, for instance, the profession of a surgeon. However, in the particular case mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers* the surgeons have not yet completed their training and still are only medical students. As it is written in the negative comments by Sam Weller

‘A couple o’ Sawbones,’ said Sam.
‘What’s a Sawbones?’ inquired Mr Pickwick, not quite certain whether it was a live animal, or something to eat.
‘What! Don’t you know what a Sawbone is, sir?’ inquired Mr Weller. ‘I thought everybody know’d as a Sawbone was a Surgeon.
‘Oh, a Surgeon, eh?’ said Mr Pickwick, with a smile.
‘Just that, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘These here ones as is below, though ain’t reg’lar thorough-bred Sawbones; they’re only in trainin’.’

‘In other words they’re Medical Students, I suppose?’ said Mr Pickwick. (Dickens, 1993b:382)

As well as there is an apothecary who visits little Paul Dombey - ‘There was a certain calm apothecary, who attended at the establishment when any of the young gentlemen were ill, and somehow *he* got into the room and appeared at the bedside, with Mrs Blimber.’

(Dickens, 1995:180) Thus, Dickens’s novels portray all types of the Victorian age doctors, depending on their education and specialization.

In contrast to nowadays, the 19th century doctors had a wider range of responsibilities. Surgeons were the ones who probably had the most responsibilities. As it can be seen in the dialogue between Mr Pickwick and Mr Weller, where surgeons are called sawbones (Dickens, 1993b:382), they were the ones responsible for health problems related with bones and surgery. As it can be seen in the conversation between Mr Pickwick and a doctor

‘There must be a splendid operation though, tomorrow – magnificent sight if Slasher does it.’ ‘

‘You consider Mr Slasher a good operator?’ said Mr Pickwick.

‘Best alive,’ replied Hopkins. ‘Took a boy’s leg out of the socket last week [...]’ (Dickens, 1993b:412)

In addition to doing surgery, surgeons also performed such procedures as pulling out teeth.

As it is being said by one of the medical students, Mr Sawyer, ‘I think the Church-rates guesses who I am, and I know the Waterworks does, because I drew a tooth of his when I first came down here.’ (Dickens, 1993b:498) Nevertheless, despite the great amount of work, other medical professions, apart from physicians who attended wealthy families, did not earn a lot of money. As it is explained by Esther in *Bleak House*

I believe – at least I know – that he was not rich. All his widowed mother could spare had been spent in qualifying him for his profession. It was not lucrative to a young practitioner, with very little influence in London; although he was, night and day, at the service of numbers of poor people, and did wonders of gentleness and skill for them, he gained very little by it in money. (Dickens, 1993a:206)

Also Esther after marrying doctor Woodcourt, who became the medical attendant for the poor in Yorkshire (Dickens, 1993a:689), admits that they are not rich despite people’s love and gratitude towards her and her husband. As Esther points out

We are not rich in the bank, but we have always prospered, and we have quite enough. I never walk out with my husband, but I hear the people bless him. I never go into a house of any degree, but I hear his praises, or see them in grateful eyes. I never lie down at night, but I know that in the course of that day he has alleviated pain, and soothed some fellow-creature in the time of need. I know that from the beds of those who were past recovery, thanks have often, often gone up, in the last hour, for his patient ministrations. Is not this to be rich? (Dickens, 1993a:740)

Thus, the profession of a doctor in most cases was not a very profitable career choice for the 19th century Britons.

Even though in *Bleak House* doctor Woodcourt is valued very highly and loved by his patients, not all people were so positive towards doctors. Surgeons in general were the most unloved profession. For instance, Mrs Raddle's from *The Pickwick Papers* view of surgeons is as follows – 'He ought to be ashamed of himself (here Mrs Raddle sobbed) to allow his wife to be treated in this way by a parcel of young cutters and carvers of live people's bodies [...]' (Dickens, 1993b:411) Also Sam Weller's reference to 'sawbones' (Dickens, 1993b:382) points out that he did not think very highly of surgeons. The negative attitude towards doctors was also linked with the negative attitude towards hospitals. As a hospital is mentioned, 'Drink put him in the hospital, guv'ner, and the hospital put him – in a glass case, I *have* heard,' Phil replies mysteriously.' (Dickens, 1993a:315) Nevertheless, the attitude towards a medical professional depended on each patient and person individually, since there were also those who valued highly doctors, their knowledge and ability to help people. One of such persons is Mr Pickwick, as it is written when speaking about the medical students that previously are characterized as 'sawbones'

'I'm glad of it,' said Mr Pickwick, casting his nightcap energetically on the counterpane. 'They are fine fellows; very fine fellows; with judgements matured by observation and reflection; tastes refined by reading and study. [...] overflowing with kindly feelings and animal spirits. [...] Eccentricities of genius, Sam.' (Dickens, 1993b:382)

Hence, despite the achievements or talent in the field of medicine, doctors were subjected to different attitudes from the part of other people, who either praised or despised the medical attendants.

To sum up, Dickens's novels extensively refer to doctors and other medical professions. The novels include different medical professions according to their classification, like surgeons, practitioners, apothecaries and physicians, from whom the most prominent persons – physicians, seem the most distant from the point of view of the patients. In addition, the novels touch upon the various duties of doctors, their little income, as well as other people's attitude towards them.

To conclude, Dickens's novels are a great source of information about health problems and health care system of the 19th century Britain. Similarly to the real situation of the Victorian era, also the characters of the novels could not avoid the numerous health problems. While some characters' ailments were less dangerous or even used as a means to get what they

wanted, other experienced serious and, in some cases, lethal diseases. Whilst Dickens has put more emphasis on the depiction of certain health problems, some diseases are only mentioned without giving great importance to them. Similarly to the depiction of the health problems, in his novels Charles Dickens shows various treatment possibilities. Dickens's characters not only fought diseases with medicine and alternative ways of treatment, but also strengthened their health with exercises and visits to seaside. Nevertheless, the majority of the medicine used was dangerous and certain characters were aware of it. In addition, Dickens portrayed the Victorian doctors, their duties, as well as other people's attitudes towards the medical attendants.

CONCLUSIONS

Charles Dickens's novels have always been worth reading; nevertheless, only recently Dickens's works are being appreciated again. One of the reasons for the regained popularity was the author's bicentennial in 2012, due to which new film adaptations of his novels are made, as well as new biographies and journal articles are published (Burns, 2012), once more making people interested in the works of Charles Dickens. Probably one of Dickens's keys of success is that the novels provide not only an entertaining and interesting reading material, but also give the modern reader an insight into the ways of life of the 19th century Britons. Thus, due to Dickens's interest in medicine and health care, the novels contain also a number of references and mentions of the medicine of the Victorian era.

The research of the historical background of the 19th century revealed that the Victorian era was a period of contrasts, where new medical innovations were used together with various out-of-date or even dangerous treatment methods. Health problems were caused by different consequences of industrialization, as well as the Victorians' wish to appear fashionable and live up to the standard. In addition, there was a romantic attitude towards various diseases and people who looked after the patients. The main health threats of the 19th century were tuberculosis, smallpox and cholera; however, there were also other health problems, for instance, hysteria. The treatment of the Victorians included not only doctors' prescribed medicine, but also alternative methods of treatment; nevertheless, the majority of treatment options did more harm than good. Even though in the 19th century health care system underwent various reforms, only at the end of the century people began to have more trust in doctors and hospitals, resulting in better treatment options and faster recovery.

Charles Dickens's interest in medicine could have been based upon the author's personal experience. Dickens himself was a sickly child and experienced different health problems through his entire life. However, the greatest impact upon the author's works probably had the health problems of his friends and family, for instance, the sudden death of his sister-in-law Mary Hogarth. In addition to writing about health problems, Dickens contributed to the development of health care system and medicine. He was one of the first supporters of chloroform, as well as participated in various reforms to improve the living conditions of the poor, the public health and supported or investigated other health related issues, for example, the high mortality rate of young people in the 19th century. Moreover,

Dickens's curiosity urged him to try his hand at mesmerism as a treatment option, adding to the author's experience in the field of medicine.

The practical part of the Bachelor thesis, including the analysis of three of Charles Dickens's novels, came to the conclusions that Dickens vastly and precisely depicted the 19th century health problems and medical system. In *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* there are depicted not only various major and minor illnesses of the period, but also different treatment possibilities. In addition, all of the mentioned novels have a character who works in the field of medicine. Dickens's characters experience diseases like smallpox and tuberculosis, and undergo such treatment methods as bloodletting, leeches, the use of opium and visits to spa or seaside. As well as there are portrayed all types of the Victorian medical attendants along with the 19th century beliefs and attitudes towards the particular professions. Even though the novels precisely depict the 19th century situation, as well as the Victorians' beliefs about medicine and health care system, the portrayal of various characters and situations could have had an influence upon the depiction of health problems and health care system, for instance, lethal diseases could acquire a tinge of humour; while, various characters' beliefs and opinions about medicine could be based upon the background or the role the character had in the novel. In addition to depicting various health problems, Dickens also used them as a symbol of social problems of the 19th century, like, for instance – poverty; and the novels, just like Dickens's social activities, propagated certain ideas about healthier ways of life and the necessity to be more educated about the topic of medicine and health care in order to live a healthy life.

To sum up, Dickens's wonderful ability to tell stories allows modern readers to get information about the author's period of live, while being entertained by the plot twists and fascinating characters. Nevertheless, readers cannot rely on the novels fully in order to get historically correct information, due to the fact that the author or the readers themselves can become biased against certain characters or events, leading to inability to depict or understand the situation precisely.

THESIS

1. Despite various innovations in the field of medicine, like x-ray machine and chloroform, the 19th century Britain was a dangerous place and time for the health, being characterized by lethal diseases and the lack of proper treatment.
2. The Victorian health problems were mostly based on the negative consequences of industrialization, like pollution and over-crowded living; however, also the wealthy, especially women, jeopardized their health in order to live up to the standard of that time upper class.
3. The 19th century was characterized by the epidemics of tuberculosis, smallpox and cholera. Even though not much could be done for the sick people, the epidemics had an impact upon the Britons, making them think of ways to improve the individual and public health.
4. A number of diseases and efforts to relieve them were romanticized and viewed almost positively. Diseases were seen as a sign of specialness; while, taking care of the sick person was considered a sacred duty.
5. The 19th century experienced changes in the way diagnosis was made; nevertheless, the treatment mostly included old-fashioned methods, like bloodletting and leeches that could do more harm than good to the patients.
6. During the Victorian era the health care system underwent significant changes, allowing to perform procedures previously avoided, like surgery; thus, improving the Victorians' views about doctors and hospitals.
7. The depiction of medicine in Charles Dickens's novels was not only based on the situation of the 19th century, but was also influenced by the author's private experience and interest in medicine and health care system.
8. In addition to writing about health problems, Dickens also contributed to the health care system and medicine by participating in various health related reforms and promoting certain innovations in the field of medicine.
9. In the novels *The Pickwick Papers*, *Dombey and Son* and *Bleak House* Charles Dickens refers to the epidemic diseases of the 19th century, other health problems linked with individual characters, as well as various treatment options. In addition, different types of medical attendants are mentioned, as well as other people's attitude towards them.

10. Dickens does not name all the diseases mentioned in the novels, forcing the reader to identify the health problem based on the description. In addition, many of the existing diseases had not been identified in the 19th century.
11. The depiction of certain health problems and the way the patients dealt with them in the novels could be influenced by the particular characters, their characteristics and how likeable the character was to the author or the reader.
12. Even though Dickens's characters mostly use dangerous and unhelpful treatment methods from the point of view of the modern readers, in some cases the characters are aware of the dangers of the particular treatment.
13. The novels refer to different types of the Victorian doctors – surgeons, apothecaries, practitioners and physicians, as well as the attitudes linked with the particular class of medical attendants. However, the attitude towards a doctor could depend also on the context or the characteristics or views of the particular character.

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