

John Howard

The inhabitants of Kherson cherish the memory of the names of great and famous people linked with the history of our Motherland, of our region. One of these people is John Howard, an Englishman. The main aim of his life was philanthropy and helping those who lived in poverty. He was the first to study thoroughly the status of prisons, the life of prisoners and to develop the prison system, progressive for his time. J. Howard visited the places of imprisonment in all European countries and he was justly called a friend of prisoners. He was the founder of a science of prisons which was called the science of prison keeping in Russia.

The famous philanthropist (philanthropy means “love of mankind” in translation from the ancient Greek language) was born in a family of a rich merchant on September 2, 1726.

J. Howard acquired profound knowledge in natural sciences and humanities, geography, he knew several languages. Having inherited a great fortune after his father’s death he did not become a businessman but continued to study science and devoted himself to extensive philanthropy activities.

Having no special medical education he was considered to be a skilled doctor. He acquired profound medical knowledge by self-education and great practice.

He was interested in finding a good remedy for serious infections – plague to begin with.

John Howard went around many countries of the Mediterranean Sea and persistently searched that terrible disease in quarantines and wards and looked for the means of fighting it, running risk for his own life. He successfully cured both infectious and some ordinary diseases.

Biographers described an event in J. Howard’s life. When he was in Constantinople he received an invitation to the palace to a pasha’s daughter whose health was hopeless. Howard saved her. Glorious fame about the great doctor was running over many countries. Then J. Howard decided to treat only the poor and the unfortunate.

Travelling in the European and Asian countries J. Howard covered the distance of 68000 kilometers. It was the time when there were no railways.

For the first time John Howard came to Russia in 1781. He visited Petersburg, Kronstadt, Moscow, Tver, Vyshny Volochyok. He had already become a European celebrity and Catherine II sent him an invitation to have a talk. J. Howard refused the invitation. He said “My aim is to visit prison, but not palaces”.

But the Russian Empress was interested in J. Howard’s ideas and she signed a number of decrees concerning the organization of life in prisons. They were based on J. Howard’s works.

For the second time Howard visited Russia in July, 1789. In a letter to his friend he wrote with satisfaction about prisons and hospitals, “doors of which are open to me. Even some burgomasters accompany me. Moscow hospitals are in a very grievous condition. I am going to establish philanthropy in these remote places... I hope for the best”. But J. Howard did not stay in Moscow too long. He was in a great hurry to the South to the wounded and sick soldiers, taking part in the Russo-Turkish War.

In October 1789 he arrived at Kherson. But in the eve of the coming winter the offensive of the Russian troops was put off. J. Howard decided to stay in Kherson till the time when his help

would be extremely necessary. He settled in Suvorov Street in house # 13 belonging to Dophine, a courtier of Catherine II (unfortunately this house did not survive to our time).

The famous philanthropist was given the most flattering reception. The empress Catherine II sent directions to Kherson in which she ordered to follow all J. Howard's advices and commands.

J. Howard made friends with his countryman Russianized English captain Prestman, rear-admiral Mordvinov, living in Kherson.

A broad sphere of activity was opened for J. Howard. The town had just entered its second decade. The inhabitants of the town were in need of many things. Hospitals were overcrowded with wounded, sick people. There appeared cases of typhus in the town.

That period of his life was described in a magazine "Syn Otechestva" ("Son of the Motherland") in December 1851 in such a way: "He is true to himself even here. To visit two, three times a day hospitals and the prison to help all the poor, such is the way of his life in Kherson. Neither cold, foul weather, nor circumstances could keep him from carrying out these everyday free-will duties".

Late in winter, yielding to persuasions of landowner F. Komstadius, J. Howard and rear-admiral Mordvinov came to the village of Sadovo to the landowner's sick kinswoman. He visited her twice. He could not help her, the woman died. But he fell ill very seriously. Prince Potyomkin sent his best doctor to Howard, the guest of Russia. At that time the medicine proved to be helpless. Howard was dying and he knew it. His friend captain Prestman called on him. But J. Howard did not accept any consolations. He said "I know very well that I'll die in a very short time".

And he asked "There is a place near Dophine's estate. You know this place very well because I often said that I should like to be buried there. And let me beg you not to suffer as it is used to be at the funerals, not to erect any monuments to me, not to write any inscriptions.

I would like you to put me down softly into the earth, make a sundial on the grave and let me be forgotten".

A very modest person living for the sake of others, J. Howard remained true to himself in his death hour. He died at about 8 a.m. on January 20, 1790.

Admiral Mordvinov made a death mask, sent it with J. Howard's last will to England.

But the immortal memory about that humane selfless man lives in the hearts of people, of inhabitants of Kherson.

The inscription dated 1790 on J. Howard's obelisk on his grave reads "Ivan Howard. Whoever you can be, here your friend is buried". A monument to J. Howard (architect V. P. Stasov) was erected in Pochtovaya (Post-office) street in Kherson in 1827. (Now this street is named after admiral Ushakov.)

Streets in villages Stepanovka and Sadovo are named after John Howard as well.

Monuments to the outstanding son of English people were put up at Saint Paul's Cathedral in London and in Bedford in England.

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