

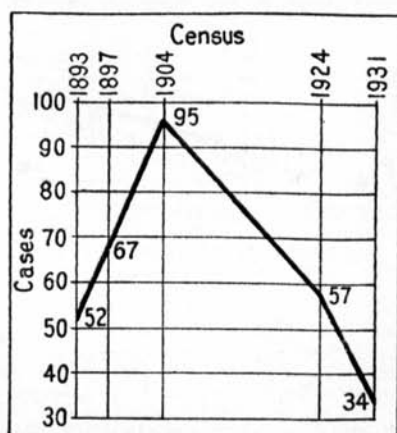
LEPROSY IN FINLAND¹

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Ever since the Middle Ages leprosy has occurred endemically both in the Baltic Provinces and in Finland, and there still exist in these countries a number of lepers. At the instigation of the Medical Board the leprosy cases known in Finland on December 31, 1931, were counted. I am indebted to Mr. K. A. Tukiainen, Medical Councillor, for being permitted to base the present study on the material collected.

Careful censuses of lepers in Finland have been taken five times, the first in 1893. The number of cases recorded are: 1893, 52; 1897, 67; 1904, 95; 1924, 57; and 1931, 34. These figures are plotted as a curve in Text-fig. 1, which shows the fluctuations of the extent of the disease in this country. The curve for the past few years shows a satisfactory downward tendency.



TEXT-FIG. 1.—*Number of lepers in Finland, 1893-1931, inclusive*

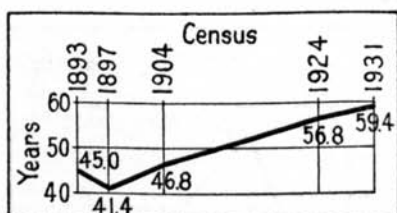
We are sure that these figures are rather too low, for a number of cases have probably remained undiagnosed, especially those of

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lepra maculo-anaesthetica. A careful examination of the workhouse inmates, especially those from the parishes of southwest Finland where, as shown in an earlier paper (1), nearly all of the leprosy cases were to be found, would be certain to bring cases to light. However, because the physicians of Finland have since 1891 been ordered to report to the Medical Board all cases of leprosy observed by them, it is to be expected that all that have been diagnosed by physicians were entered in the statistical reports.

Of the 34 lepers living in the country on December 31, 1931, 16 were in the leprosarium of Orivesi.

The average ages of the patients recorded in the different censuses are: 1893, 45.0 years; 1897, 41.4 years; 1904, 46.8 years; 1924, 56.8 years; 1931, 59.4 years. These figures are shown in Text-fig. 2, which shows a marked increase in the average age since 1897. Most of the living lepers are above middle age. Only eight of the 34 patients have not yet reached their fiftieth year, and none of these is below twenty. In the natural course of events a comparatively marked reduction of lepers in Finland should take place in the next few years.



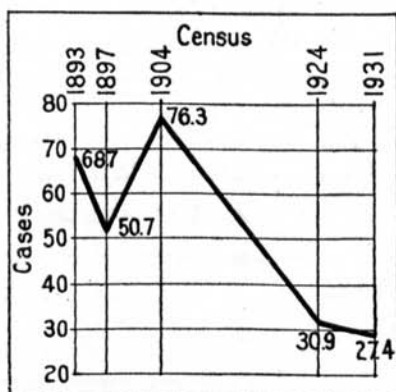
TEXT-FIG. 2.—Average ages of lepers in Finland since 1893

The relation between the numbers of cases of *lepra tuberosa* and *lepra maculo-anaesthetica* at the different periods is of some interest inasmuch as the former type is much more infectious than the latter. Text-fig. 3 is a curve illustrating the numbers of cases of *lepra tuberosa*, expressed in percentage of the whole number of cases recorded at each census. The figures are: 1893, 68.7 per cent; 1897, 50.7 per cent; 1904, 76.6 per cent; 1924, 30.9 per cent; and 1931, 29.4 per cent.

In this case also the curve shows a favorable tendency; not even a third of the present cases have the tuberosus form of the

disease. The numbers of each type among these cases are: *tuberosa*, 7; mixed, 3 (total 10); and *maculo-anaesthetica*, 24.

In the seven years since 1924, there were diagnosed in Finland a total of 22 new cases, of whom 10 were men and 12 were women. Seven had died by the date of the census. Eleven of these new cases were *lepra tuberosa* (4 men and 7 women), and 11 were *lepra maculo-anaesthetica* (6 men and 5 women). Several of these individuals had been ill for several years before the disease was recognized. One man, for instance, dated his disease from 1910, and another from 1916.



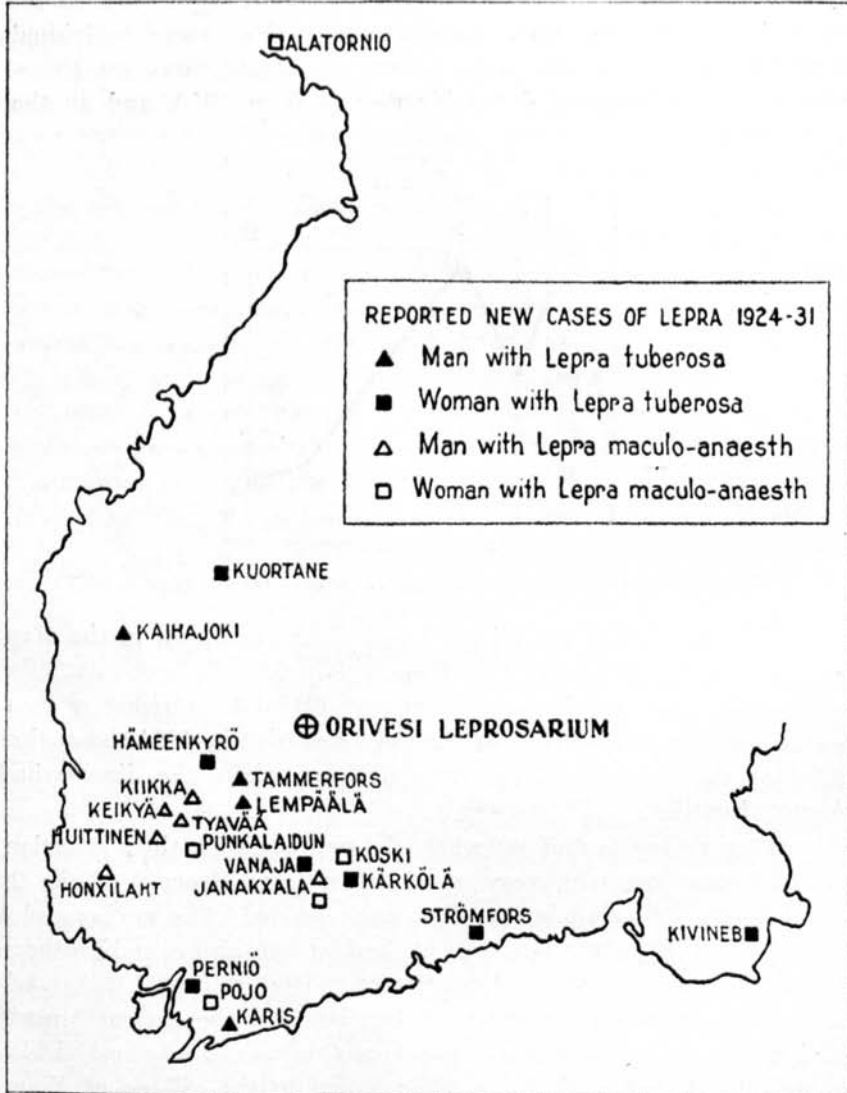
TEXT-FIG. 3.—Cases of *lepra tuberosa*, in percentages of all cases

The domiciles of the reported new cases are shown in the map-sketch herewith (Text-fig. 4). From this it is to be seen that most of the new cases originate in southwest Finland. Further, a comparison with a similar map of the cases recorded in 1924 shows that most of the new ones came from parishes where the disease had occurred earlier.

When trying to find out where the new cases got their infection, we of course met with very great difficulties. From 8 of the 22 patients the following information was obtained: The mothers of 4 of them were leprosy. Two patients had leprosy sisters and brothers. One had been married to a leprosy man. The brother of the grandfather of one of the patients was leprosy, and the patient himself had grown up on the same farm where this man lived; he had also come into contact with three other leprosy in the village of Wamala. Further, it must be mentioned that the father of one of the patients in question was born in a parish (Kärkölä) in which num-

erous cases of leprosy have occurred, and that one of the lepers had a leprous son.

Of the reported new lepers 11 were or had been married. As far as we know these patients had had a total of 48 children, of whom 35 are still alive.



TEXT-FIG. 4.—Sketch map showing locations of new cases of leprosy recorded in Finland, 1924-31

From what has been said above, it appears that leprosy in Finland since 1904 has displayed a downward tendency, that the number of cases in the country now amounts to only one-third of the number in 1904, and that there is prospect of a continued decrease of the frequency of the disease.

However, the fact that during the last few years a small number of new cases has been reported shows that the disease still smoulders here and there in the country. That in one-third of the cases discovered since 1924 the existence of a source of the disease in the family of the patient could be established is a circumstance which deserves attention.

There is no special leprosy law in Finland, and no possibility of confining a leprous individual against his will in a leprosarium. Consequently, it may be considered rather satisfactory that almost one-half of the lepers in the country were under treatment in the leprosarium of Orivesi in 1931. Meanwhile the medical authorities ought to endeavour earnestly, as far as it lies in their power, to induce all the *lepra tuberosa* patients who are living at home—at present five in number—to enter the leprosarium. Legal measures ought, in my opinion, to be avoided; but yet I think that much could be done with money, for all lepers in Finland are poor and their conditions of life are of the hardest.

REFERENCE

- (1) CEDERCREUTZ, AXEL: Spetälskans förekomst i Finland. *Finska Läk. sällsk. Hdl.* (1925) 143.