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THE HISTORY OF THE ANTILEPROSY EFFORT IN IZMAILSHCHINA¹

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We have found no reliable information in the literature about the time of the appearance of leprosy in Izmailshchina, which was part of the former province of Bessarabia, lying along the Danube. There are differing opinions on this point. It would appear that the disease penetrated into this area in different ways.

A possible source of infection for Izmailshchina was the thriving Danube shipping trade, which had existed from the earliest times, with leprosy-endemic countries on the shores of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. It is also quite possible that leprosy was introduced from the former principalities of Walachia and from heavily-infected Moldavia (now Rumania), which up to the thirteenth century were part of the Byzantine empire.

According to the surgeon Mariya Stepanovna Nacheva, who worked in Izmailshchina from 1898 to 1951, leprosy was carried there by fishermen from Turkey where it was endemic. When the fishing in the Danube was bad, fishermen from the commercial part of Vilkovo used to go to Turkey to fish, and they picked up leprosy there. Thus, a fisherman from Vilkovo, S. I. Bulavin, built a small cottage on the outskirts of Constantinople in 1901 and went there every year to fish; he subsequently contracted leprosy.

In our literature there is only a little documented information about the incidence of leprosy and the organization of the antileprosy effort in the province of Bessarabia. K. K. Degio, in his work "Leprosy past and present and the fight against it," notes that in the Balkan peninsula leprosy is encountered along the Danube, particularly in Rumania and in Eastern Rumelia. N. M. Baluyev, in his article "The campaign against leprosy in pre-revolutionary Russia" (1946), points out that "a leprosarium with 36 beds was opened in 1909 in the province of Bessarabia, 6 kilometers from Izmail." At the All-Union Conference of Leprologists, held in 1949, L. Ya. Klopenko stated that the main

¹Translation, supplied by Dr. J. Ross Innes, of an article from *Collected Works in Leprology and Dermatology (Sbornik Nauchnykh Rabot po Leprologii i Dermatologii)* No. 12. Rostov University Press, 1959, pp. 86-89.

Note: "Izmailshchina" (according to J.R.I.) is the general area of Izmail, Ukraine.

group of leprosy cases registered in the Ukraine since 1930 was in the Izmail and Odessa oblasts. In his work "Leprosy in the Ukraine" (1957), N. A. Torsuyev sets out more detailed information about the incidence of leprosy, beginning with the year 1889, in the former province of Bessarabia.

Without pretending to give a full account, we consider it not without interest to supplement the above-mentioned information with material about the antileprosy activity in Izmailshchina made available to us by M. S. Nacheva, already mentioned—the wife and close professional associate of Dmitry Rodionovich Nachev, who played a leading role in the matter. Nachev was born in 1848 in Bolgrad. After completing his medical studies at Würzburg University and a year's work in Rumania, he was appointed chief doctor of the Bolgrad Zemstvo hospital² in 1878. For the first time, Nachev registered and hospitalized a leprosy patient from Vilkovo in the Bolgrad hospital. Furthermore, he gave outpatient treatment to leprosy victims.

For ten years Nachev conducted a correspondence with the then Directorate of the Chief Medical Inspectorate in St. Petersburg, asking for permission and a grant to open a refuge for leprosy patients. Having received no affirmative reply, he decided to set up a refuge at his own expense. The Izmail town council, however, afraid that leprosy would be brought into the town, refused to allow a site in the town for the construction of accommodations for the patients.

Nachev devoted a great deal of attention to finding out the extent of the disease. To do this he went out to the endemic leprosy foci together with his wife, M. S. Nacheva, who was appointed surgeon in the Bolgrad hospital in 1898. They visited the area of the Petropavlovsk monastery on Peschanyi Island (near the commercial district of Vilkovo), Muralevka village, and the commercial district³ of Vilkovo. Here, in small filthy hovels built by their relatives, the victims of leprosy—mostly of the lepromatous type—dragged out their miserable existence. During this trip 17 leprosy sufferers were found.

One should note at this point that leprosy in Izmailshchina ran in families. Thus, in the families of fishermen Serpionov and Sidorushkin there were three cases each, and in the families of Krepakov and Goncharov five cases each, and so on. The endemic leprosy foci in Izmailshchina were: the villages of Novaya and Staraya Nekrasovka, Safyany, Utkosonovka, Pershotravnevo (Acanaspaga), Primorskoye (Zhebriyany), Kislitsa, Kayrakliya, the town of Kiliya, and the commercial district of Vilkovo.

In 1905 Nachev took part in conferences on leprosy in Berlin and

²Zemstvo = rural self-government in pre-revolutionary Russia.—J.R.I.

³Russian "posad," the commercial and industrial district of a town, outside the walls in ancient times.—J.R.I.

Constantinople, where he showed photographs of patients. In 1908 he retired from his post in Bolgrad because of illness, and went to live in Izmail, where he died in 1910.

After his death his wife, the surgeon M. S. Nacheva, continued the campaign against leprosy in Izmailshchina. In 1914 the Izmail town council set aside a plot of ground of 10 hectares, 8 kilometers from Izmail and 6 from the village of Larzhanka, for the construction of accommodations for 15 leprosy cases; but it made no financial provision for the patients' food. Then Nacheva, in her capacity as chairman of the Izmail area Red Cross, turned for help to the Chief Directorate of the Russian Red Cross (St. Petersburg), which, with the aim of protecting military units from leprosy infection, in 1916 allocated 5,000 roubles for the construction of barracks as a refuge for leprosy cases. At first accommodations were provided for 15 beds, and then for 25.

As a result of the energetic activity of Mariya Stepanovna Nacheva, 14,000 roubles were collected from the people of Izmail, and she was able to obtain the building materials free. Built of pisé bricks, with a stone foundation and a tiled roof, the building consisted of 11 rooms: 9 for the men's and women's sections, the remaining two for a dining room and a provision store. Accommodations for a dispensary, kitchen and bath-house were built separately, and three rooms were provided for staff and for relatives visiting patients. Accommodations were also provided for stables, britzkas, sledges, carriages, a refrigeration room, and a mortuary.

The area surrounding the refuge was planted with acacias and fruit trees, surrounded by a ditch, and enclosed by wire. The equipment came from disbanded Izmail hospitals, and medical supplies and bandages were provided by Chernogorgevich, a laboratory worker in the Serbian army. Mariya Stepanovna herself managed the hospital and gave medical treatment; there was no other medical staff. Whenever necessary, a doctor from Izmail was called in. Treatment was with chaulmoogra oil.

The refuge at Larzhanka was so well equipped that the Rumanians began to send their own leprosy cases there. By 1929 it contained 70 patients, of whom more were women than men. However, in 1929 the Rumanian Ministry of Health, in order not to have two leprosaria, disbanded the Larzhanka leprosarium and transferred all the patients to Ticilesti, near the town of Tulcea, Rumania. In 1940, after the liberation of Bessarabia by the Red Army, 45 patients, who had fled from the Ticilesti leprosarium, were temporarily isolated—on the instructions of the USSR Ministry of Health—in the village of Kayrakliya, 10 km. from Izmail, on the estate of the landowner Georgiou, and then sent to the Ukrainian leprosarium near the town of Smela.

The campaign against leprosy in Izmailshchina had a particular philanthropic character and began, as in all areas of Russia, in the

eighties of last century. On July 20, 1916, the Vice-Governor of Bessarabia approved a "charter of the society for the care of leprosy patients in the Izmail district of Bessarabia." In this charter it was laid down that "the aim of the society is to prevent the spread of leprosy in the Izmail district of Bessarabia by the provision of leprosaria where leprosy patients may find shelter and appropriate care." This society, supported by members' subscriptions and voluntary donations, was periodically convened by M. S. Nacheva. It was disbanded in November 1919.

At the present time the leprosy foci in Izmailshchina are becoming extinct, and only isolated cases of infection occur. This is due to the growing material well-being of the Soviet people, the improvement in their living conditions, and the wide medical and preventive measures that have been taken. The Nachevs played no small part in reducing the incidence of leprosy in Izmailshchina. The memory of Dmitry Rodionovich—the initiator and organizer of the antileprosy effort in that region—and of Mariya Stepanovna, still in good health after having given 50 years of her life in the continuous service of her patients, should be preserved in the history of leprology in our country.