

## On the history of national medicine: Vasily Parmenovich Obratsov (1851–1920)

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In this article, the authors discuss the main points of life of V.P. Obratsov – a general practitioner from Kiev, one of the fathers of national medicine. While eliminating errors, inaccuracies, fables, and speculations, the authors attempt to create his scientific biography on the basis of numerous archival documents and a critical overview of the sources of literature. V.P. Obratsov is viewed as one of Russia’s three leading clinicians (alongside with V.N. Sirotinin and V.D. Shervinsky). Another aim of the article is to specify the nature of the main scientific priorities (the deep sliding palpation of abdominal cavity organs method development; the description of clinical aspects and diagnostic criteria of acute coronary thrombosis that laid the foundation for the modern understanding of myocardial infarction). Beyond that, one of the major academic achievements, i.e. the creation of a unique clinical school, the most influential in Russia (together with M.V. Yanovskiy’s school in Saint Petersburg) is examined. V.P. Obratsov’s role in organizing the first congresses of general practice in Russia is presented. The article shows the striking, complex and exceptionally attractive individuality of Vasily Parmenovich, his unconventional life journey that ended tragically. The authors demonstrate that V.P. Obratsov was the most important figure in the history of national internal medicine after S.P. Botkin.

**Keywords:** *V.P. Obratsov, congresses of general practice in Russia, internal diseases therapy, physicians’ elite, scientific schools, methodical palpation, myocardial infarction*

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### Introduction

Clinical medicine in Russia in the early 20th century is characterized by the formation of the first therapeutic elite as a single institution. The congresses of Russian therapists played an

exceptional role in this. It was at the first five pre-war congresses (Moscow–Saint Petersburg–Kiev, 1909–1913) that the elite acquired explicit features. The first congress of therapists took place in Moscow in late December 1909. Its

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organisation was directed by V.D. Shervinsky, V.N. Sirotinin was elected as a chairman, the scientific leader was V.P. Obratsov. Summarizing the results of their collective scientific work, V.N. Sirotinin concluded that “the championship belongs to Kiev, then Saint Petersburg and Moscow” [1]. The participants of the congress understood that they had in mind primarily the clinic of V.P. Obratsov in Imperial University of St. Vladimir, V.N. Sirotinin in the Military Medical Academy (VMA) and V.D. Shervinsky — L.E. Golubinin in Imperial Moscow University (IMU). Later the opinion of the leading Soviet therapists was expressed by D.D. Pletnev — one of the leaders of the clinic of internal diseases in the USSR in the 1920—1930s: “Besides Zakharyin, Botkin and Ostroumov, there are many talented clinicians who have their place in the history of Russian medicine. <...> The recently deceased Kiev clinician, who can be considered the creator of methodical palpation as a diagnostic method, V.P. Obratsov is especially bright” [2, p. 6].

However, despite the undoubted scientific leadership of V.P. Obratsov and the presence of extensive literature dedicated to him, starting with the memorial article of N.D. Strazhesko [3], there is no monograph or dissertational study, in which his life and activities have been comprehensively assessed and recorded. The charismatic and very complex personality of a doctor, scientist and teacher is presented in the literature in a one-sided and unreliable manner, based largely on hearsay and conjecture. The scientific biography of V.P. Obratsov has to be written anew, using archival documents (those already known to the scientific community, and introduced into scientific circulation) as sources, and the memoirs of contemporaries.

### **The beginning of the journey**

The biography of V.P. Obratsov starts with a mystery, beginning with the date and place of his birth. The students, the authors of the jubilee book devoted to him (1947), do not mention this [4]. The main biographer of the scientist, A.Ya. Gubergrits, argued that V.P. Obratsov “was born on January 12th, 1851 (January 1, 1851 according to the old style)” [5]. His biographer-researcher V.P. Brevnov, based on the documents of the State Archives of the Vologda Oblast and the testimonies of his relatives, the descendants

of Parmen Obratsov, specified the place of his birth — as Popovka a village in the Khrenovskoy volost of Vologda County [6]. However (given the difference between the old and new style), V.P. Obratsov was born on the 12th and not on the 13th January 1851 — in the modern encyclopaedic note 01 (13). 01.1851.<sup>1</sup> Popovka village is not mentioned in the lists of the Khrenovskoy volost of the Vologda district. In the parish records of the Vasilyevskaya Toshinskaya church (part 1, No. 1)<sup>2</sup> it is stated that Vasily, the son of Parmen Ivanovich Obratsov, the priest of the church, was born and baptized on January 1st, 1851. One can assume that his father baptized him in the church, which was in that same village. It should therefore be stated that Vasily Obratsov was born in the village of Vasilyevskoye on Tosno (in popular speech Popovka) in the Vologda district of the Vologda province (the church, like the village, was preserved no longer exists).

According to (Communist) ideological guidelines, Soviet historiographers who wrote about V.P. Obratsov's childhood, sought to highlight the impoverished life of the family of a poor priest, Parmen Obratsov. However, the parish of Vasilyevskaya on Tosno Church included 14 settlements, including the municipality of Hrenovo. Vasilyevskaya church which belonged to the estate, and included haymaking and arable land and “two tithes for the pasture of livestock”; the church held a church fate annually. Obviously, the priest's family had wealth. Vasily Obratsov was taught by his aunt, (who baked the communion bread) and his father to read and write [7, VII]. After graduating from a rural school and the Vologda Ecclesiastical School, in 1866, V.P. Obratsov entered the Vologda Theological Seminary, where he was among the best students.

In 1870, Vasily Obratsov graduated from the 4th class of the seminary, went to Saint Petersburg and entered the Medical and Surgical Academy. Among his teachers were the famous Russian specialists — surgeon N.V. Sklifosovsky, therapists S.P. Botkin and E.E. Eichwald. In his student years Vasily earned his living by singing in a church choir (he had a beautiful tenor). However,

<sup>1</sup> The literature also erroneously indicates 1850 and 1849.

<sup>2</sup> Certificate of Birth No. 4508. Russian State Military Historical Archive. F. 316. Op. 63. D. 4410 (student's case).

there was not enough money, and at senior courses at the request of V.P. Obratsov Vologda province zemstvo enrolled him in a fellowship. He studied well, but he joined the revolutionary group of the Narodniks,<sup>3</sup> and came to the notice of the secret police. The story is that he even participated in an attempted assault on a police colonel: he spotted the owner of a magnificent trotter carriage, whereupon he fled from the police along with the terrorists. There was no evidence to charge Obratsov with criminal liability, but the traces of his “fighting youth” were kept in the police “memory” files and later interfered with his career.

V.P. Obratsov was one of the first to graduate with honours from the academic course (1875) and received an offer to stay on at any theoretical or clinical department (without a scholarship). However, he chose his specialty as surgery and, fulfilling his obligation to the Vologda zemstvo, left to take up a position as a doctor in Veliky Ustyug. Here he successfully practiced and gained credibility as an enterprising and energetic, competent and demanding public doctor, engaged in all the relevant areas of public health. A year later, the Zemsky Assembly expressed its gratitude to him and issued a prize (300 rubles) [6].

In the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878, V.P. Obratsov, as evidenced by his track record, was “in the Principality of Romanian from November 11, 1877 to November 18, 1878”, i.e. was officially considered a participant in the fighting (serving as a battalion physician in the Oltenitsko-Kalarash detachment). From December 13th, 1877 to January 12th, 1878, he was “against the fortress of Silistria”, and from January 27th to August 28th, 1878 — “crossing the Danube in the town of Zimnitsa”,<sup>4</sup> where several temporary military hospitals and infirmaries were concentrated. Perhaps, it was then that the young military doctor got acquainted with the

commander of the infantry division, General M.I. Dragomirov (later chief of the General Staff, then — commander of the Kiev Military District), who played an important role in his career.

During the next stage of his medical activities, V.P. Obratsov was no longer a surgeon, or a therapist, but a theorist of medicine. Having accumulated a thousand gold rubles for military service abroad, he went to Germany, and in Breslau he took up a position with a professor of pathology E. Ponfica. In his laboratory, he began experimental studies on the morphology of blood and bone marrow hematopoies in animals that ended in Saint Petersburg at the Department of Histology of the Medico-Surgical Academy with Professor F.N. Zavarykina (the money ran out — and to continue the work, V.P. Obratsov needed a scholarship). His viva defense of the thesis “To the morphology of blood in the bone marrow of mammals” [9] was held in 1880 and was met with exceptional success. Based on the results of flawlessly performed studies (in accordance with the methodological capabilities of the time), V.P. Obratsov first formulated a hypothesis about the unity of the origin of all cellular elements of the blood (“protolukocytes are the initial elements for all marrow structures”). After defending his thesis, he received an offer to stay with the academy to prepare for the professorship of histology. However, V.P. Obratsov saw himself as a clinician, and the financial situation was weighted in favor of medical practice. He refused a flattering academic proposal and, at the end of September 1880, was appointed by the defence ministry to Kiev to accept a post in the therapeutic department of the Kiev military hospital (there were no vacant posts in the surgical departments of the hospitals). The new appointment met his desire to work in a university city, where there was the opportunity for clinical and scientific growth.

### Maturity

With energy, straightforwardness and directness of speech, the new resident (that was the name of the post of director at that time) made order in the department entrusted to him. His abilities and whirlwind of energetic activity did not go unnoticed. In January 1884, V.P. Obratsov was the first in the list of doctors of the Kiev hospital, whom the leadership recommended

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<sup>3</sup> A. Ya. Gubergrits in the pamphlet “V.P. Obratsov”, referring to the memories of N.D. Strazhesko and M.M. Gubergrits, points out that the student Obratsov “adjoined the circle of Chaikovsky, and then moved to the society ‘Earth and Freedom’” [8, p. 6]. Here is an obvious problem, since “Earth and Freedom” resumed its activity only in 1876, and Obratsov graduated from the academic course in 1875.

<sup>4</sup> Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.546. Op. 2. D. 1635. L. 7–8.

“to send abroad for scientific purposes for public account”.<sup>5</sup>

The main threats to public health at that time were epidemics of cholera, dysentery and other infectious diseases. On December 19, 1881, at a meeting of the Kiev Medical Society, the young military doctor, V.P. Obratsov made a report on dysentery. In 1882, his article titled “On the Treatment of Dysentery” was published in the “Weekly Clinical Newspaper”, and in 1905 was included in the publication of his selected works “To Physical Investigation of the Gastrointestinal Canal and Heart” [10] and later entered in “Selected Works” [11].

While working in the hospital, V.P. Obratsov became a participant in a significant event for the history of Russian clinics. In May 1883, a 45-year-old official entered the office, a “drinker and, perhaps, a syphilitic”. V.P. Obratsov described this case as follows: “Since the beginning of 1883, frequent seizures of chest pain and gastralgia. The day before death, severe pain behind the sternum and painful propping up the spoon with nausea and vomiting. I saw him about 5 hours from the start of the attack. The patient was fully conscious, but blue, cold, with a barely palpable pulse. 26 hours after the start of the attack, exitus. Arrived at the consultation at the time of death, the late prof. Mehring, on the basis of the type of patient and my story, recognized in this case a thrombosis of the coronary artery of the heart” [12].<sup>6</sup> Here we are talking about one of the first (if not the first) in Russia intravital diagnosis of myocardial infarction, delivered by an outstanding Kiev doctor – Professor F.F. Mehring.

V.P. Obratsov’s military service in the Kiev hospital was short-lived. According to the memoirs of N.D. Strazhesko, “having received the management of the therapeutic department of the military hospital, V.P. Obratsov first of all drew attention to strange orders, which then reigned here. He, who had been abroad and had seen how they were being treated and how the patients were kept, showed a bad job at the Kiev military hospital. Not being reconciled with various disgraces, he rather rectilinearly opposed the orders in the military hospital and

armed himself with the head of the hospital...” [3, p. 12]. However, the documents of the Military Historical Archive indicate another reason for V.P. Obratsov’s departure from military service. Here is an excerpt from the document we found, signed by the district military medical inspector: “It is very secret. On December 10, 1884, the commander of the Kiev Military District, Adjutant General Drentel<sup>7</sup>, in my personal meeting with him, asked me to transfer the younger resident of the Kiev military hospital Obratsov to another hospital, since Obratsov has very close acquaintances in Kiev with persons unreliable politically, although he, under the strictest supervision of him, does not notice any crime of a political nature. I have agreed to such a transfer”.<sup>8</sup> At that time, three residents of the Minsk hospital did not have a doctorate in medicine. It was decided to move one of them to the regiment, and in its place to transfer Obratsov.<sup>9</sup> In December 1884, V.P. Obratsov was instructed to transfer to the Minsk military hospital. Compared with Kiev, a major trading and cultural and scientific center, Minsk was considered a backwater, so the new appointment could be considered a downgrading. Obratsov’s reaction was immediate: he did not go to Minsk, and filed a report on his dismissal because of “upset domestic circumstances”.<sup>10</sup> In July 1885, he left military service [13] and engaged in private practice.

Talented, experienced, attentive to his patients (according to recollections of his contemporaries, always gentle and unhurried when examining any patient), V.P. Obratsov quickly succeeded in private practice and in the second half of the 1880s became very popular in the city as a doctor with a good income. Over time, he acquired a mansion, servants, and an expensive equipage (carriage), and his own box at the theatre. In 1877, he married a beautiful woman from a merchant family Alexandra Alexandrovna

<sup>7</sup> Correctly – Drenteln Aleksandr Romanovich (1820–1888), at that time the Kiev, Podolsk and Volyn governor-general; before that – in 1878–1880. – chief of the gendarmes and head of the Third Department.

<sup>8</sup> Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.546. Op. 2. D. 1562. L. 62.

<sup>9</sup> Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.546. Op. 2. D. 1562. L. 63–65.

<sup>10</sup> Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.546. Op. 2. D. 1562. L. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA) F.546. Op. 2. D. 1475. L. 26; the trip did not take place

<sup>6</sup> For the same work, see [10, p. 291].



Gushchina, and in 1878 they had a daughter, Natalia. According to the Russian medical list, in 1880 A.A. Gushchina was awarded the title of “doctor for women and children’s illnesses” in the exam at the Women’s Medical Courses at the Mykolaiv Military Hospital, and at the beginning of the 20th century, she was registered in Kiev as “a female doctor. Freely practicing” (did not serve).<sup>11</sup>

In 1887, the Kiev City Duma announced an all-Russia contest for the position of resident head of the therapeutic department of the Kiev City Hospital Tsarevich Alexander (Alexandrovskaia City Hospital). V.P. Obratsov’s popularity as a private practitioner, and doctor of medicine, including among wealthy and influential people, was by then so great that the Duma decided in his favour. However, the state of the hospital was unsatisfactory. The therapeutic department was located in two dark, dirty, poorly ventilated barracks. There was no laboratory, and no means for its organization. The equipment had to be purchased at his own expense, and the new manager used his own money to buy two microscopes and the necessary reagents. V.P. Obratsov plunged headfirst into the work. His qualities of exceptional energy, dedication, and competence typical of his work as a doctor and organizer were of great use to him in these endeavours. Despite the difficulties, the Alexander Hospital acquired a reputation as a good medical institution: the patients spoke of it as a place in which any patient would want to be treated.

V.P. Obratsov received from the hospital a state apartment in which his family lived until 1895, when he bought a house at Yaroslav Val (another name – Bolshaya Podvalnaya Street), 5 [14]. It was a one-story wooden mansion with twelve rooms with a stone annexe and a mezzanine. A gifted person, and a noted bon vivant, V.P. Obratsov lived in grand style and tastefully, was an admirer of female beauty and a favourite of women, a hero of society gossip and tittle tattle, which did not impede his impressive and fruitful work rate. His professional interests were focused on diseases of the abdominal

organs, including those borderlines for therapists and surgeons, as well as infectious diseases – in these sections of clinical medicine he was considered a prominent specialist. V.P. Obratsov made presentations at the Society of Kiev Doctors (joined him in 1881) [15], at the Pirogov congresses, at the 12th International Congress of Physicians in Moscow, published articles in Russian and German journals. His pupils also presented reports and articles. Over time, under his leadership V.P. Obratsov’s department became the clinical base of the Department of Private Pathology and Therapy of the Medical Faculty, and his team gradually gained prominence in the medical world.

From the second half of the 1880s, V.P. Obratsov was engaged in the development of a new palpatory method for studying the gastrointestinal tract. In the first article on this subject, he put forward the thesis that, if certain methodological requirements are observed, each person can feel the stomach and individual parts of the intestinal tract not only in cases of their pathological changes, but also in their normal state [16]. The origin of the idea and the method itself was due to the observations of V.P. Obratsov. In November 1886, he was approached by an elderly retired official, who had suffered for a long time with constant constipation and painful sensations in the abdomen. Investigating the abdomen of a patient who was in a horizontal position, V.P. Obratsov felt along the median line “three fingers below the navel” transverse colon in the form of a thick movable cylinder, other parts of the colon were also palpably palpated. Ten days later, with the same result, he examined a schoolboy suffering from diarrhea.

The idea of using deep palpation for the recognition of pathology of the abdominal cavity belongs to the French physician F. Glenard, who developed the theory of enteroptosis (1885), pointed to the principle possibility of palpation of the large intestine and suggested a technique for probing its individual parts and stomach. In his opinion, palpation can be applied only to pathologically altered organs of the abdominal cavity. V.P. Obratsov in his studies went from studying the norm to studying pathology, observing an indispensable methodological requirement: the axis of the palpating hand should be perpendicular to the axis of the cylinder

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<sup>11</sup> A.A. Obratsova, born Gushchina (1853–1916), appears in all issues of the Russian medical list: since 1883 in the “List of doctors for women and children’s illnesses”, and from 1890 to 1916 – in the “Alphabetical list of female doctors”.

of the intestinal tube, and the fingers should slide in the same transverse direction. Together with his students, he led the way in the development of a palpation diagnosis of diseases of the abdominal cavity organs, but only in the first decade of the 20th century, confirmed by contrast radiographic studies, did the method of deep sliding (methodological) palpation become established decisively as part of clinical practice. The most important role was played by F.O. Hausmann. The Baltic German Fyodor (Theodor) Oskarovich Hausmann was born in Russia in 1868. In 1894 he graduated from the University of Dorpat, worked as a military and practicing physician in Russia, as an anatomist in Germany, in particular, as a supernumerary assistant at the Berlin clinic of the founder of gastroenterology K. Ewald (1901–1902). After reading the first publication of V.P. Obratsov, he proceeded to a systematic study of the diagnostic capabilities of deep-seated palpation, enriched the method with important techniques, which gave him a scientific physiological justification, conducted clinical and radiographic comparisons, described in detail in his publications in German and Russian and actively promoted it in Germany at medical conventions and special courses for doctors in Munich and Berlin. In 1910, F. Hausmann published a monograph in German [17], and in 1912 it appeared in the Moscow edition of “Fundamentals of methodical palpation of the gastrointestinal tract”, in which the author pointed out: “a method I call ‘topographic sliding deep palpation’”.

N.D. Strazhesko and other students of V.P. Obratsov perfected individual methods of palpation, specified specific questions of the technique, and promoted his popularization among domestic doctors. This method has rightly entered the European, and then domestic clinical practice as palpation for Glenard-Obratsov-Hausmann (or Obratsov-Hausmann) [18].

A mastery of the technique of methodical palpation and further development of the method became a distinctive feature of the clinical school

of V.P. Obratsov. Of course, the widespread introduction of diagnostic methods into modern clinical practice, in particular ultrasound, changed the situation, pushing the methods of direct research, including methodological palpation, into the background, but they played their historical role and remain useful if the doctor cannot use instrumental methods of diagnosis.

Since 1885, V.P. Obratsov repeatedly made attempts to obtain permission to read private-docent lectures on diseases of the digestive tract at the University of St. Vladimir (as a doctor of medicine, he had the right to do this). However, all of them were unsuccessful because of “extreme political unreliability” doctor of medicine V.P. Obratsov and his wife, doctor A.A. Gushchina had gained a reputation as free thinkers [5, p. 11–15]. Permission to read the private-docent course of lectures at the Department of Medical Diagnostics, which was headed by Professor F.A. Lesch,<sup>12</sup> was received by V.P. Obratsov only in January 1891<sup>13</sup> (by then he was already forty years old) – thanks to a grateful patient, the famous General M.I. Dragomirov. The friendly patronage of the adjutant general played a decisive role in the further university career of the scientist: notwithstanding his pressure on the Minister of Public Education, V.P. Obratsov could take the post of extraordinary professor at the faculty of private pathology and therapy that became vacant in 1893 [5, p. 14–15]. His long-awaited teaching and research career as a university professor had begun. His course was planned as a theoretical one, and V.P. Obratsov, who did not have any speaking skills, was not a success lecturing to undergraduates. However, on Sundays he read clinical lectures on the analysis of patients to groups of senior students and doctors of on the staff of the Alexander Hospital, whose



Fig. 1. V.P. Obratsov (1890s).

<sup>12</sup> Fedor (Ferdinand) Lesch entered the history of medicine as the discoverer (1875) of the causative agent of intestinal amoebiasis (amoebic dysentery).

<sup>13</sup> The service record of V.P. Obratsov. The State Archives of Kiev. F. 16. Op. 465. D. 4803. L. 38–58.

therapeutic department was in charge (re-elected by the city Duma every five years) before moving to the department of faculty therapy. These he conducted masterfully (Figure 1).

V.P. Obratsov's records note that on May 13, 1902, he was approved as an ordinary professor, and on October 31st, 1903 transferred to the department of the therapeutic faculty clinic – the medical faculty unanimously supported his candidacy.<sup>14</sup> Faculty therapy was the leading therapeutic department of the University [19, p. 60–62]. In the faculty clinic of the University of St. Vladimir under the leadership of V.P. Obratsov formed the third scientific center of domestic therapy (along with the Military-Medical Academy in Saint Petersburg and the Medical Faculty of the Imperial University of Moscow). As an innovator, V.P. Obratsov successfully and tirelessly worked in such scientific areas of clinical medicine, which later became the fields of gastroenterology and cardiology. According to many contemporaries, he was undoubtedly the most notable representative of the therapeutic sciences after Botkin, Zakharin and Ostroumov.

In its educational and scientific work, the faculty clinic adhered to the Botkin approach. Instructing students and students, the professor said that when making a diagnosis, the clinician should be like a watchmaker: the clock stopped working and the watchmaker opened the mechanism up, armed himself with a magnifying glass, looked at the mechanism and said that such and such a cog had deteriorated, and it was necessary to replace it. V.P. Obratsov, of course, used the anamnestic method, but much more economically than Zakharin, and often after examining the patient. Obratsov's attitude to the utility of the therapy of that time, that it was only empirical in the involuntary sense and most unsatisfactory for an analytically thinking physician, is demonstrated by the phrase that many of his lectures traditionally ended, always devoted to a careful clinical analysis with a diagnosis delivered in a masterly manner thus: "We'll talk about treatment next time". In doing

so, he successfully treated his patients, using mainly natural healing factors, general preventive treatment measures (a regime of work and rest, a healthy diet, etc.), psychotherapeutic effects, and simple and proven medicines from medications.

Extraordinarily observant, with impeccable logic of scientific thinking and exceptional medical intuition, wide general medical training, professional knowledge of surgery and a special interest in the issues of borderline pathologies of the abdominal cavity, V.P. Obratsov was an indispensable participant in medical consultation, when in difficult cases the question of the possibility and feasibility of surgical intervention was decided. V.P. Obratsov was one of the first in the field of domestic medicine to describe and classify appendicitis and its forms [20]. He was the first in the domestic literature to present the semiotic characterization of enteritis as an independent disease, separating it from colitis. Applying his method of palpation, he enriched the clinical diagnosis of typhoid fever with two symptoms – thickening and painful sensitivity of the ileum and an increase in the mesenteric glands (report at the 5th Pirogov Congress, 1893) [21]. The index of exceptional diagnostic skills of V.P. Obratsov can serve the intravital (confirmed in the section) diagnosis of hernia of hernia – obstruction of the intestine due to infringement of the loop of the small intestine in the hernial sac (in hard confrontation with surgeons and pathologists). His report on this issue at the Second Congress of Russian Therapists (Saint Petersburg, 1910) was met with great interest, since in the world literature this was only the fourth case of intravital diagnosis of a rare disease<sup>15</sup> and its first accurate clinical description.

He was a model natural scientist and reflecting on the problems of clinical medicine and approaches to their solution when he asked the "eternal question" – "What is medicine-science or art?" – answered: "Medicine is a science that requires high art" In his medical activities, he pursued a natural-scientific, functional, clinical-experimental way – the same as S.P. Botkin,

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<sup>14</sup> Figures in the literature (N.D. Strazhesko, A.Ya. Gubergrits and others) information that V.P. Obratsov became an ordinary professor in 1903, and head of faculty therapy in 1904, – are mistaken.

<sup>15</sup> The student of Obratsov M.M. Gubergrits in the above essay, p. 46, claimed that the lifetime diagnosis of his teacher was "the third in the world literature", but the author himself in the article "To recognize the hernia of Treitz cited three cases known from the literature: see [11, p. 148].

therefore, he is called a pupil of Botkin, a representative of the scientific school of that great clinician.<sup>16</sup> But in the 20th century those who followed in the footsteps of S.P. Botkin was the whole therapeutic elite: many followed the path that he had laid out, as his followers, not students – but representatives of his clinical school.

A characteristic feature of the development of clinical medicine in the early 20th century was the formation of a functional direction. The functional approach of V.P. Obratsov to the problems of pathology can be traced throughout his creative life. In particular, he was interested in the problem of the origin and spread of pain, to which is devoted his special study “On the transfer (pain) of pain in the abdominal cavity” (1900). Later he applied a functional approach to the characterization of the pain syndrome in various forms of the angina pectoris (report at the Third Congress of Russian Therapists, 1911) and the development of the neurosis of the heart (1912). To carry out dissertation research V.P. Obratsov sent his staff to experimental laboratories, including I.P. Pavlov, who worked with his leading disciples, N.D. Strazhesko, A.Z. Bylina, and M.M. Gubergrits.

As an outstanding exponent of the method of direct examination of the patient, V.P. Obratsov saw that the transformation of diagnostics was unavoidable on the basis of the application of new instrumental and laboratory methods that made it possible to assess the functional state of the affected organ. V.P. Obratsov’s clinic was one of the first clinics in Russia to begin to participate in the development and testing of new methods of laboratory-instrumental diagnostics. In 1901, he sent N.D. Strazhesko in the leading Paris clinic P.K.E. Poten,<sup>17</sup> to master the method of simultaneous recording of the curves of the arterial and venous pulse and apical impulse and learn how to record the rhythm of the canter. When electrocardiography appeared as a method of clinical diagnosis, V.P. Obratsov acquired electrocardiography as a method of clinical diagnosis, V.P. Obratsov purchased an electrocardiograph and suggested

that M.M. Gubergrits mastered the new method, having worked (1912–1913) in the Berlin clinic F. Kraus. The results of M.M. Gubergrits were reported at the 5th congress of Russian therapists (Heart Gallops and Electrocardiography, 1913), and his general work *Physiological Principles of Electrocardiography and Its Clinical Significance* was published in 1916 in the journal *The Russian Physician*. By the same time, the report of M.M. Gubergrits “The Most Common Methods for Determining Blood Pressure” at the Fourth Congress of Russian Therapists (1912) and the study of N.D. Strazhesko “On the clinical significance of the definition of blood pressure” (1913). A report at the 4th Congress of Russian Therapists of another pupil of V.P. Obratsov – F.A. Udintsev – was devoted to the clinical significance of the determination of venous pressure. In the faculty clinic, an X-ray room was organized (X-ray studies were conducted by a privat-docent professor without tenure E.K. Veber), methods were developed for the functional diagnostics of the pathology of the pancreas, liver and kidneys (A.E. Bylina, V.N. Mikhailov, etc.).

One of the brightest pages in the history of Russian cardiology is the first detailed description of the thrombosis of the coronary artery of the heart and the clinical criteria for its diagnosis, which laid the foundation for the modern doctrine of myocardial infarction. At the First Congress of Russian Therapists (1909), V.P. Obratsov made a report “To symptomatology and diagnosis of thrombosis of the coronary arteries of the heart”, prepared jointly with the privat-docent of his department, N.D. Strazhesko. Based on a number of clinical observations (in three cases with fatal outcome and sectional confirmation of the diagnosis), the report described the main symptoms (sudden onset, chest pain with typical irradiation, barely palpable heart beat and peripheral pulse, deaf heart sounds, “galloping rhythm” and others) and leading syndromes (anginal status, asthmatic status, pseudostralgia, acute weakness of the heart) acute myocardial infarction; the basic criteria of differential diagnosis of thrombosis and uncomplicated angina pectoris are indicated. This work was published in Russian and German in 1910 [20], two years earlier than a similar article by American therapist J.B. Herrick (in the

<sup>16</sup> Such an assessment is characteristic of both Soviet medical historians and clinicians: see, for example, [22, p. 532; 23, p. 135].

<sup>17</sup> Shortly before this Poten passed away.



English-language literature it is customary to consider him the founder of the modern doctrine of myocardial infarction). However, in the Soviet historical medical and therapeutic literature the following formulation was adopted: Obratstov and Strazhesko (or even “Strazhesko together with his teacher Obratstov”) “for the first time in the history of medicine, he was diagnosed lifetime with thrombosis of the coronary arteries of the heart”.<sup>18</sup> No one was embarrassed by the explanation, which in the report was given by V.P. Obratstov: in a certain case, described by the German doctor A. Hammer (1878), “the diagnosis was made during life and was confirmed by autopsy” [11, p. 296]. There were other cases of intravital diagnosis described in the literature. Note that the merit of V.P. Obratstov and N.D. Strazhesko, like J.B. Herrick, is not in intravital diagnoses, but that the classic description of the clinical picture of myocardial infarction given by the doctor gave the doctor the keys to his diagnosis.

Obratstov also had other major successes in studying the physiology and pathology of the heart and blood vessels. Thus, he used his method of listening directly to the patient’s heart with a doctor’s ear, and not just through a stethoscope, and completed (following P.K.E. Poter in France and L. Traube in Germany) the creation of the theory of the tripartite heart rhythm of the canter (1900–1902). In the opinion of M.M. Gubergrits, V.P. Obratstov was the first in Russia to listen to the rhythm of the galloping heart muscle, which he figuratively called “the cry of the heart for help.” In a series of studies, he and his colleagues indicated the features of the detection of this not only as a sound but also as a tactile phenomenon, gave a detailed description of its various forms, investigated their origin and emphasized the special clinical significance of the canter rhythm as a signal of severe damage to the heart muscle requiring urgent therapeutic measures. Their works enriched the doctrine of heart diseases: the features of the first tone were refined, the detailed characterization of the splitting and bifurcation of the first and second tones in physiological and pathological conditions, including the division of the first tone in the failure of aortic valves (the symptom of “Obratstov’s bisistolia”, 1908) a

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, [24, p. 24; 25, p. 195; 26, p. 26].

description of the tripartite “quail rhythm” with stenosis of the left atrioventricular orifice (in modern terminology – the “click of the opening of the mitral valve”), the doctrine of the normal third tone, which was formulated by V.P. Obratstov in the report to the Society of Doctors of Kiev (1918) and was further developed in the research of M.M. Gubergrits and his students. We stopped only at the main achievements of V.P. Obratstov – as a doctor and a scientist, and did not go into a special analysis of all of his scientific works (for example, those devoted to the treatment of dysentery, enteroptosis, purulent processes in the abdominal cavity, etc.).

### **Last years of life. Scientific school**

Active medical and scientific activities filled the life of V.P. Obratstov, but he had enough energy left over for noisy feasts with friends, and for amorous adventures. His students who witnessed the events of his life omit these memories. Witnesses of the events of his life, his students in their memories miss out these moments. In the address book “All Kiev” it is stated that in the first half of the 1880s, the Obratstovs (family) lived at Bolshaya Vladimirskaia Street (building 26), and in the first ten years of the 20th century – at Podvalnaya Street (building. 5). In this house, bought in the name of A.A. Obratstova, Professor V.P. Obratstov ran his surgery from 4–8pm and held a private reception for patients with internal diseases.<sup>19</sup> In 1910, he bought a luxurious mansion at 60 Fundukleyevskaya Street (now Bogdana Khmel'nitskogo Street, 60), after marrying for the second time.

The personal life of the famous physician changed after his acquaintance with the young (born in 1873), intelligent and charming princess Varvara Vladimirovna Chegodaeva, wife of Professor V.K. Lindemann and the mother of two children. V.P. Obratstov fell in love, the feeling turned out to be mutual. The stormy romance that followed led to a public scandal. Colleague V.P. Obratstov at the University of St. Vladimir, one of the most talented pupils of the founder of experimental cardiology in Russia and the Moscow school of pathologists A.B. Focht, 40-year-old Vladimir Karlovich Lindemann

<sup>19</sup> Kiev, the calendar for 1885 Kiev, 1884. With. 142; All of Kiev. Address and reference book (for 1904 and for 1908). Kiev, 1903 and 1908.

was a charismatic, strong personality, but at the same time an arrogant and ambitious man. In 1908, at a meeting of the university council, the well-known professor V.K. Lindeman threw a glove and called another well-known professor in Kiev a scoundrel – V.P. Obratstov. It was a challenge to a duel. V.P. Obratstov accepted it. They tried to hush up the scandal, but even the governor could not reconcile the duelists. In the Cadet Grove, where the participants of the duel arrived, the resourceful seconds managed to measure the steps so that the distance between the duelists was almost doubled. Lindeman demanded to reduce the distance. In view of the fact that all the seconds stated that previously stipulated conditions were not provided for, he refused to participate in the duel, as it had turned into a farce.

Varvara Vladimirovna divorced from V.K. Lindemann. In 1909, her and V.P. Obratstov's daughter Evgenia was born, and in 1911 – the son Vasily. It was a wonderful time for V.P. Obratstov: fascinating work, Russia wide medical and scientific glory, an expensive house, a beloved family, friends, numerous students (Figure 2). However, the marriage was purely civil. Only in 1916, after the death of A.A. Obratstova, were they able to formalize their relationship. Then, abandoning his inheritance, V.P. Obratstov presented a mansion on Bolshaya Podvalnaya street to his daughter Natalia from his first marriage

A witness to these events, was the daughter of a professor at the University of St. Vladimir A.D. Pavlovsky, an outstanding surgeon and bacteriologist, a classmate at the Medico-Surgical Academy and a friend of Obratstov, who was also one of his seconds during the aforementioned duel wrote: “The great doctor ... left his family and became unmarried to live with his young wife. Varvara was not a beauty seducer. She was a pretty, tiny woman, very modest and very kind, radiating some kind of quiet light. She gave birth to two children – our peers, Zhenya and Vasya, with whom we were friends, often in the mansion at Fundukleyevskaya, where the Obratstovs

lived. Before the revolution, this marriage was perceived by others, especially professorial wives, as scandalous, and they were no longer ‘accepted’ at home. Mom, a man of progressive views, began to be friends with them, to visit the house, to show themselves in the theater in their box, emphasizing their sympathy for this newly-born Anna Karenina”.<sup>20</sup>

Attacks of thoracic pain or stenocardia had become a problem for V.P. Obratstov since 1909. In 1912, N.D. Strazhesko at his request and for the first time conducted an examination which revealed high blood pressure, increased heart size and aortic changes. Later, there was an increased level of sugar in the blood. The professor complained of fatigue, felt that he was not coping, he was talking about an imminent end. The V.P. Obratstov literature dedicated to this issue is dominated by the view that at the age of 65 “he applied for resignation and, despite the protest of the council of the medical faculty, left his post”.<sup>21</sup> However, this contradicts his track record,<sup>22</sup> according

to which V.P. Obratstov left the department and clinic only in 1918. This is also evidenced by university reports. The decisive argument is V.P. Obratstov. April 8, 1918. N.D. Strazhesko filed a petition for his dismissal from the position of assistant chair of the faculty therapeutic clinic, on this statement, Obratstov's hand wrote: “For my part... I do not mind. Director of the therapeutic faculty clinic”.<sup>23</sup>



Fig. 2. V.P. Obratstov (1910s) [4].

<sup>20</sup> Memories of Ksenia Alexandrovna Pavlovskaya-Karysheva, the eldest daughter of Alexander Dmitrievich Pavlovsky, were processed and prepared for publication by her granddaughter – the professor of Moscow Medical Academy of Sechenov – Tatiana Dmitrievna Bolshakova (Donskaya), but were not published. The authors are grateful to Tatyana Dmitrievna for providing a copy of the fragment of the manuscript dedicated to V.P. Obratstov (personal archive of V.I. Borodulin).

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, [5, p. 22; 8, p. 25].

<sup>22</sup> The service record of Vasily Parmenovich Obratstov. State archives of Kiev. F. 16. Op. 465. D. 4803. L. 38–58.

<sup>23</sup> The petition of N.D. Strazhesko about the dismissal. State archives of Kiev. F. 16. Op. 479. D. 25. L. 1–2; [27].

Thus, 1918 can be called the final period in the teaching career of V.P. Obratsov [28, p. 6]. At that time he actively joined in scientific and public work, agreed to be chairman of the Kiev Society of Physicians; In the post-revolutionary period he was also elected chairman of the Union of Physicians.<sup>24</sup> His authority and perseverance in many cases helped to protect doctors, to find solutions in difficult situations that constantly arose during that very difficult time when, after the 1917 Revolution the Civil War began. The general lack of money and the reduction of private practice, led to a sharp deterioration in the financial position of the Obratsov family.

V.P. Obratsov, holder of the following honours; Actual State Councilor (1909), Honored Professor (1916), Knight of the Order of St. Vladimir of the 4th degree (1906), St. Vladimir third degree (1912) and St. Stanislav 1-st degree (1916) by this time was a sick old man. He did not accept the new reality of life during the Civil War with its seemingly endless changes of power (between 1917 and 1920 Kiev passed “from hand to hand” 14 times) and did not hide his views. We know that after the February Revolution, joint meetings of professors and students began “with the aim of establishing mutual relations in the new situation. Subsequently, students participating in these meetings contributed to the release of the Prof. V.P. Obratsov who had been arrested by the order of an Extraordinary Commission” [29, p. 90]. So the punitive machinery of the Soviet system had touched his life.

V.P. Obratsov suffered a haemorrhagic stroke (according to one source – in 1919, according to another – in the summer of 1920) [30]. After a while, the function of his hand was restored, he was able to walk, but his speech was lost. He was suffering heavily from his helpless condition. His wife; V.V. Obratsova had left with their children, apparently via Poland to Germany (we do not know, whether this was with the consent of the head of the family or not). Students (of those who had stayed in Kiev) managed to prevent his attempts to commit suicide. A.V. Krotkov, who for several years worked in the clinic of V.P. Obratsov as a non resident doctor recalled his last meeting with his former teacher: “...His hand, leg and speech were cut off. He lay for a

long time in bed, but later rose and began to walk a little. And once, walking along the street, I met leaning on a cane, in a short coat, similar to a quilted jacket, gray trousers, an old man. It was Obratsov. I say hello, he does not answer, but only nods and smiles woefully. I cannot stand it, I say goodbye and I run away. I have not seen him again” [31].

V.P. Obratsov could no longer accept patients, he did not have money for firewood and he did not have adequate food the luxurious mansion in which a lonely poor and sick old man lived was not heated). In December 1920, he contracted flu that was complicated by pneumonia. The students managed to place him in the private St. George’s Hospital, the best in Kiev at that time, where he spent the last days of his life. V.P. Obratsov died on December 14, 1920, shortly before his 70th birthday. He was buried in the cemetery of the Intercession Monastery.

Soviet Kiev, as it turned out after the death of V.P. Obratsov, recalled the old doctor, with love and gratitude despite his physical helplessness, political unreliability and social status as a class enemy. The Kiev newspaper *Kommunist* reported on February 2, 1921, that at a meeting of the Govern Revolution Committee on December 27, 1920, a decision was made “the expenses for the funeral of prof. Obratsov take to the account of the republic, and his family to provide a pension in 4 times the average wage in the Kiev belt.” However, there was no one to receive a pension.

In 1934, the ashes of V.P. Obratsov were reburied at the Lukyanovka cemetery. On the 25th anniversary of his death at a joint meeting of the Kiev Therapeutic Society and the Kiev Medical Institute, his disciples N.D. Strazhesko, M.M. Gubergrits and F.A. Udintsev recorded their reminiscences, which in 1947 were published in the form of their collective book “Professor V.P. Obratsov”.

In 1950, a resolution was adopted by the government of the Ukrainian SSR, according to which the centenary of the birth of V.P. Obratsov published his “Selected Works”, a memorial was erected on the territory of the Aleksandrovskaia hospital, a memorial plaque<sup>25</sup> was erected on

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<sup>24</sup> A professional medical union, not a scientific society.

<sup>25</sup> It is a bust on a hexagonal pedestal; bronze, labradorite; architect M.K. Vronsky.

the building of the clinic, and the department of faculty therapy of the Kiev Medical Institute was named after V.P. Obratsov. In 1989, a plaque was solemnly unveiled on the building of the hospital, where he worked as a military doctor for a young V.P. Obratsov. However, only at the end of the 20th century (in 1994) was his grave in the Lukyanov cemetery properly put in order his grave in the Lukyanov cemetery and the therapeutic society on it put an Orthodox cross on it as a monument

However, the best monument to V.P. Obratsov – is the scientific therapeutic school he created which was probably the largest after Botkin [32, 33]. Combined with the system of medical and scientific views of the teacher, his original methodology of direct patient research and general subjects, this school was distinguished both by the scale and “handwriting” of scientific research. According to the calculation of N.D. Strazhesko, under the leadership of V.P. Obratsov performed more than 60 original scientific studies, 16 of his students became professors of the departments of therapy and physiology in Russia and Poland [8, p. 22–23]. N.D. Strazhesko, M.M. Gubergrits and L.B. Bukhshtab created their own scientific therapeutic schools in Kiev and Odessa. Among the numerous students of V.P. Obratsov is best known academician N.D. Strazhesko, academician of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR, M.M. Gubergrits, Honored Worker of Science F.A. Udintsev (Kiev), Professor L.B. Bukhshtab (Odessa), A.Z. Bylina (Warsaw), V.N. Mikhailov and G.P. Khosroev (Kiev). Usually, Obratsov is also referred to as B.I. Trusevich [34], but there are no scientific grounds for this: the youngest of the named clinicians, who later became an academician of the Academy of Sciences of the BSSR, Trusevich

graduated from the university in 1916, was drafted into the army and only after demobilization for about two years he worked as a resident in the faculty therapeutic clinic, but V.P. Obratsov at that time did not teach at all.

### Conclusion

V.P. Obratsov, V.N. Sirotinin and V.D. Shervinsky were the leaders of scientific therapeutic thought in the early 20th century and personified the movement of the domestic clinic on the Botkin (essentially a European natural-science, functional) path, were the bearers of its high moral (Christian) principles and an unconditional professional authority. A century has passed, and it seems to modern medical historians in Russia that the emphasis should be shifted to a comparative evaluation of their historical merit. Obratsov created a scientific therapeutic school, proposed a unitary concept of hematopoiesis, developed a method of deep sliding palpation of the abdomen, first described the clinical picture and criteria for the diagnosis of acute myocardial infarction (before the development of ECG diagnostics) – all this characterises him as an outstanding clinician, the pre-eminent figure of domestic therapeutic science in the first decades of the 20th century [14]. Neither V.N. Sirotinin, or V.D. Shervinsky left behind such a foundational scientific heritage. At the same time, according to the plentiful evidence of contemporaries, two doctors of pre-revolutionary Russia, V.N. Sirotinin, a doctor of rare talent, and V.D. Shervinsky, an outstanding organizer of the scientific and public life of the therapists, who was also the leader of the therapeutic elite. Consequently, after S.P. Botkin, G.A. Zakharyin and A.A. Ostroumov domestic clinics of internal diseases continued to thrive.

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