

Lev Il'jič Mečnikov

Born May 30, 1838 in St. Petersburg, Russia

Died June 30, 1888 in Montreux, Switzerland.

Geographer, sociologist, ethnologist, journalist

At age 16 he ran away from home to join the forces fighting to defend Sevastopol in Crimea. He went on to study (at various Russian universities) medicine, mathematics, physics, art, and East Asian languages until he was expelled for his revolutionary activities among the peasantry.

He emigrated first to the Middle East and then to Italy. When he heard of Garibaldi's call for volunteers to fill the ranks of The Thousand in 1860, he quickly made his way to Genoa to sign up, but unfortunately he arrived after the expedition had already set sail. He set off on foot down the boot of Italy, determined to join up with them, and at last met up with Garibaldi and his troops at Naples; he fought in the battle of Volturno and was seriously wounded.

He began to write articles about the Expedition of the Thousand from the unconventional point of view of peasants and common soldiers, as well as scientific articles in Russian (though under a false name). Functionaries in new Italian kingdom headed by Victor Emanuel II were bothered enough by the former to expel him from the realm in 1864. From 1864 to 1874 he worked in Geneva for the International Association of Workers, then moved to Tokyo, Japan, where he was headmaster of a Russian school until 1876.

Following a serious illness, he returned to Switzerland via the U.S.A. and contributed articles, especially regarding East Asia, to the *Nouvelle Géographie Universelle* edited by Elisée Reclus, which was published in 19 volumes in the time span of 1876 to 1894. (Reclus, exiled from France for his radical ideas, was the only geographer of international standing to focus on 'universal works,' while the rest of his eminent colleagues were publishing or editing only monographs on specific nations.)

From 1883 until his death, Lev Il'jič Mečnikov was also a professor of Comparative Geography and Statistics at the Academy of Neuchâtel, where he co-founded the local Geography Society in 1885.

A further interesting note of history is that in 1908 his brother Il'ja Il'ič Mečnikov won the Nobel Prize for medicine for his research on immunology.