

lake of Abungda. This little settlement is considered the best of any as they even had cows, although, here, the Yourtas (huts) they lived in, were far too small for the number. In a Yourta measuring twelve yards in length and five in width, we found nine lepers, men and women together, and in this condition they have to spend the eight to nine months of severe winter, the cold reaching 50° Reamur.

All the other settlements that I visited were far worse—in some places the Yourtas seem too small for two, but we found five and ten lepers in them, the frightful dirt, the disgusting stench of rotten fish, the constant smoke from the fire, no beds, hardly any clothing, all these are the constant attributes of Viluisk leper dwellings.

Food is often provided for them by their relations, or the community they belong to, and brought to them for fear of the lepers coming for it themselves, the Yakouts dreading leprosy above everything else. One can easily imagine that, if it were not for this dread of contagion, taking into consideration the distance the lepers are away from any village, often forty to fifty versts and more, and the risk of meeting bears which abound there, the natives might not trouble themselves to bring food to the lepers, and they would thus die of hunger. The official documents state indeed that the lepers are always in a more or less chronic state of starvation. As regards the food provided for them by the community, not forgetting that in general the food of the Yakouts is miserable and scanty, yet that provided for the lepers is still more unsatisfactory, as it consists of small rotten fish, which, as they receive it once a week in the summer, they are obliged to bury in the ground, where it naturally decomposes, spreading a disgusting stench around; sometimes they have not even this fish; then, if they have cows, they feed on sour milk (called tara), adding to it the bark of trees (called biaz). Tea and meat, and other provisions the society does not supply them with. According to the statement of Father JOHN, Priest of the Kobaisky St. Innocent's Church, the lepers, when pressed by hunger, catch and kill any of the cattle coming near their dwellings. When the Priest remonstrated with them about this, telling them it was wrong, they answered, that as they did not receive any wholesome food from the community, they were obliged to steal or die of hunger.

The clothing of the lepers consists of skins of sheep, cows, horses, reindeer, hares, and squirrels, but those that I saw were either quite naked or their clothing was so filthy and old, that instead of sheep's skin shouba (Russian fur coat), there was nothing but the skin left, with bits of the fur here and there, which stuck to their open sores, causing them additional pain with every movement. Some were in such tatters, that it was difficult to describe what they had on their body. At a little place, Djikinda, we found a man, woman and children almost naked. At another place, Hgidjan, we saw six people likewise almost naked.

All Wool Durable House Flannel Squares.—19 inches by 19 inches, 2s. 6d. dozen; 15 inches by 15 inches, 1s. 6d. dozen. Very Special. Soft, absorbent, economical. Lasts three times longer than ordinary House Flannel. Write for sample dozens. W. MOORE & Co., Lauderdale Buildings, Aldersgate, London.

Only a very few of the lepers have sufficient, and decent clothing, generally supplied by their relations. Assisted by the feldsher paramonoff (doctor's assistant), I inspected 66 lepers—37 men and 25 women, one boy, six little girls—ages varying from 85 to 13, these last-named ages belonging to women. In the midst of these lepers I found a young girl in perfect health, who had been living with the lepers all her life; her mother had been a leper, therefore the community compelled her to remain with them. I found children also with no signs of the disease, having to live with their leper parents.

In one Yourta (Yakout hut), a man aged 52 had lived for 11 years, with his leper wife and daughter, and showed no signs of leprosy. These facts would go to prove that leprosy is neither hereditary or contagious; but, at the same time, I saw lepers who had taken the disease at the age of 35 from having been with lepers, though in their own families they had never had the disease; another leper whose parents were perfectly healthy, had taken it from a relative with whom she had lived, others had got it from having nursed lepers.

As regards occupation, the lepers can do little; the disease often deprives them of part or the whole of their fingers and toes, and causes paralysis and wasting. The severe winter shuts them up in their Yourtas (huts) for eight to nine months, thus compelling them to total inactivity; only in the rare exceptions when the lepers have any possessions of their own, and have only been ill a short time, they are then able to rear cattle in a very small way, and to provide food and clothes for themselves. There was a woman who lived perfectly alone, and whose sole recreation was to drag her poor body along the snow (she had no toes or fingers), to the place where her husband usually left her food and firing, and once or twice a year to have a glimpse of her children from afar off, when brought there by their father. The burden of the disease, the everlasting seclusion, the absence of relations and friends, the wilderness around, the severe winter, the dampness from the marshes and lakes, the miserable dwellings, the extreme poverty and want of food and clothing, the total absence of medical assistance, all this makes these poor forsaken people in reality the most miserable of beings, who seem to have lost all human resemblance, and by their surroundings are more like miserable animals than men and women.

Perhaps I may be judged by some and thought to have given a pessimist's account of the state of the lepers, being a foreigner and reared in comfort, and unaccustomed to the sight of the Yakouts feeding on fish and grease, living in dirty stifling Yourtas (Yakout huts), and only having bread as a great luxury. Thus the position of the lepers may have only appeared to me horrible. In answer, I will say, that having been through the Russo-Turkish War, and amongst lepers of different countries, in Egypt, Jerusalem, Constantinople, I have seen them under different conditions, but, I must say, with Father JOHN VINOKUROFF, that true friend to the poor lepers, and one well acquainted with the customs of the Yakouts and the lepers, that "in the whole of the world there is no one in so miserable a condition as the Sredni Viluisk lepers, and we must help them individually

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)