

however, that the staffs are doing their utmost to cope with the desperate situation. The most terrible place is the Epileptic Hospital, where the children are all starving, because the Relief Organisations and the Government feel that the food is so precious that it should be kept for the children worth saving. Surely under these conditions a lethal chamber should be allowed! It was the most ghastly sight I have ever seen.

"This morning I went to see the refugees in Moscow Station. One cannot describe the appalling chaos, or one's sense of helplessness. There were hundreds of people lying or sitting on their luggage, huddled on the top of each other for warmth, or picking the lice off each other. In one room the sick people were collected—most of them suffering from typhus or recurrent fever. One doctor struggles daily to try to find room for them in the hospitals, but many die just where they are. . . .

"The station is cleaned and disinfected every morning, the refugees being turned out into the snow, the only place for them. I was, however, very struck with the patience and kindness of the station officials."

Writing on a Red Cross train on the way from Moscow to Buzuluk, Miss Payne says:—"There is a Red Cross Hospital carriage at the end of our train. The conductor goes the length of the train twice a day asking for the sick or dead. The sick are taken to the Red Cross Hospital. This is a truly indescribable place, where they lie packed together, with one attendant to look after them. The dead are simply put on to the wayside or dropped at the stations. . . .

"The most awful strain of this job is the never-ceasing wail of the children. When one gives them anything they are dazed, and do not eat it immediately, but hang on to it like death, and then lick it all over first to make the joy last longer.

"The chaos of the whole country is indescribable. No one seems to know anything or to do anything. The population is a seething mass of louse-covered, ragged humanity, who, apparently, have no purpose left in life. They all move slowly and listlessly about, the reigning law being, 'It is yours, take it.' But there is now nothing left to take, so they just sit down and die.

"The Soviet Government is divided into two parties. One party realises that a form of capitalism is absolutely necessary for the reorganisation of the country, and so are beginning to allow private trading again. The other says that the chaos is due to the fact that Communism has not been carried far enough. Heaven knows how much further they could have carried it! There are hundreds and hundreds of miles of flat corn country that belonged to the rich, who ploughed it and supplied the world with food. Now that there are no rich the land belongs to anybody who will work it; but no one must employ labour or he becomes a capitalist. It is all intensely interesting."

#### LIFE IN THE FAMINE AREA.

From Buzuluk Miss Payne writes: "It has been

definitely decided that I am to take over F.'s district. I am very thrilled at the thought. I have over 67,000 people to look after and feed, and 1,000 orphan children living under the most awful conditions for whom I start homes. There are also three hospitals, at present practically closed, no food, and nurses starving.

From Borskoe:—"Sanitary arrangement all over Russia are simply awful. The water we drink is thick with black mud from the river, in which there are floating bodies. I am glad that I brought some chloride of lime with me.

"Yesterday I drove over a track in a buggy, vastly worse than anything in Czecho-Slovakia, to inspect the distribution of the rations at some of my villages. . . . I had deputations in nearly every village of those poor people without a ration, and so destined to die if the food does not come in time. It is an awful job. They fling themselves on the ground and lick my boots. It is too heart-rending to write about. I always explain everything very clearly to them, and generally leave them as satisfied as it is possible to be with empty tummies."

From Buzuluk:—"I am frantically busy opening a children's home on modern lines, or rather it is a receiving station. . . . If only I had ten real nurses and the medical equipment we could soon get these homes established on proper lines.

"Yesterday I cleaned up my stores magazine and made cakes for my skeleton babies as an extra for Easter Day, visited three villages, and interviewed about fifty people.

"In one village a woman has just killed and eaten her husband and sister. Of course they are mad when they do that. On the whole, there is very little cannibalism.

From Borskoe Miss Payne wrote a most graphic account of an attempt to get to her starving homes at Zaplovnia cut off by the flood, in a cockleshell of a boat. "Certainly auto-suggestion kept my nerves steady during this eight-hours trip. When the boat behaved like a cork in a whirlpool, or barged into half-hidden trees, I kept on saying, 'Every moment in every respect this trip becomes safer and safer'—and it did, in the end!

The reorganisation of hospitals, the provision of food, the "cleaning-up" of her district, the distribution of seed, were a few of the tasks undertaken by Miss Payne. She writes to her mother: "You say I do not answer your questions, so I will now. My duties are as follows:—(1) Warehouse superintendent, (2) supervision of fifty-nine Food Distribution Centres, (3) organiser of fourteen children's homes (nine in semi-working order), (4) the establisher of three hospitals, (5) scavenger, organiser, and sanitary adviser to the villages, (6) chief sexton, (7) drug dispenser (of a few drugs I have received from Buzuluk), (8) head of the clothing department, (9) general adviser to the community of District No. 6."

A lonely figure seen on the horizon when Miss Payne was driving out to a village proved to be a man with a heavy knapsack on his back. Told by her driver, "Your wife and family are all alive;

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)