

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

“ OPERATION “ HOPE ” IN THE HEART OF AFRICA ” ¹

This is the title given to the attractive and well illustrated booklet which is the League report on the resettlement operation of Sudanese refugees in the Central African Republic which, in 1966, it undertook in co-operation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. An outburst of rivalry between the inhabitants of the North and the South of the Sudan led many Sudanese to seek refuge in the Central African Republic. By the end of 1965 they were no less than 18,000 and their number was increasing continually. In view of the difficulty of the problems, the Government of the Central African Republic appealed to the High Commissioner who, in turn, appealed to the League. In a tripartite agreement signed in June 1966, the League was assigned responsibility for a resettlement programme and for co-ordination of relief work undertaken by different bodies.

At the beginning the essential was to distribute relief and set up a full-scale resettlement programme. However, after several months, incidents occurred which caused the Government to order the transfer of the refugees to M'Boki in the interior of the country. The League undertook this vast operation which gave rise both to practical organizational problems and to a no less complex human problem, for the refugees had to be induced to agree to a new departure.

Only then could the difficult task facing the Red Cross delegates be carried out as described below:

“ Departure was subject to control: each refugee reported to the police station with a card, on which the words “ Seen on departure ” were inscribed; there he was given two days rations, and the long trek towards M'Boki began. He carried a huge basket

¹ Published by the League of Red Cross Societies, Geneva, 1969, 24 pp.

BOOKS AND REVIEWS

on his head: household goods, clothes, a few tools and seeds received at Bambouti. Very light luggage with which to build a new life, but a very heavy load to carry 125 miles.

Supply posts had been installed every 25 miles or so along the way, where the refugees received fresh food rations and any necessary medical care. A nurse and a midwife were on duty at each of these relays, while a delegate and a doctor regularly travelled the road.

The old and sick, infants and pregnant women were transported by lorry and a military plane.

These arrangements worked out well for, despite conditions having been made still more difficult by the rainy season, nothing ill-toward occurred."

Transfer to M'Boki was terminated in June 1968 but for several months it had been necessary to help refugees as they arrived to integrate into the society and economy of their country of asylum, organize a medical network of dispensaries and a central hospital, vaccinate the population against diseases endemic to the Central African Republic, and build a village especially for old people incapable of looking after themselves. The Red Cross teams co-operated in this extensive and useful work to which this booklet bears vivid witness.

In January 1969 the League assignment ceased but the medical work was continued until July that year at the request of the Central African Republic Government, so that the Red Cross was still active for several months more. To-day at M'Boki there is no longer a refugee zone but a complex of ten thriving villages where material settlement has been ensured, crops seemed to be doing very well and the medical and educational structures are functioning satisfactorily.

J.-G. L.