

VI - 73 C - 8. Smedley, Agnes "The Real China" book review of Thunder Out of China by Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby. The Nation, November 30, 1946.

The Nation
1946

V1-73-C.8

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BOOKS and the ARTS

The Real China

THUNDER OUT OF CHINA. By Theodore H. White and Annalee Jacoby. William Sloan Associates. \$3.

AS THE group of suave Chinese pretending to represent "China" took their seats in the General Assembly of the United Nations, a book of epochal importance about the medieval-Fascist dictatorship which they represent was placed before the American public.

This book, "Thunder out of China," by Theodore White and Annalee Jacoby, for years the China correspondents of *Life* and *Time* magazines, is the most incisive and enlightening study of present-day China to appear in many years. While other excellent books have been more restricted in theme, this one is distinguished by its much broader canvas, which embraces not only China but all Asia.

The book is superb reporting; some of its chapters have real literary excellence. Its vigorous pages are full of dramatic details of heroism, tragedy, compassion, humor, and scalding satire. All the elements of Chinese life are in turn unified and analyzed in the light of those social forces without a knowledge of which China appears as it did to most American officers and G. I.'s—a land of squalor, filth, and ignorance.

Understanding these social forces, the authors are preoccupied with the feudal oppression of the Chinese peasants who constitute more than 80 per cent of the Chinese population. In this book the reader, hitherto confused by American press dispatches from China, can watch the savage exploitation of the peasant by the Kuomintang dictatorship and the medieval forces on which it is based: landlords, usurers, gendarmes, tax collectors, merchants, and generals. During the Honan famine of 1943, which killed three million people, the reader sees Kuomintang generals strip the peasants of all their grain, hoard it until the prices soar, then feed it into the black market. An American relief official had to buy this grain from generals at prices ten times as high as those in the United States, then give it back to starving peasants from whom it had been looted. But the Chinese government suppressed a newspaper in Chungking for four days for publishing the statement that there was a famine in Honan.

The two chapters on the Chinese Communists, who are today fighting for their lives against these Kuomintang generals and their dictatorship, tell an entirely different story. The entire Communist political thesis, say these authors, can be reduced to a single paragraph:

If you take a peasant who has been swindled, beaten, and kicked about for all his waking days and whose father has transmitted to him an emotion of bitterness, treat him like a man, ask his opinion, let him vote for a local government, let him organize his own police and gendarmes, decide on his own taxes, and vote himself a re-

duction in rent and interest—if you do all that, the peasant becomes a man who has something to fight for, and he will fight to preserve it against any enemy, Japanese or Chinese. If, in addition, you present the peasant with an army and government that helps him harvest, teaches him to read and write, and fights off the Japanese who raped his wife and tortured his mother, he develops a loyalty to the army and the government and to the party that controls them.

The criticism of some of the Communist practices pales beside the pen pictures of the key men in the Kuomintang dictatorship. Here you see Chiang Kai-shek not as American reactionaries picture him but as he is, a medieval war lord who is convinced that he alone is China, and who hates and wages a war of extermination on anyone, from Communist to mild liberal, who believes that the Chinese people are China. The Chinese government, the Kuomintang armies, and the Kuomintang Party are Chiang's instruments; the national treasury is his private pocket-book.

There are terrifying sketches of such arch-reactionaries as General Ho Ying-chin and such anti-foreign, Hitlerian reactionaries as Chen Li-fu, who "sleeps untroubled by the screams of victims in Kuomintang concentration camps" where practices like those of Dachau, Belsen, and Buchenwald still prevail. The reader will revel in the savage and satirical picture of Dr. H. H. Kung, who, with his entire racketeering family, is hated by the Chinese people as a grotesque caricature of all the war was about. The Chinese, "with the most biting sense of humor in the world," delighted in the spectacle of the henpecked Dr. Kung, "gutlessly presiding over a Cabinet that reeked of corruption and indecision, surrounded by a kitchen council of cringing sycophants, [who] symbolized all the ridiculous decay they saw in their nation." Just as grotesque is the picture of the boasting buffoon, the American ambassador, Patrick Hurley, who went through devastated China giving a Choctaw war-whoop.

After V-J Day, write these authors, the American army, navy, and air force moved with swift precision to the defense of Chiang Kai-shek's regime. American marines stood side by side with Chinese traitors, Japanese troops, and Kuomintang armies against the Chinese Communist-commanded armies which had fought the Japanese throughout the war, and which the Kuomintang dictator and the American armed forces are now trying to exterminate. All Asia, they say, is now convinced that "America is the last great bastion of reaction, a nation that speaks of freedom while aligning itself with the old order which over a billion people of Asia are determined to destroy."

It is imperative for every American to read this book; its authors deserve the eternal gratitude of the American people, who believed that we fought the last war for the destruction of fascism, not for its preservation.

AGNES SMEDLEY