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Plain Talk About China

SHARK'S FINS AND MILLET. By Ilona Ralf Sues. Little Brown and Company. \$3.

SPEAKING of fights: 'way back in late 1940, before the great Japanese blizzard, a bunch of American marines had a fight with a bunch of Italian marines. The fight took place in a White Russian dance hall on Blood Alley in the French concession in Shanghai, next door to one of the many hop joints. Just as the fight was at its best, with beer bottles flying, an American marine grabbed an Italian marine, dragged him to the piano, and ran his face up and down the keyboard, rubbing off all the Fascist glamour.

In this book about China Miss Sues has rubbed all the glamour off the face of the ruling clique of our Far Eastern ally. Needless to say, in all such fights all kinds of people get hit, some deservedly and some less so, and even innocent bystanders are not safe. Many people are going to be furious with Miss Sues, and they may even hire someone to write a reply, just as they once hired her and other Occidentals.

Miss Sues is a Polish woman, speaking many languages, who worked for seven years in Geneva for the Anti-Opium Bureau of the League of Nations. She could do a good book on that subject, but only one section of this one is devoted to her disillusionment. When the Japanese occupied Manchuria and later when Italy occupied Abyssinia, the League looked the other way and instead of doing something effective against the aggressors started a Committee for the Protection of the Whale.

Miss Sues could not stomach this, and eventually she took her cat and her typewriter and went off to China, which she believed to be an enigma, yet on the whole noble. She began by trying to chase down facts about opium but found herself chased down by one Tu Yueh-seng, opium king of China, whom the Generalissimo of all the Chinas had appointed chief "opium-suppression" officer; in previous years Mr. Tu was also chief "Communist-suppression" agent of Shanghai and did the bloody job so well that he controlled labor and sent his own henchmen to Geneva to sit on the Labor Bureau of the League. Miss Sues thinks she got the better of Mr. Tu in her interview with him—but no one ever got the better of the double-barreled Al Capone of China. His disciple, Mr. Chu Hsueh-fang, who represented Chinese labor at Geneva, will also represent it at the coming International Labor Conference in Philadelphia.

Miss Sues sat near one of the seats of the mighty, turning out publicity for China, a job to which she was appointed by Madame Chiang, who in turn did what the Australian, W. H. Donald, "advised" her to do. Miss Sues admires Donald still, but she calls him the "Richelieu of China" because, she says, he controlled Madame Chiang and, through her, much that the Generalissimo thought and did. Donald's ambition was to make Madame Chiang the "First Lady of the World," and Miss Sues thinks he achieved a great deal, inducing her to turn slightly democratic and to modify her Wellesley view of life. Madame Chiang, she says, was a mixture of many things, but within her own four walls she was a "selfish, petty, capricious prima donna."

Many of the things that appeared in print under her name were written by Donald, Miss Sues, and a number of other Occidentals, including missionaries. The Chinese masses, so Miss Sues declares, judged the three Soong sisters in the following terms: "One loves wealth, one loves China, and one loves glory." It was Madame Sun Yat-sen who loved China. However, this graphic phrase most surely came from student sources, not from the masses.

Intent on getting the scalps of the ruling clique, Miss Sues makes many statements against men who were really victims of the clique. But others deserve what they get, on the whole, for many of them drew salaries merely by virtue of their Kuomintang membership, while one would endure every indignity as long as he could eat his way through life. Miss Sues makes liberal use of satire to prove her points.

When it comes to the revolutionary movement, Miss Sues is on insecure ground, for she had but little time to know it. She was one of a group of five foreigners who made a short tour to the Eighth Route Army and the Communist headquarters in the northwest. Her interview with Mao Tze-tung, the Communist leader, is excellently, even brilliantly done, but she makes herself appear ridiculous as she stands in trembling awe before Mao with her gift, a tin of cigarettes, pressed to her heart.

This section of the book contains many small factual inaccuracies. For example, the children known as "little devils" in the Eighth Route Army did not fight in battle and were not the terror of the Japanese; some romantic student perhaps told Miss Sues this tale. Her admiration for the American "volunteer" fliers in 1938 is beyond my comprehension, for they were mercenaries who would bomb anything they were paid to bomb. Also, while Dr. Robert Lim, director of the Chinese Red Cross Medical Corps, met ceaseless and bitter opposition, still he and I were not condemned wholesale for trying to "pamper coolies" (soldiers) by making first-aid kits. Dr. F. C. Yen did not oppose us but helped us. Nevertheless, the general braying and baying that went on against Dr. Lim was sufficient to give Miss Sues the impression that every man's hand was turned against his work. I come out well in this book. Miss Sues generously records my strong points, forgetting my weaknesses; but I am a little surprised at some of the words attributed to me.

Miss Sues states that, had weather conditions not been unfavorable, General Ho Ying-ching, Minister of War, would have bombed Sian in December, 1936, and perhaps killed Generalissimo Chiang, who was a prisoner there. As one who was in Sian, I must state that the weather was excellent. Planes brought the Red Army leaders to the city, General Ho's planes reconnoitered over the city, his bombers bombed nearby towns, and a plane came and went from Nanking; and eventually the Generalissimo and his party were flown out.

So there are many sides to this picture of China. Miss Sues defends the democratic side, and rightly, but her reasoning is so disjointed that one finishes the book still not knowing what she really believes in. She gives a picture of one part of China—a part that has its counterpart in America, England, Italy, and elsewhere. The world is now small and very, very round, as a friend of mine is wont to say.

AGNES SMEDLEY