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Book Reviews

BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA. By Agnes Smedley. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, publishers. Price \$3.50.

"Battle Hymn of China" is a tremendous, confused and sometime confusing record of events which are sometimes personal to the author, sometimes local and peculiar to China, and often fundamental to the living and the unborn of the whole world. Put as simply as possible, the narrative is the autobiography of an American woman participating in the Chinese struggle for freedom from the past of China and the thralldom Japan is seeking to impose.

Carlyle once remarked of De Quincy that he looked like a child who had been to hell; by the same token, Miss Smedley has every right to carry in her face the stigma of purgatory, for she has looked on injustice, suffering, and horror until there can be no terrors left. And as a consequence "Battle Hymn of China" is a brutal, savage and compelling book; it would have taken a major miracle to make it otherwise.

Gentle readers will not enjoy this book and prudish readers will snicker behind their hands at some of the frankness. But if gentle readers are sickened by what Miss Smedley has written they can take satisfaction from the thought that they sicken Miss Smedley; the prudish readers will get only the satisfaction of their own prudishness. That Miss Smedley is an individualist who cares little for the conventions so dear to safe and successful people is quite unimportant, both to the author and the story she has to tell. She is trying to tell what her eyes have seen and her hands have handled of the agony of a nation; that nation's courage, devotion, and intelligence, faith, and determination are important, and anything else read into or out of "Battle Hymn of China" is sheer impertinence.

Indeed, Miss Smedley's conclusions are not very important; she may be justified or not in her estimate of Chiang Kai-Shek—which, by the way, may be somewhat surprising to some Americans; her frequent impatience with gentlefolk and what they stand for and hold precious, is emphatically unimportant, regardless of the rightness or wrongness of her views, however they may be judged by the ultimate standards of history. What is of supreme importance is that she has packed into slightly more than 500 pages enough factual material about the Chinese to give any intelligent reader an opportunity to judge intelligently for himself, and to shame that reader loose from some of his smugness.

This book is well titled, though at first sight the implications are not all evident. But as one lays it down it is borne in on the mind of the reader that China has a battle hymn, conceived in agony and written down in blood. But it is a stirring hymn, calling to men of good will everywhere. There is something in it that says mankind, in spite of all our frequent doubts about

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it, is worth saving, largely because, given half a chance, it will go to any lengths to save itself. That is what Miss Smedley seems to be saying and that is what she practiced when she threw in her lot with the Chinese. That is what some of us call Christianity.

—FRANK McLEAN.