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### The Post Reviews

## Far East Books

**BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA**, by Agnes Smedley. Alfred A. Knopf, New York, \$3.50.

Agnes Smedley is the same old tempestuous, implacable, fire-eating defender of the poor and the underprivileged we have always known. The agony of China's poverty is her personal cross to bear. On her frail shoulders she carries the whole burden of China's war and its suffering.

"Battle Hymn of China," is Miss Smedley's passionately partisan version of Chinese revolutionary history from 1922 to the present. Readers are warned by the author herself that there is nothing impartial about the book.

"I was determined that any facts which I gathered about the Chinese revolution should be laid before the American public," she writes. "That these would be incomplete and would be considered one-sided went without saying. Enough people were writing about the other side, and many were writing nothing else. I would write of the common people, the soldiers and the intellectuals—of those who struggled for liberation from any form of oppression."

#### Prejudiced But Sincere

Like Edgar Snow, Nym Wales, Anna Louise Strong, T. A. Bisson, James Bertram and other authors who present the Communist viewpoint, Agnes Smedley believes that the Kuomintang Party represents everything that is feudal, oppressive, reactionary and backward in the Chinese struggle for freedom and uplift while the Communist Party epitomizes everything progressive, high-minded, benevolent and pure.

Taking it from there, the reader had better resign himself to reading this book without mental argument with the author. Miss Smedley is one of the most sincere, unselfish, courageous and devoted "women with a cause" one can be privileged to know. Her prejudices come from her heart and must be understood and forgiven; one must always respect and admire Agnes Smedley for her saint-like qualities. (Dr. Hu Shih refers to her as "St. Agnes.")

trailed us, guarded the hotel door day and night, to prevent the contact. Miss Smedley explains that I "disappeared" but the truth is I jumped from a Sian Guest House window before dawn, crept along the darkened streets, made the contact and was concealed by young guerrillas under a cargo of supplies in an army truck leaving the city gates, finally reaching Yenan where Agnes Smedley awaited with a huge grin and a hearty hand-clasp.

I can personally say that Miss Smedley's description of the inspiring, vitalizing life of Yenan in these days is an understatement. Only a few correspondents were able to run the Kuomintang blockade and reach Yenan—Victor Keene, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Snow (Nym Wales) and a British journalist—but anyone who has once come under the powerful personal magnetism of men like Chu Teh, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Lung, Chou En-lai and the others and has watched the Red Army at work, play and study, will never again maintain a cynical attitude towards the Chinese Communists.

After the Lukouchiao incident a few months later, the Red Army marched to the front and Miss Smedley accompanied the fighter troops as field member of the Chinese Red Cross Medical Corps in the war zones.

#### Remained Despite Hardships

Though she herself suffered many serious ailments, this heroic American woman stayed with the troops—sometimes she had to be carried on a stretcher—dressing wounds, talking to guerrilla units on educational subjects, interviewing privates, commanders, and carrying messages, moving into the cities once in while to wheedle, beg or steal medical supplies for her ragged and wounded boys.

The last half of this important book is a remarkable achievement in editorial excellence and brilliant reportage.

As we read through the book, we sometimes wondered if we didn't detect a mellowing influence seeping into Miss Smedley's mind and mood. Maybe she will detest me

Much of her book is violent, explosive, shocking, reckless and beligerent, some of it is tender and compassionate, and all of it is highly emotional.

#### Early Life of Poverty

The first section is devoted to her early poverty-stricken life in a primitive Colorado mining camp where her mother died from overwork, undernourishment and disease, and her father drank himself to death. In Europe, where the youthful Agnes made her way, she lived with an Indian revolutionist, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, who later died a tragic death (not mentioned in the book). Once when her citizenship was questioned by an American consular officer in Berlin, she explained, "My husband is married to a Catholic nun and for this reason could not marry me. You may call me a concubine if you will but not a British subject."

When she arrived in China as correspondent for the Frankfurter Zeitung in 1928, Miss Smedley was shocked to the core of her sensitive soul by the poverty, sickness and chaos she saw herself and heard about from her circle of Leftist friends.

Her review of Chinese revolutionary history is, as expected, a one-sided version. She does not admit that both the Kuomintang and the Communists committed grievous excesses in those first tortured years after the Kuomintang-Communist split. She implies that the Kuomintang committed all the atrocities and the Reds none.

The book picks up speed and power when Miss Smedley leaves to tell her own experiences and eyewitness observations in revolutionary China: In Sian where she was caught in the midst of the coup d'etat; in Yenan, where she lived for many months as unofficial (and unpaid) adviser to the Red Army leaders; on a dozen fighting fronts in North and Central China where she really heard the "Battle Hymn of China."

#### Arranged Visit with Red Army

It was she who arranged for a number of foreign correspondents, including myself, to visit the Communist capital, Yenan, interview the Red Army leaders and observe conditions in Red China. Miss Smedley arranged for Red Army trucks to meet us at a secret rendezvous in Sian but the Kuomintang gendarmerie hounded us,

for even suggesting it! She still despises missionaries on mass but she likes the several she meets, and strikes up a warm friendship with one. She still hates Kuomintang party leaders and army commanders en masse but she is deeply impressed by the ones she comes to know. The most moving chapter in the entire book concerns her visit with a Kuomintang general, Chung Yi, who was killed in action, and it is with his words, "Tell your countrymen... tell your countrymen... that she closes your book. "Battle Hymn of China" is the fulfillment of her pledge to tell her countrymen.

#### Not Blind Follower

For the benefit of those who believe that Miss Smedley is a Communist and a blind follower of the "Party line," it is worth reading some of her comments of how she disliked the intellectual arrogance of some individual Communists, and how she shudders at the Communist "Party line" in that period of the Russo-German agreement.

"We got echoes of the American Communist Party line (it was the same as the British) from American travelers. True, the Communists had fought the Fascists in Spain, and they had added their voices to those of trade unions, liberals, and other Americans opposing the sale of war materials to Japan. But when I heard these men talk about the war, I could see little objective difference between their policy and that of the America Firsters and the various religious pacifist group... I regarded all these peace movements in America as poisons drugging the American people and keeping them totally unprepared to meet the coming attack. But what was wrong with the American people that they permitted this?"—EARL H. LEAF