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The Tough
Sinews of
Free China

BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA, by Agnes Smedley (528 pages, illustrated), Alfred A. Knopf, New York).

AGNES SMEDLEY, by heritage and through environment, is a strong and tough-minded woman and in "Battle Hymn of China" she has written a strong and tough book, not one for the fainthearted. It should be a revelation both to those who have idealized the Chinese people beyond all reason, and those who, on the other hand, have underestimated their power and faith.

For twelve years this Missouri-born woman lived among the Chinese and as a result, to use her own words, "To me the problems, strength and weaknesses of China seemed to be those of the whole world." For one stretch of nearly two years she marched and lived with some of the many Chinese armies, filling her days and nights with the almost impossible task of trying to bring some order and efficiency into the treatment of the sick and wounded, and at the same time through newspaper dispatches trying to arouse the democratic world to the needs of China. Not only were medical supplies tragically inadequate even to begin to care for those who needed attention, the number of physicians available was minute and the government refused to do anything to force into the service of their country the hundreds of doctors who refused to leave the comforts of civilian life in the larger cities.

Miss Smedley also lectured many times to groups of Chinese soldiers, all eager to hear about the world outside of China, about the attitude of England and the United States toward Japanese aggression. The author, forthright as she is by nature, confesses that many times she had to lie to these hopeful Chinese. She just couldn't bring herself to tell the truth about the relative difference of the people of the western nations to the Japanese war on China.

Miss Smedley's book is too full of detail, too replete with striking scenes and incidents, to lend itself to satisfactory summary. Yet it produces certain general impressions. It depicts a China that has made great progress in moving toward unity but which still is dangerously divided by political differences, mostly stemming from the split which occurred in 1927 when Chiang Kai-shek agreed to purge

the Kuomintang of Communist elements and so began a period of strife which even the attack by Japan has not been able to end completely. Miss Smedley mentions numerous instances in which the government has regarded war against the radical guerrilla armies as more important than the war against Japan. Lack of vital equipment, lack of efficient training, disease, dirt, materialism are other great handicaps faced by the Chinese. On the credit side are the huge supply of manpower, the great faith of the mass of the people, the valor of individual soldiers, the devotion of certain generals to the Chinese cause. Incidentally, Miss Smedley has only the most reassuring things to say about the ability and character of our military leaders in China, such as Stilwell and Chennault.

Agnes Smedley is a very direct woman. She professes not to be a Christian, but not only did she completely wear herself out physically in the service of others, she also has certain definite ideas as to right and wrong that would seem to be based on a decidedly Christian basis. For example, she thinks it was absolutely wrong for American businessmen to sell scrap iron to the Japanese to use against the Chinese. She thinks it wrong for the International Red Cross to quibble over whether certain medical supplies are used to save the life of a wounded soldier instead of a civilian. She thinks it wrong to leave a Chinese dying in front of a mission hospital because he doesn't possess the small admittance fee. She thinks it wrong to have evacuated American and English women and children from Hong Kong but left Chinese and Indian women and children there to endure attacks. And of course she thinks it wrong for Chinese to fight Chinese instead of Japanese.

Readers may ponder, too, on whether Miss Smedley is not right when she suggests that Mme. Chiang Kai-shek and her two sisters are not the only capable women in China, and when she wonders "what would have happened to the whole Soong family if they had been born in the obscurity and poverty that bound most of the Chinese doing duty in the war zones." For certainly one cannot read "Battle Hymn of China" without being convinced that if China is to be saved it will not be by its most publicized figures, by its war lords, or even by its foreign allies, but by those millions of men and women for whom Maj. Gen. Chung-yi spoke when he told Miss Smedley, "We have our faith. Victory will not be easy but we will fight until victorious. We have faith. Tell your countrymen."

T. M. O.