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# Agnes Smedley's Stories of China

THE BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA. By Agnes Smedley. Illustrated with photographs. 528 pp. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. \$3.50.

By CHEN YIH

THE BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA is a diary of a participant and of a partisan. It covers the turbulent years—1929 to 1941—of a China struggling in her revolutionary transition and fighting for existence in her war against

Japan. But chiefly it is a book about the "common men"—in whose resurgence of power Miss Agnes Smedley sees the only salvation of China.

Often called by the Chinese the most passionate of all American champions of the Chinese Reds, Miss Smedley has within the past years written three books on the Communist movement in China. She is also the author of "Daughter of Earth," in which she told of the first half of her life and which has sometimes been called one of the great American autobiographies.

For twelve years in China, Miss Smedley penetrated into lands which few Westerners have visited. After the Japanese invasion she lived at the front with the guerrillas and national armies and served as a field member of the Chinese Red Cross Medical Corps. She survived malaria and Japanese bombings, but returned to the United States shortly before Pearl Harbor when her health finally broke down.

"The Battle Hymn of China" is a collection of folk tales of China at war and revolution. They are heroic sagas of guerrilla generals; epics of men, even boys, who met death gladly with faith in their cause, and of that ragged band of armies that shivered in winter like the soldiers of George Washington at Valley Forge.

The description of the appalling sufferings of the civilian population of the Yangtze Valley, which is partly under Japanese occupation, is even more moving.

You see the people, whose villages were plundered and burned in the Japanese advance, living under the condition of semi-starvation and rampant disease. Here "village people came in crowds, pleading for medicine. Their bodies were a mess of scabies sores. . . . In summer there had been cholera, and in winter smallpox would come. And everywhere there was trachoma, malaria, dysentery."

Miss Smedley also describes vividly the state of incessant and relentless strife between the guerrilla units and the Japanese, with the former pitting swift movement, knowledge of the country and close cooperation with the people against the superior armament and motorized mobility of the Japanese Army.

The book is no cold, critical reporting job; it is a violent piece of partisan story-telling. And Miss Smedley makes no pretense of being an objective observer. She writes what she believes—and she writes with much tender sympathy for the Reds and as much hostile feeling against those who are not Red. She spares no word to vilify some high government officials who are opposed to communism in China.

But for all its fault of intolerance, the book is alive and quickening. The author has a remarkable capacity for details and she can bring life to print. One may not agree with some of her conclusions, but one cannot fail to find this a stimulating book.



A Chinese Peasant Soldier.

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