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Roused China As Seen By a Woman Reporter

BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA: By Agnes Smedley; 528 pp.; Knopf; \$3.50.

The evaluation of any book on a foreign country must partially rest of the competence and reliability of the author. American-born Agnes Smedley meets this test well. Turning to journalism in 1929, after a difficult childhood and unorthodox youth, she went to China as special correspondent for the Frankfurter Zeitung, and later the Manchester Guardian. With the Japanese invasion of China, she went to the front with the Eighth Route Army; and after the fall of Hankow in October, 1938, she served as a member of the Medical Corps in the war zones. For almost four years she lived and marched with the troops, covering thousands of miles in the interior and seeing embattled China as few of the white race have seen it.

"Battle Hymn," the author's fifth book on China, depicts the country and its people in their agony and former isolation, as well as in their courage and hope. Her portraits are often vivid. We see Lu Hsun described as the best and most typical of all Chinese writers. We view the guerrillas fighting with all their fearlessness and intensity. We meet "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell before he becomes world famous as one of America's most illustrious generals. We see revolutionary generals learning to dance, with Miss Smedley as their instructor. And we witness slow death in the medieval hospitals, as well as Hong Kong in its final moments.

The style, while not distinguished, has reportorial objectivity. Miss Smedley makes no effort to face or solve the many problems that confront fighting China today or the issues that will descend upon postwar China. The narrative is strictly factual, which is at once the book's strength and weakness. The reader finishes with the feeling that it is a competent, though far from definite, work on its subject.—E.C.S.