

VI - 73 E - 21. Agnes Smedley, Battle Hymn of China, Far Eastern Survey
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BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA. By Agnes Smedley. New York: Knopf, 1943. 528 pp. \$3.50.

This is an account of China's fight for social and national liberation, by a reporter who soon became an active participant. It begins with an analytical resume of the author's personal background, which conditioned her to plunge into the struggles of the underprivileged, including those of her own sex.

Agnes Smedley arrived in Manchuria in December 1928, when the Kuomintang was starting a war against the Communists, who were leading the peasants in an agrarian revolution. Although these events took place mainly in interior China, while the author was visiting only the coastal regions, their reverberations involved her in a civil liberties movement, in nursing embattled revolutionists from the interior, and in aiding their escape.

The author was in Sian when the Generalissimo was kidnapped and persuaded to unite with the Communists against Japan. She then visited the Communist center, Yen-an, and witnessed China's agrarian democracy in practice. After the Marco Polo Bridge Incident, she devoted herself mainly to army medical work, which led her to various war fronts and notably to the New Fourth Army guerrilla regions in the Yangtze and Han valleys. Undernourishment and physical exhaustion forced her to return to America in the summer of 1941.

The whole subject is treated with the same frankness, intimacy and interest as the author's account of her own parentage, her Colorado mining town, and her pre-China career and associations. There is no effort to hide the corruption, deceit, and brutality of some of China's higher-ups, or the filth, misery, and ignorance of the lowly. Yet the upsurge of gigantic forward forces is unmistakable.

Patriotic Kuomintang generals, decent Anglo-American officials, and dutiful Catholic nuns and Protestant missionaries — for none of whom as a group the author has much respect — are portrayed with enthusiasm.

A number of episodes, such as the death of Governor Liao Rei, not only are tragically fascinating, but they fill the gaps of contemporary Chinese history, and afford a grim insight into the struggle between forces of unity and division in China's war of national liberation.

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