

VI - 73 E - 22. Agnes Smedley - Battle Hymn of China, The Glasgow Herald,
Glasgow, Scotland, April 5, 1944.

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From

The Glasgow Herald

The leading daily newspaper in Scotland

Issued dated *April 5th*

With the Compliments of the Publishers

BOOKS OF THE DAY

Reports from Three Fronts

BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA. By Agnes Smedley. (7s 6d net; Collancz.)

NEW GUINEA DIARY. By George H. Johnston. (10s 6d net; Collancz.)

MOSCOW DATELINE. By Henry C. Cassidy. (10s 6d net; Cassell.)

IT is difficult to do justice, in small space, to the impact of Miss Smedley's book — to the impact, that is to say, of its utter frankness and faithful realism in picturing fighting China through the last 15 or so years, the China of revolution, civil war, and heroic defence against the Japanese invader.

It is no accident that this record begins as autobiography and merges into the story of a nation. Miss Smedley is what some would call a born rebel. As a fighter for the social have-nots against the haves, she drifted out of America in the direction of India (variously labelled Communist, political agitator, and general suspect), but was caught up in the Chinese maelstrom. Her book really begins with her arrival in the China of 1928, split by the previous year's breach in the Kuomintang and the start of Chiang Kai-shek's campaign against the Communists.

The Conflict

It is their point of view she takes, their story she tells, through the long years of civil strife that followed, and the pattern is inevitably that of the masses striving for elementary rights and fundamental freedoms against the exploitations of privileged power and wealth. Later this internal conflict is seen hindering and handicapping the growth of a united nationalism against the common aggressor. It is a conflict, moreover, which in Miss Smedley's judgment may still have to be resolved, if not fought out, when the Japanese are driven out of China.

But politics, in this sense, is the book's background. The narrative is of the most direct and factual kind, shot through with vivid portraits of people and personalities, graphic scenes of war and war's aftermath, and personal adventures with China's fighters in half a dozen theatres of the war against Japan. Throughout her mission is to tell the United Nations,

and not least America, what China has endured in the long fight against Japan, and the debt of remorse as well as of alliance which is owed to the Chinese people. She fulfils it with uncompromising directness.

Unfamiliar Front

Mr Johnston's is an Australian journalist's account of what fighting really means on a front of which few people can have any clear geographical conception. For a twelve month from January, 1942, he takes his readers almost day by day through the events of the jungle war against the Japanese in New Guinea, in a story of battle against nature—steep heights, deep valleys, clinging undergrowth, steaming heat, torrential rain—in which men could become exhausted before ever they met a human enemy.

The account is interleaved with vivid incidents of the "shooting war," on land and in the air, and group after group of Australian and American fighting men come to life in Mr Johnston's contacts with them. The general background is one of a turning tide of fortune, as Allied man-power and, especially, air-power begin to make themselves felt.

Accidental Interview

Mr Cassidy is the American correspondent in Moscow whose two "Second Front" letter-interviews with Stalin made headlines in the world's press. He is very very modest about these two occasions. The first was an accident—a shot in the dark to which it just happened to suit Stalin to reply. The second was a piece of good journalistic timing. The Allies had landed in North Africa, Russia as well as the rest of the United Nations was anxious to know what Stalin thought about it, and there was no handy peg on which to hang a Kremlin statement. Mr Cassidy offered one, and again it was accepted.

For the rest his account of Russia at war is in the tradition of the political rather than the war correspondent's picture of events in a foreign capital. It is lively, personal, shrewd, and perhaps more "knowing" than knowledgeable. But there is also some good war reporting, including a chapter on the events and strategy of the siege of Stalingrad which is genuinely informative.