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**Thirteen Years in China**

**BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA.** By Agnes Smedley. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943. 528 pp. and index. \$3.50.

Reviewed by MARK GAYN

AGNES SMEDLEY was born in the Rockefeller domain of southern Colorado, to an unskilled laborer and a washwoman. When Agnes was sixteen, her mother lay down and died "from hard labor, undernourishment, and a disease which she had no money to cure." With the forty-five dollars found hidden beneath his dead wife's quilt, Agnes's father went to a saloon and got drunk with the boys. In her twenties, Agnes briefly married an engineer. Out of this union sprang aversion to sex relationships—"only a trap which limited women in every way." Later, Agnes lived with a Hindu revolutionary in Germany, and the difficulties of her life drove her to years of pain and sickness, and to the verge of insanity. In 1928, she went to China.

This is the hereditary and emotional soil in which grew the roots of Asia's most remarkable American. Everything Miss Smedley has done in China, every belief she held, every sacrifice she made could be traced directly to her dreary childhood, her unhappy personal life, her physical ailments. Yet, this turmoil and unhappiness produced a passionate and fearless crusader, rather than a neurasthenic.

With brief gaps, Miss Smedley has lived in China for thirteen years. During these years, she has made herself an integral part of the Chinese revolutionary pattern, a leading champion of the poverty-stricken and the oppressed. She worked with the underground against the Blue Shirts and Tu Yueh-sen's sinister Green Circle

Society. For thousands of painful miles, she marched with the Chinese guerrillas, ate their food, suffered with them, ministered to their spiritual and medical needs. She witnessed great events in Chinese history, and in some of them—such as the famous Sian kidnaping incident—she has played a role. As a spokesman for American democracy she regained friends lost by the American sale of oil and steel to Japan.

"Battle Hymn of China," thus, is a record of Miss Smedley's work, adventures, and impressions. It is also an exciting gallery of incredible figures—heroes and villains and the layer of the common man in between. There is Ho Lung, the "Double-Headed Dragon" of the "Big Brother" secret society, a noted Communist leader, and withal a pirate in dress and battle tactics. There is Gen. Kwo Shuenchi, too progressive for the Kuomintang's liking to hold on to his army command. There are Dr. Robert Lim, China's "Florence Nightingale"; Capt. (now Lieut. Col.) Evans Carlson, the American Marine who learned many a lesson from the Chinese guerrillas, and "Little Devil" Shen, a boy-guerrilla. There are pompous Chinese and British officials, Chinese society ladies, spies, assassins, missionaries, fliers, gun-runners, nurses, politicians, and soldiers with-



out number. Each is a part of the colorful mosaic of the book.

Agnes Smedley is not a skilled writer, and much of her writing is pedestrian. Her prejudices are vast, and her judgments are often naive. A partisan, she can see only two colors, white and black, and those who are not with her are black indeed. And yet, all these things are unimportant, for "Battle Hymn of China" is rich and moving and intrinsically good. Miss Smedley may be intemperate and intolerant, but she is honest, and this honesty underscores every line. And the indignation aflame within her produce many a page as touching as anything yet written on China.

This is an earthy, honest, powerful book by a good woman. Once Miss Smedley's biases are taken into account, it is also a powerful searchlight, exposing much that is rotten—and very much that is good—in war-torn China.