

VI - 73 E - 28. Fadiman, Clifton, Review of Battle Hymn of China by Agnes
Smedley - New Yorker - September 11, 1943.

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WE still know so little about the Chinese people that we had better listen carefully to any American who has lived with them (not with their bureaucracy) and has true tales to tell us. Agnes Smedley, a close observer of the Eighth Route Army in action for some years, is one such American. She is a woman who has suffered greatly, is beset by neuroses (she's quite candid about them), and writes as a passionate Leftist sympathizer though not a Communist. Much of her 528-page "Battle Hymn of China" is intensely subjective, much of it is filled with angry scorn for those whose politics do not jibe with hers, and some of it consists of unimportant personal anecdote. Yet the effect of the whole volume, unevenly written though it may be, is fairly impressive.

The China Miss Smedley saw and worked for and fought for is largely the

China of liberal intellectuals, peasants, laborers, and the "Communist" Army. She does not like the Kuomintang and has plenty of reservations about the Generalissimo and his group. She likes General Stilwell but is not too fond of our State Department. She is bitter about the laissez-faire attitude many of us took toward Japan before Pearl Harbor and, like a lot of other Americans who have actually lived among the Chinese, she implies that we are still niggardly with our assistance to our ally.

Her book is not pleasant. It is full of horrors, tortures, betrayals, and poverty, poverty, poverty. The China she portrays (1928-1941) is a feudal country engaged in a revolutionary war. What is happening there is not pretty, and I imagine that if it were, the grim Miss Smedley would not care to tell us about it. Her tone is harsh and sometimes raucous. I think, however, that for all her violences and prejudices, she is worth listening to.

—CLIFTON FADIMAN