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The New Books

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

In the oblivious '30s, when the tough shell of American isolationism was yet to be cracked, Missourian Agnes Smedley did more to make this country aware of China, betrayed by the western powers and outraged by Nippon, than any combination of writers, publicists or departments.

This "premature anti-fascist" who has been fighting and writing for the self-determination of peoples all her adult life, has now written her autobiography, and the most exciting of her five books.

No stylist, Miss Smedley writes as she has lived, rapidly, almost in a hurtling manner, packing the page with incidents and anecdotes and people, hurriedly telling of this historic crisis that she observed, then dashing on pellmell to describe the next.

Out of "Battle Hymn" emerges a violent and crowded picture of post-World War I China, plagued and exploited by a corrupt and brutal system of feudalism, debased by greedy western nations, and enslaved by the new conquerors from Japan, whose manufactured "incidents" over a period of years have culminated in the major "incident" of the present China War.

Agnes Smedley was reared in the coal-mine region of Colorado, by a well-meaning but hard-drinking father, who never got around to "schooling" his brood of five. A rebel right from scratch, young Agnes grew up detesting the Colorado Fuel & Iron Co. and its ilk, left home, waited on table, and finally amassed herself sufficient booklearning to qualify as a lecturer and writer of considerable power.

During World War I and in the early '20s she got herself eardeep in the Free India movement, was locked up in the Tombs for violation of the U. S. neutrality law, was called by the reactionary press of the time a "Communist" and by the Communists a "Smedleyite," left America and entered into a union with the Indian nationalist Virendranath Chattopadhyaya. From London to Berlin, Heidelberg and Munich, where "by chance one evening we found ourselves in a hall where Hitler was speaking. This event made so little impression on me that I recall nothing but Hitler's frothy shouting."

The book is a first-hand account of what millions of Chinese are fighting for, and many of them are not fighting for the same things. The hope and striving of the Chinese common people for such basic things as food and freedom. The brutality and tortures inflicted on so many of these people by their masters, Chinese and Japanese, in the interest of greed and privilege. It really is a fine book, one that will stir you to rage and compassion.

For an honest and fearless picture of all that is good and all that is rotten in wartorn China we recommend Agnes Smedley's "Battle Hymn of China" (Knopf). Miss Smedley, who has lived in China for the past 13 years, is almost a legendary figure. A passionate, courageous crusador this remarkable American woman has devoted her life to aiding the underprivileged of China. She worked with the underground against the Blue Shirts and the Green Circle society. During the years 1938-1940 she marched thousands of miles with the ragged Red Army, China's guerillas, witnessing their operations in central China, eating their food, suffering with them and tending their sick and

wounded. She dealt with Red Army commanders, spies, boy-guerillas, gun runners, politicians, assassins, heroes and villains and her impressions of them make melodramatic reading. "Battle Hymn of China" is an important contribution to the books on China's fight for survival.