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THIS MONTH'S BOOK REVIEW

Battle Hymn Of China

By AGNES SMEDLEY
Reviewed by Leo Huberman
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No foreigner is better equipped to tell the tragic—and inspiring—story of China's heroic resistance to Japanese aggression, than Agnes Smedley, a Missouri working class girl who never finished elementary school. She was on her way to India when she went to China in 1929, as special correspondent for the Frankfurter Zeitung... She stayed in China 12 years.

Many foreign correspondents have learned the trick of "covering" a country from the bar of the swankiest hotel in the capital. But Agnes Smedley couldn't have done that even if she wanted to. She's just not made that way. From the moment she set foot on Chinese soil, her path was clear, "to stand in the middle of the stream of life and let it strike me full force—risking robbery, disease, even death." Accordingly, she covered a China at war, on the battlefield. Four of her twelve years she lived at the front with the national and guerilla armies. To the revolutionary Eighth and Fourth Route Armies she was a true comrade-in-arms who not only served as a nurse but was called upon also to help in the tremendous task of educating illiterate soldiers by lecturing on hygiene, the international women's movement, the war in Europe, etc.

She met the great and the near-great both in government and in the armies, and with characteristic courage she tells the truth about them as she sees it. But these passages, as interesting as they are frank, are a small part of the book. The major portion of the 528 pages is devoted to the trials and tribulations of the common man with whom she spent most of her time.

"I watched one soldier dresser tearing an old dressing off the hand of an unconscious man. The hand had been almost severed and the man was bleeding to death. I called the superintendent, a fairly well-qualified doctor, but he himself was suffering from hernia. After examining the hand, he took from his kit an ordinary sewing-needle and some silk thread, gathered up the few forceps, shears, and knives, and placed them in a wash-basin to boil. There were no sheets, towels, soap, hypodermic syringes or needles, and the "operating-table" was nothing but a straw pallet. The superintendent amputated the hand. I was his assistant."

Agnes Smedley's tribute to the courage and resistance of the Chinese people deserves the attention of all Americans who realize the significance for Asia and the world of the emergence of a free, democratic China.