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Battle Hymn of China - Great Britain And The East -
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Book Reviews**CHINA FROM THE INSIDE**

"BATTLE HYMN OF CHINA." By Agnes Smedley. (London: Gollancz. 7s. 6d.)

MISS AGNES SMEDLEY is a fighter and she likes other people who show fight. Her early life was bitter: her mother died, worn out by poverty and overwork, while she was a child, and her father drifted on from one casual labourer's job to the next, now in north Missouri and now in south Colorado, drinking to forget his disappointments. Agnes Smedley educated herself as best she could, reading long hours at night while in the day she was stenographer, waitress, tobacco-stripper, book-agent or, as she says, "just plain starveling." When she was twenty, she went to New York, where she became interested in the Indian nationalist movement. Her activities on its behalf brought her under suspicion of being an agent of Germany (this was in 1918), and she was arrested and kept in solitary confinement until after the Armistice.

She first came to Europe in 1919, and settled down in Germany. In 1928 she signed a contract with the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, then one of the greatest liberal papers in Europe, to act as their Special Correspondent in China, and set off immediately, crossing Russia on her way. The first articles she sent back were from Manchuria and dealt with the infiltration and secret military preparations of the Japanese in those provinces. Her Editor doubted their accuracy, however, and did not print them until the Japanese openly invaded the country in 1931. As the political situation at home in Germany developed, the giant chemical works I. G. Farben gradually bought up the shares in the *Frankfurter* and she lost her job, doing no more regular newspaper work until she joined the *Manchester Guardian* in 1938.

Agnes Smedley was on the spot when

some of the most exciting events in modern China's history took place: for instance, the kidnapping of Chiang Kai-shek at Sian in 1928, and the Japanese drive on Hankow in 1938 when it was temporary capital of Free China. For a while she lived the elegant and civilised life of the wealthy class in reactionary Peking: for a while the hard and dangerous life of the Eighth Route Army in the north-west, and of peasant guerillas in occupied territories. She met the outstanding Chinese men and women of the day, such as the Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek and his wife, the Communist leaders Mao Tse-tung and Chu Teh, the writer Lu Hsiang-shan, who has often been compared to Gorki, the scholars Hu Shih and Lin Yu-tang, the Army medical chief Dr. Robert Lim, and scores of others.

Wherever she went, she made both friends and enemies: tact is by no means her strong suit. In particular she seems to have a rooted dislike for all British diplomats, although a pleasant exception to this rule is Sir Archibald Clark Kerr. Perhaps it was love for China which they had in common, or perhaps deep called to deep.

It is easy to pull this book to pieces or to call Miss Smedley's objectivity in question. Clearly, she is in many ways a difficult person. But here is a woman correspondent who went far off the beaten track, while her male colleagues sat comfortably in the cities and sent home the official censored news: who suffered hardship and appalling ill-health in order to see for herself what was happening. She ends on a note of modesty and resolution: "I knew I had made countless mistakes: I hoped I had done a little good. For the future I still had one great job to do—to tell America the truth about China, how the Chinese had fought and were still fighting."

H. T.