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AGNES SMEDLEY owes her international conscience to Thomas Jefferson.

### No Life of a Cabbage for Agnes

By CLIP BOUTELL

When Agnes Smedley was nine, she was put to work washing clothes and tending squawling babies in a Colorado mining camp.

When she was 16 her mother, who also took in washing, died of undernourishment and her father got drunk on the family's last \$45.

Today Agnes Smedley, authority on modern China, a legendary heroine to the Chinese guerillas, a noted foreign correspondent, and author of the new book, "Battle Hymn of China," published yesterday, stands as the living answer to the challenge she accepted as a girl—to seek out and live fully the adventures life holds and to take the downtrodden of the world to her heart.

"It seemed then that men could go anywhere, do anything, discover new worlds," she said, "but that women could only trail behind or sit at home having babies. Such a fate I rejected."

And so with the courage born of desperation and bitterness Agnes Smedley set out alone to find out if the world had anything better to offer than the squalid life in a mining camp.

#### "At Worst, A Relic of Human Slavery"

At first it didn't offer very much—a job as a waitress, as a stenographer, a tobacco stripper, a book agent, a brief, unhappy existence in New York. Then she joined the Indian revolutionaries, and, finally, a journey to Europe as a stewardess on an old Polish freighter.

"For," as she put it, "live the life of a cabbage, I would not."

For the next eight years she threw herself with fierce energy into the Indian revolutionary movement in Berlin. And it was here that she met Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, the Indian terrorist leader. He was the one strong romantic attachment in her life and, to her, embodied the tragedy of a whole race. After the rise of Hitler, however, Chattopadhyaya had to flee Germany and the last time she saw him was in Moscow in 1933. She has never heard from him since.

While she was devoted to Verin, as she called him, matrimony holds little attraction for her.

"For women," she says, "marriage is at best an economic investment; at its worst, a relic of human slavery."

Her first glimpse of China convinced her that she had but two alternatives: to build a wall of indifference and hostility around herself as protection against "the flood of abandoned humanity," or "stand in the middle of the stream of life and let it strike me full force." She chose the latter.

Of those days, she says, "Some people called me an idealist, others a fool; some called me both. Within my heart was some vague conviction that love and understanding began long and anciently."

#### "Heart Is Big Enough To Embrace the World"

Agnes Smedley still clings to this idealism although the hate, the torture, the mass murders,

the misery and the hopelessness which she saw in China during those next few years would have embittered and disillusioned a less stalwart mind.

Today only the deeply-etched lines in her face reflect what she has seen. She can still laugh easily and eagerly. Her husky voice throbs with enthusiasm, and her blue-gray eyes shine with quick sympathy. As she speaks she rumples her close-cropped brown hair or gestures with her cigarette. And always her thoughts are with the under-dog, for her heart is big enough to embrace the world.

Because she never has known anything else but poverty, money means little to Agnes Smedley. Typical of her idea of relaxation and recreation is her recent three-month vacation in upstate New York. She spent it working full time on a farm, tending chickens and packing eggs.

#### Mysteries and Movies Leave Her Cold

However, she admits that she would rather see a good play than eat and, while food does not interest her, she loves coffee and missed it terribly in China, she said.

She usually goes to bed at 7 a. m. and sleeps until noon—a habit established during her nights with the Chinese guerillas.

Books on the Far East interest her most, but for "essays" she turns to Chaucer or the notebooks of De Vinci. Mystery stories and the movies leave her cold.

"There is no excuse for them in America where we have everything," she says. "They are responsible for the Pearl Harbor of



Post Photos by Sam Meior

#### CHAUCER is her escape.

our minds. We should face realities. Why should we drug ourselves?"

Her idol—both political and intellectual—is Thomas Jefferson. It is his ideas of democracy that give her hope for the world of the future. Jawaharlal Nehru she sees as "the Jefferson of the Orient."

#### Writing a Play About China

She believes that his autobiography, "Toward Freedom" is one of the great books of our times. Of "The Last Days of Sevastopol" she says simply "Oh boy!" She also acknowledges a debt to Shaw and to the memoirs of Gorki, but, sooner or later, she comes back to Jefferson.

"Without him," she says, "I would never have had an international conscience. Thank God, he is still alive in America today!"

Miss Smedley's book is being published by Alfred A. Knopf. Now she is planning a lecture tour and several radio appearances and is writing a play about China. For her one aim is to tell America about the Chinese as she knows them.

"The Chinese face the supreme realities," she said, "that's why they have been able to fight for six long years. They know exactly what they are fighting for; they cut through every illusion."

And then she wants to write a revolutionary novel. In a characteristically abrupt change of mood, Agnes Smedley lighted a cigarette and swept aside her own problems to launch into a vigorous denunciation of Lord Mountbatten, the new Allied commander in Southwest Asia.

#### Can Name a Dozen Chinese for the Job

"I think it is the most contemptibly light-minded and cynical thing that has come out of

the war," she said. "The only commanders of experience and with political appeal for the Burmese are the Chinese. If Generalissimo Chiang is too occupied elsewhere, I can name a dozen other Chinese leaders ideally suited for the job."

It is this violent forthrightness, the refusal to be swerved from the position she believes and her ruthlessness in attacking anything and everything that she does not believe in, that is one side of the seeming paradox that is Agnes Smedley. The other is her great compassion, her almost intuitive understanding and her gentleness toward those who suffer.

But in Agnes Smedley there have been reconciled without a struggle. The British here are enemies and she would like to set the imperialist apple cart. But in China she has found her life work. China after the war will be nearer to her conception than to that of the British Foreign Office.

She knows the Chinese people.