

X - 78 - 51. Letter addressed "Dear AAngus (sic) from 872 Partridge, Menlo Park,
California - September 30, 1943. Letter is not signed.

872 Partridge
Menlo Park Calif
Sept 30, 1943

Dear Angus,

You asked me what I thought of Agnes Smedley's book. I had not seen it but yesterday I got it and read it most of the night. I don't think there are words to tell what I think of it. It is not only the best book on China; it is the only book on China now...I say this, having written two books of China which were not bad, but rather useful....But mine, like all the others, was over-simplification. It was about China from the outside..This book is China-~~China~~ itself--from the inside..

It is much better than Agnes' past books. Those were all partial pictures, both in that they were done about small parts of China, and because they were done under heat of partisanship....This book still has the emotional loyalties that Agnes always had...But instead of seeing things in black and white---with Kuomintang all bad and Eighth Route all good, she sees things in the round..She sees the complexities of the world of China..She sees an honest, able general, appointed by Chiang, and finally overwhelmed by the corruption around him; she sees Dr Lin striving under impossible ~~xxx~~ conditions for a good Red Cross; she sees a Chinese soldier who whispers: 'It is so little; it is for my country', and dies.....

She feels the inner feelings of these people; at the same time she sees and feels them from the outside, philosophically, their place in history, in the onward march of mankind...You get not only China, but the universal human tragedy and dignity, in a hundred episodes such as that soldier who died for a country that had given him nothing whatever except just this chance to die... You get the unbearable picture of human corruption---not just as an anti-Kuomintang slogan, as it was in her earlier books, but as a complex rotting-away of old society, causing millions of human tragedies as it rots....At the same time you get the strength of and beauty of the common people, giving their lives in heroic and patient sacrifice for a future they will never see... and so inevitably some day overwhelming that ancient corruption.

I hope our good friends in the East will not let their many past disagreements with Agnes, or some of the minor digs she gives in this book, prevent their realizing what this book really does for our joint worldwide struggle, what a place it gives the Chinese people, and what real appreciation it inspires for all those forces which struggle forward in China and the world,

Yours,