

Battle Hymn of
CHINA

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Battle Hymn of
C H I N A

BY AGNES SMEDLEY

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Battle Hymn of
C H I N A

A DA CAPO PRESS REPRINT SERIES

China
in the 20th century



Battle Hymn of China



Battle Hymn of

C H I N A

AGNES SMEDLEY

New York ALFRED A KNOFF

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THIS BOOK HAS BEEN PRODUCED IN FULL COMPLIANCE WITH
ALL GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF
PAPER, METAL, AND OTHER ESSENTIAL MATERIALS.

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*To the soldiers of China,
poor, glorious pioneers in the world struggle
against Fascism*

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BOOK I

Glimpses of the Past

The Pattern

THERE are tales, long whispered in my family, which, if true, explain the two strains that mingled when my father and mother married. One strain — my mother's — was of a hard-working, gentle, and devout folk. The other consisted of rebels, wanderers, tellers of tall tales, singers of songs.

My father eloped with my mother before she was of age. Her father, John, found them in the home of my father's sister, Mary. Aunt Mary was a widow with many children, but a woman of unusual capacity and determination. Her eyes fell approvingly on Grandfather John, a frail, gentle man resembling pictures of Jesus Christ. John's wife was still alive and, to judge by a faded tintype, very beautiful. But she died shortly after, following a long illness, and my grandfather married Aunt Mary. In the small, drab villages and isolated farmhouses of northern Missouri little rumors often grew to gargantuan proportions. The gossips specialized most of all in the gruesome and more than one farm woman was thereafter seen wagging her head and heard talking of the strange things that were supposed to have happened in my grandfather's house — of evil widows . . . and poor ailing wives . . . and poison. . . .

Finally Grandfather wasted away and died of tuberculosis. Mary cared for him with infinite tenderness, uttering never a harsh word at his endless exactions, warning her many children, and his, to behave as she did. There lingers in my memory a vision of this tall, strong woman, sitting or kneeling by his bedside, engaged in low conversation or silent waiting.

So John had died, said the gossips, shaking their heads knowingly. What else could you expect, when, as everyone

knew, he had spent his declining years walking the floor complaining that his first wife's spirit haunted him? As he lay dying, rumor ran, he wanted to cleanse his soul of the sin of poisoning his first wife, but Mary had smothered his confession by placing her hand across his mouth! Anything could be expected of that big woman, who came from God only knew where and could do anything from curing diseases with herbs to managing a big farm and rearing more than a dozen children!

If Aunt Mary had lived in an earlier period, her abilities might have caused her to be burned as a witch. Instead, she was well over ninety before she laid down her corn-cob pipe for the last time. People said she sped around the country in a Ford until her dying day, her white hair flying, her pipe in her mouth. She was so tall that when she died a special coffin had to be built for her. I have not yet heard just how many men were needed to carry the coffin, but by the time I get around to investigating the story, I'm sure the number will be *fabulous*. I've heard it said by the gentle branch of our family that Mary is most certainly not taking any back seat in the Hereafter.

All my mother's people died young — which, considering their goodness, was only natural. On the other hand, all my father's people, save one uncle who turned Christian missionary, lived to a ripe old age. The two family strains, meeting in me, made my spirit a battlefield across which a civil war raged endlessly.

When I was very young, my father dragged us from northern Missouri to southern Colorado, where Rockefeller's Colorado Fuel & Iron Company owned everything but the air. My father went to this region to make his fortune, but fell victim to a system the fruits of which were poverty, disease and ignorance for the miners.

We lived a primitive life in the camps, but I now understand that our intellectual poverty was far worse than our physical condition. When I try to recollect the impact of so-called cultural influences, I can recall only Scotch and English folk-songs, cowboy songs, and such ballads as those