

Generalissimo—Intimate View

"Chiang Kai-shek: An Unauthorized Biography," by Emily Hahn (Doubleday & Co. 382 pp. \$5), is a portrait of the Kuomintang leader and an account of his career to defeat by the Chinese Communists and retreat to Formosa. Wilbur Burton, who reviews it here, has covered China and the Far East for newspapers and magazines for the past two decades.

By Wilbur Burton

GENERALISSIMO Chiang Kai-shek is indubitably in that group of world leaders—including Sun Yat-sen, Mao Tse-tung, Gandhi, Nehru, Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini, and Franco—who have arisen in our twentieth-century "time of troubles"; but less is known of Chiang personally than any of the others save perhaps Mao. The group, it may be noted, has nothing in common unless it be Nietzschean will to power, and Gandhi may be exempted from that; but it is significant that most of them are of areas that in the last century counted least in international affairs.

Information about Chiang is now increased to a considerable extent by Miss Hahn's new essay in biography. In this field she has previously en-



Chiang—"a very happy snowstorm."

dowed us with lives of Fanny Burney, Sir James Brooke of Sarawak, Raffles of Singapore, and the Soong sisters, as well as "China to Me: A Partial Autobiography" of one of the most charmingly unconventional American women ever to enliven the China Treaty Ports and the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. And, as always, she writes in extremely lucid narrative style.

There have been, of course, previous biographies of Chiang, though notably few, and they have been either sketchy or official apologies such as are ever being wrought by members (or would-be members) of the entourages of eminent political figures. In the general field of literature on China there is a considerable amount of valid material about aspects of Chiang's varied career; and it is to be regretted that Miss Hahn has not utilized some of this. On the other hand, through her quite intimate acquaintance with at least two of the Soong sisters, Madame Chiang and Madame H. H. Kung, as well as others close to her subject, she had a unique chance to get data not easily available, if at all, to other writers.

Miss Hahn justifiably makes the most of this—but she unduly denigrates those who have ever seriously crossed Chiang or written adversely about him. Thus, Madame Sun Yat-sen, the Soong sister now in the Communist camp, is less than fairly presented: for there is no evidence that she had "dedicated her faith to Communism" as far back as 1923, when Dr. Sun was still alive. She definitely was not a Communist, or more than sentimentally pro-Communist, when this reviewer had considerable contact with her in 1927, and her subsequent Red involution was probably from idealistic reaction to Chiang's sometimes questionable course rather than from Marxist conviction.

Borodin, the Soviet advisor to the Kuomintang in the 1925-1927 revolution that elevated Chiang to sufficient power to break with both the Chinese Communists and Moscow, is implicitly dismissed as an old roué who was in love with Mayling Soong, now Madame Chiang. This is indeed news to this reviewer, who was privy to the gossip of both the foreign and Chinese elite of the time. According to that gossip, Borodin was in love with Madame Sun! Actually, there was not an iota of truth for the story; and, as a



THE AUTHOR: The life of Emily Hahn is a striking example of a St. Louis girl who did most of the things girls usually don't. "You are the epitome of modern woman—mining engineer, novelist, essayist, traveler, who supports herself much better than I do," a renegade of the stronger sex told her back in 1932 on her return from the Congo, "and I am frightened to death." Miss Hahn, puffing awesomely on a cigar, agreed. By then Mickey, as she is known, had given the world only a glimmer of her potential as a gay slaughterer of convention. She began in 1926 by getting the first degree in mining engineering ever granted to a woman by Wisconsin. She subsequently taught geology at Hunter, devoting a minute of her time to dashing off a spoof called "Seductio ad Absurdum," which got a lot of talk. Listening and wanderlust don't mix, so Mickey left for Africa, where she looked things over between 1930 and 1932. Those experiences quickly resulted in two books—"Congo Solo," a travel diary, and "With Naked Foot," a novel. By 1935 restlessness again set in, so she left for China. She wrote articles for *The New Yorker* and she met Major Charles Boxer of British Intelligence. They had a child. All three of them were among the Allied nationals who were in Hong Kong when it fell in late 1941. Mickey, with Carola, her daughter, finally returned to the States in 1943. Around that time she turned out "The Soong Sisters" and "China to Me," in which she said: "I have deliberately chosen the uncertain path whenever I had the chance." The Major, after spending years in a Japanese prison camp, arrived here in 1945, and Charles and Mickey got married. They have since had another child. The Boxers live in Ringshall End, Little Gaddeston, Berkhamsted, Herts. That's somewhere in England. These days Miss Hahn is revisiting Africa, looking up some old friends. She is still a great cigar lady; on her last New York visit, in 1954, she whipped out a Havana in the lobby of the St. Regis and fired it up admirably. People stared, but Mickey, bless her, blew beautiful smoke rings.

—BERNARD KALB.

