

Roll Away the Stone

By Pearl S. Buck

I enjoy life because I am endlessly interested in people and their growth. My interest leads me to widen my knowledge of people, and this in turn compels me to believe in the common goodness of mankind. I believe that the normal human heart is born good. That is, it's born sensitive and feeling, eager to be approved and to approve, hungry for simple happiness and the chance to live. It neither wishes to be killed, nor to kill. If through circumstances, it is overcome by evil, it never becomes entirely evil. There remain in it elements of good, however recessive, which continue to hold the possibility of restoration.

I believe in human beings, but my faith is without sentimentality. I know that in environments of uncertainty, fear, and hunger, the human being is dwarfed and shaped without his being aware of it, just as the plant struggling under a stone does not know its own condition. Only when the stone is removed can it spring up freely into the light. But the power to spring up is inherent, and only death puts an end to it. I feel no need for any other faith than my faith in human beings.

Like Confucius of old, I am absorbed in the wonder of earth, and the life upon it, and I cannot think of heaven and the angels. I have enough for this life. If there is no other life, than this one has been enough to make it worth being born, myself a human being. With so profound a faith in the human heart and its power to grow toward the light, I find here reason and cause enough for hope and confidence in the future of mankind. The common sense of people will surely prove to them someday that mutual support and cooperation are only sensible for the security and happiness of all. Such faith keeps me continually ready and purposeful with energy to do what one person can towards shaping the environment in which the human being can grow with freedom. This environment, I believe, is based upon the necessity for security and friendship.

I take heart in a promising fact that the world contains food supplies sufficient for the entire earth population. Our knowledge of medical science is already sufficient to improve the health of the whole human race. Our resources and education, if administered on a world scale, can lift the intelligence of the race. All that remains is to discover how to administer upon a world scale, the benefits which some of us already have. In other words, to return to my simile, the stone must be rolled away. This too can be done, as a sufficient number of human beings come to have faith in themselves and in each other. Not all will have such faith at the same moment, but there is a growing number who have the faith.

Half a century ago, no one had thought of world food, world health, world education. Many are thinking today of these things. In the midst of possible world war, of wholesale destruction, I find my only question this: are there enough people now who believe? Is there time enough left for the wise to act? It is a contest between ignorance and death, or wisdom and life. My faith in humanity stands firm.

Pearl S. Buck won the 1938 Nobel Prize for Literature for her writings including "The Good Earth." Born in West Virginia to missionary parents, Buck lived in China for 40 years. She wrote more than 100 works, and advocated for adoption of homeless Asian-American children.