

A
Biographical Sketch
of
PEARL S. BUCK



THE JOHN DAY COMPANY

NEW YORK



Alexander Alland

Books by Pearl S. Buck

FICTION

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|---|---|
| EAST WIND, WEST WIND, 1930. | THIS PROUD HEART, 1938. |
| THE GOOD EARTH, 1931. | THE PATRIOT, 1939. |
| SONS, 1932. | OTHER GODS, 1940. |
| THE FIRST WIFE AND OTHER STORIES, 1933. | TODAY AND FOREVER, 1941. |
| THE MOTHER, 1934. | DRAGON SEED, 1942. |
| A HOUSE DIVIDED, 1935. | THE PROMISE, 1943. |
| HOUSE OF EARTH (trilogy including THE GOOD EARTH, revised, SONS and A HOUSE DIVIDED), 1935. | THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH (combining THE EXILE and FIGHTING ANGEL), 1944 |
| | PORTRAIT OF A MARRIAGE, 1945. |

GENERAL

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| IS THERE A CASE FOR FOREIGN MISSIONS? (pamphlet) 1932. | AMERICAN UNITY AND ASIA, 1942. |
| THE EXILE, 1936. | WHAT AMERICA MEANS TO ME, 1943. |
| FIGHTING ANGEL, 1936. | TELL THE PEOPLE, 1945. |
| THE CHINESE NOVEL, 1939. | TALK ABOUT RUSSIA, with Masha Scott, 1945. |
| OF MEN AND WOMEN, 1941. | |

JUVENILE

- | | |
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| THE YOUNG REVOLUTIONIST, 1932. | THE WATER BUFFALO CHILDREN, 1943. |
| STORIES FOR LITTLE CHILDREN, 1940. | THE DRAGON FISH, 1944. |
| THE CHINESE CHILDREN NEXT DOOR, 1942. | YU LAN: Flying Boy of China, 1945. |

TRANSLATION

- ALL MEN ARE BROTHERS (*Shui Hu Chüan*), 1933.

PEARL SYDENSTRICKER BUCK was born in Hillsboro, West Virginia, on June 26th, 1892. Her father's forebears went to America before the Revolutionary War, and her mother's, the Stulings, somewhat later, having left Holland and Germany in quest of religious freedom. They settled in the South, where many of her father's family, the Sydenstrickers, became distinguished in the professions. In a talk on race relations she has said, "Neither of my grandfathers, although they were landed men, and men of some wealth and position, was ever willing to buy or sell human beings. Indeed, my paternal grandfather seems at times to have been considerably persecuted because he made it a principle that he hired men irrespective of whether or not they were colored or white, and he paid them equal wages for equal work. So from my ancestors I have the tradition of racial equality."

Her parents, who were missionaries, were spending a year in Europe and America, after a long period of hardships in the far interior of China. So it happened that she was born in America. When she was less than five months old she was taken to China. There, she has said, "I grew up much alone. My parents lived in many places, but when I was a child moved to a city on the Yangtse River called Chinkiang. There I spent my childhood very quietly in a small bungalow built on the top of a hill which overlooked the great river and the crowded city whose tiled roofs overlaid each other as

closely as scales upon a fish. On the other side of our house there were low mountains and lovely gardened valleys and bamboo groves. At the foot of the hill where we lived was a big, dark temple where lived a dour old priest who used to chase me with a bamboo pole if in my wanderings I came too near the gates. I was deliciously afraid of him."

HER CHINESE NURSE

She learned to speak Chinese before English, although when it came time to read and write she studied English rather than the difficult Chinese characters. For the first direct literary influence upon her we may look to her Chinese nurse, whom she has herself described in an article in the *Country Gentleman*, from which the following is an extract:

"She is one of the two clear figures in the dimness of my early childhood. Foremost stands my mother, but close beside her, sometimes almost seeming a part of her, I see, when I look back, the blue-coated figure of my old Chinese nurse.

"She was, even at this earliest memory of her, already old. There had been other babies before me and none of us ever had any other nurse. But death had been to our house before I was born and had taken the two babies, very close together, and so when I came the old nurse received me with a tenderness which made me her own. . . .

"'And what stories can I tell, who am only an ignorant old thing and I never learned the name of a letter in my life?' the old nurse would exclaim, squinting at the toe of the perpetual stocking she held over her hand to darn.

"This remark we both knew to be merely polite, and I answered, in like terms: 'You do know more stories than any woman in the world!'

"It was true she had an inexhaustible supply of tales of magic, which she had heard chiefly from Buddhist and Taoist priests. The Buddhist stories were about wonderful daggers that a man could make small enough to hide in his ear or in the corner of his eye,

but which, when he fetched them out again, were long and keen and swift to kill. Or they were tales of this god and that and what they did to men. Heaven and hell she told me about, too, the horrors of the Buddhist hell, and what heaven was and what the wheel of life was that carries us along whether we will or not. I spent many an hour lying under the bamboos, trying to think what I would like to be born into next time after I died.

"But I liked the Taoist tales better, really. They were tales of devils and fairies, and of all the spirits that live in tree and stone and cloud, and of the dragons that were in the sea and the dragons in the storm and wind. There was a pagoda towards the east and I knew there was a dragon's head pinned under there. If ever he managed to wriggle loose the river would flood and swell until we were all drowned. But there was no danger, for it was a great, strong beautiful pagoda, and there the dragon was, imprisoned and helpless.

"Many and many a time when I was surfeited with magic I used to beg my old nurse: 'Now tell me about when you were a little girl!'

"This demand I made continually upon my father and my mother, too, and from them I heard the brave stories of early pioneer days in my own country, the country I had never seen, tales of fearless undertaking, of heroic religious independence, of a stern and God-fearing morality. Now I listened with equal interest and belief to the story my old Chinese nurse told me of her childhood, and of how, in the very days when my parents were growing up in a little Christian village, going to church on Sundays, learning their catechisms, she was living in a great old Chinese city upon the Yangtse River, going to the temple to worship, having her feet bound, thinking of marriage. . . .

"There, it is enough for today!' she ended suddenly. 'Go and read your book now.'

"This was the usual ending to any period of play or idleness, for my old nurse, although she could not read a word herself, was inordinately proud of the fact that, although a girl, I could read as well as my brother. True, she did not consider it important until I began to go to a Chinese school and learned to read Chinese. Then

she used to boast proudly to her friends: 'This child of mine, although she is only a girl, has her stomach full of good Chinese characters!'

"If I dallied and complained over my books, as often I did, being an extremely wilful child, she would turn very serious and admonish me: 'You *shall* learn to read! Here am I all my days like one blind, and if I want to write a letter to my son, even, I must go to the public letter-writer and he puts in so many words I did not say that I can make nothing of it even when it is written.'

"But I muttered wilfully that I wished I were a little Chinese girl and need not learn, and well I knew I would like to be ignorant. At this she made her eyes so wide at me and thrust out her lower lip so far that I was awed and fell unwillingly to my book again.

"In many other ways she spoiled us badly. My mother deemed it wise that I should learn to work, and she set for me the task every day of sweeping and straightening my own room and of making my bed. My nurse muttered: 'And why should this child work, seeing she is to be as learned as a boy?'

"Immediately I was comforted, knowing that the old nurse had her ways and means. So it came about that many a time when I went upstairs after breakfast to my task I found my little room spotless and my bed made and my old nurse whispered to me always: 'Child, put but a little more time on your book and I am paid.' . . .

"But when her old body had been laid most tenderly into its coffin and the coffin sent away to be buried with her husband, the house was very sad for a while, and empty of a tender presence. Yet even though we grew used, and grown up, we know quite well and to this day that she left her share in us, her white children. Part of her went into us, as mothers are part of their children, so that now and forever her country is like our own to us, loved and understood, her people our own kin. And some essence from the gods in whom she believed lingers in our hearts still, and keeps us, when we think of our old nurse, too large for disbelief, too humble for any scorn."

The child's father went on frequent journeys into remote parts, and brought back tales of his own adventures, some of which took him close to death. And her mother talked to her for long hours, mostly about her own childhood in West Virginia, so greatly different from all that the daughter knew. "My mother taught me everything and made alive for me music and art and beauty. Most of all did she teach me the beauty that lies in words and in what words will say. Other American children have community and school and church and all that makes their varied environment. I had my mother and missed nothing. From my earliest childhood she taught me to write down what I saw and felt, and she helped me to see beauty everywhere. Not a week passed without my giving her something to read that I had written and she was fearless, though kind, in her criticisms."

FIRST WRITINGS

Soon her mother began to send some of the little pieces to the *Shanghai Mercury*, an English language newspaper which had a weekly edition for children. There many of them were printed, during a period of several years, over the signature "Novice." There are American writers who remember with pride their first appearances in the well-loved columns of *St. Nicholas*. Pearl Buck's recollection is less of pride than of the prizes which the *Mercury* paid in cash and which she won so often that she came to look upon them as a regular source of spending money.

When she was fifteen she went off to boarding-school in Shanghai, her first formal schooling, and at the age of seventeen went home to America—"in spite of our living in China our mother always taught us to call America home"—to enter Randolph-Macon College. She says, "I did not enjoy my life in college very much. It was too confined. I did not know of the life of which the girls talked, and my life was as remote from them as though it had been on another planet. I soon learned, however, to show myself, superficially at least, as much like them as I could, for if any heard from whence I came she would exclaim and make round eyes, and this was very irritating to me." Nevertheless she became a leader in

college, and president of her class. She wrote for the college paper and in her senior year won two literary prizes, one of which was for the best short story.

"At the end of the college life I went to my home in China to find my mother seriously ill. Two years I spent in taking care of her, finding my only recreation in long walks and in talking with my Chinese friends, but this was my pleasure.

"Then I married a young American and, my mother being recovered, we went to a town in north China where his work was, and there we lived for nearly five years.

"These five years were among the richest as well as the hardest of my life. Part of the time we were the only white people there in that town and countryside, and at no time were there more than six of us. But my life has always been among the Chinese, and here I went about among the people and came into the closest and most intimate knowledge of their lives. As a married woman I had more freedom than I had ever had to come and go among them, and Chinese women would talk to me as woman to woman and friend to friend. Some of my best and closest friends were made in those years and I have them still.

"Outwardly the life was exciting enough. We had a famine, with all that means; we had battles between bandits attacking the city, and bullets flew thick as flocks of birds over our little Chinese house, which clung to the inside of the city wall. We went into places where white women had never been and I furnished topic for conversation for weeks, I am sure.

"Then we came to Nanking. Here life was different again. We came out of the country and from country people into student life."

MAGAZINE ARTICLES

She knew always that one day she would write. But she did not yet feel ready to write, and for some years buried herself with the care of her home, her children and her parents, and with her own teaching. She taught English literature in the University of Nanking and in the South-eastern and later Chung Yang University.

While her hands were occupied her mind was framing stories. In

1922 the *Atlantic Monthly* was disturbed about the younger generation. Reading some of its articles on this subject, she looked about her at the young Chinese whom she knew. With her daughter playing in the room, she wrote an article and sent it to distant Boston. It was the first she had ever sent to any magazine, and the *Atlantic* lived up to its role as "the amateur's paradise" by prompt acceptance. The article appeared under the title "In China, Too" in the issue of January 1923. In form and manner it shows the touch of the writer of fiction. At the time only thirty years old, she cast herself in the part of an elderly woman for purpose of contrast with the young people whom she was discussing. An excerpt: "I am rather breathless over it all, having had my main outlook on life the last quarter of a century from this quiet corner of my veranda in a little interior city of China. We are really very conservative here yet, the rare visitors from an outside world tell us. Vague rumors of co-education, of men and women dining together in restaurants, of moving pictures, and even imported dances, float in from the port cities. I know that I sometimes see the inhabitants of such places pass through the abominably ugly railway station, which has just been foisted upon our old-fashioned little old town; and they look scandalous women to me, with their wide, short trousers and short sleeves and tight coats; but I suppose I am behind the times. I confess that I like my old Chinese friends better, with their courteous speech and gracious manners. I dislike the acquired abruptness of these young creatures, I dislike the eternal cigarettes, and the blasé, self-sufficient expression on young faces, which I am accustomed to seeing timid and reverential."

Seeing the *Atlantic* article, the editor of the *Forum* wrote to the unknown author asking her to write something for him, and she sent a piece entitled "Beauty in China," which appeared in the issue of March 1924. Here are found some of her early glimpses of America: "In such a mood as this I crossed the Atlantic, and was thrown straight into New York. Who except one accustomed to the leisurely traffic of trams and rickshaws and wheelbarrows can realize the astounding activity of New York! Where one dodged one vehicle a thousand sprang up to take its place, and crossing the

street was a wild adventure, compared to which bandits in China are a mild affair. There was the bewildering clatter of elevated railways to dizzy one's mind, and subterranean roars within the yawning earth, which swallowed up people by the hundreds in one spot, only to vomit them up, restless as ever, miles away. Personally, I could not commit myself to the subway, and, clinging to a trolley-strap, thought regretfully at times of jogging peacefully along on a wheelbarrow, watching the lazy ducks swimming in the ponds by the roadside and stopping to pluck a wild flower for babies tumbling brown and naked in the dust.

"But if New York shook me out of my quiescent dreaming, even New York did not prepare me for the shock of the American woods.

"A week later I found myself walking through a wood in Virginia. How can I put the excitement of it into words! No one had told me how paganly gorgeous it would be. Oh, of course they had said, 'The leaves turn in the fall, you know,' but how does that prepare one? I had thought of pale yellows and tans and faint rose reds. Instead, I found myself in a living blaze of color,—robust, violent, vivid beyond belief. I shall never forget one tall tree-trunk wrapped about with a vine of flaming scarlet, standing outlined, a fiery sentinel against a dark rocky cliff."

A third article, in the *Nation*, October 8th, 1924, on "The Chinese Student Mind," had some of the author's experience in teaching Chinese students: "I stand sometimes before one of my classes of ninety-odd Chinese college students and am almost convinced that they are a band of young Gideons. I seem to see unquenchable fires in their eyes and a determination in their young faces which warms my heart, cold after so many years of contact with Oriental habits of squeeze and face-saving. I find myself repeating that old Israelitish war-cry: 'Surely the Lord and the sword of Gideon can do it.' . . .

"'Oh, if you can teach us this term, teach us something to make us hopeful!' cried a young woman in one of my classes in the large Government college here. It is the wistful cry of youth; a heart-breaking cry to those who hear it, for who has a right to hope if youth has not? And we who come from that West which has done so much to take away their hopefulness must give it back again in a

courage strong enough for life as it must be lived in China today."

In 1925 she went to America on furlough and took up study at Cornell for the master's degree. Her dissertation was on the English essayists, and she won the Laura Messenger Prize in history (although herself in the English Department) on the subject "China and the West." This study was so soundly built that the author was able to use a large part of the historical matter seven years later, in an address before the American Academy of Political and Social Science, at Philadelphia, April 8th, 1933. This address will be found in the Annals of the Academy.

FIRST NOVEL

On the ship bound for America in 1925 she had written the story which grew into her first novel. Of this she has told in *The Colophon*:

"When I began to write *East Wind: West Wind* it was certainly not with any idea in my mind that later it might be put between the covers of a book. I wrote it in mid-Pacific, in the writing-room or in odd corners of the lounge of an Empress liner. I was quite shut off from the world, for there is no more delightful privacy than the isolation of an English steamship, where each passenger fears equally speaking to or being spoken to by another, lest in such an act a fatal social mistake be made.

"In this privacy the slender tale wove itself out, my first attempt to write anything longer than a little sketch. At its conclusion at the end of about fifty pages, I put it away and did nothing more with it until some months later, when a valued friend asked with urgency why I had nothing written to show him. Ashamed of my delinquency, for he was ever urging me to write, I brought forth my story, written with the utmost illegibility upon ship's note-paper.

"After he had deciphered it, with pains, I am sure, although he was too kind to say so, he persevered until he had made me promise to type it, and then I sent it to *Asia Magazine*. It was accepted and appeared as 'A Chinese Woman Speaks.'

"After its publication a well-known New York publishing house wrote to me—I had then returned to China—asking me to enlarge

the story into a full-length novel and offering to publish it. Meantime I had written another story, in the nature of a sequel. I examined the first story again with some interest, naturally, but I decided that to enlarge it was to put too heavy a burden upon its frail structure. It was necessarily a delicate, limited tale, because I had unconsciously chosen in the first place that very limited point of view, a young girl's mind.

"I wrote the publishers, therefore, that I could not with honesty enlarge the original story, but I offered the two stories together. This arrangement they refused.

"The manuscript lay then for a year or two in a drawer, and I forgot it until one day a man said to me of it, 'Why do you not put that story of yours into a book?'

"I remembered it again, and I fetched it from its drawer, read it, and decided its chances were so slight that I could not trouble to re-type it. Nevertheless, I decided that I would send it to some literary agency and if a publisher could be found it would be well, and if not, then nothing was lost. I chose at random the names of three such agencies out of a handbook for writers I happened to have had given me. Two of the agencies replied saying they preferred to handle nothing from China, since editors and publishers were not interested at all in such material. The third agency wrote me that they would be glad to handle material dealing with China. I sent the manuscript to them and it was accepted. I forgot it again in the series of exciting events in China. Mr. David Lloyd, my agent, will have me believe that its fortunes until it found a publisher were exciting to him. It seems to have been well read before publication, as it was on offer, Mr. Lloyd says, from one October until the next September through a period of forty-seven weeks. 'Despite a prejudice,' if one may quote one's agent:

"'Despite a prejudice among those who publish books and sell them, we put our best Chinese foot forward about your manuscript from the start. The original selling memorandum (a direct yet delicate portrayal of the new and the old in China) still seems to fit aptly, and foretell the spirit of its successors. For its readers, we chose successively publishers we knew were accessible to its flavor

and authentic substance, and always up to a certain point they responded to these temptations—editors of established lists, publishers later in the field but not behind in reputation. It was the sort of manuscript such men are reluctant to decline, a mental state often mistaken by inexperienced writers for an editorial affectation. In one office every one would agree that the book was delightful, in another, one convinced champion would fight for it as a thing of beauty, in a third, five or six excited judges could compose the different bases of their interest only in respect to that well-known prejudice (it was believed in, only three short years ago) against Chinese books. In the Paget agency itself we had to save our face as business men and women by conferring on the question whether to go on offering a book by Pearl S. Buck! We went on. In the forty-seventh week, on the seventh day of the month, to borrow the accent of Noah in his Ark, the book found its imprint. Richard Walsh and his associates, perhaps not without some prayer and fasting of their own, decided to plump for it.’”

“We made in that year (1929), however, a hurried business trip to America, and while we were there a letter was forwarded to me from China, whither it had been sent by my agent, saying that the John Day Company had made an acceptable offer for the book and would I cable concerning certain matters. At the instant of receiving this letter I happened to be but a few hours from New York; I had so completely forgotten the whole matter that I had neglected to tell the agency of my change of continents.

“When I could, therefore, I went to New York and to the John Day offices, and found that the title I had given the manuscript, ‘Winds of Heaven,’ was not liked. We compromised, therefore, by using the sub-title. I found also, that in my effort to write English that would be usual enough to be acceptable to English-speaking people I had used a number of trite phrases, which I had remembered from English books I had read. In Chinese it is good literary style to use certain well-known phrases previously used by great writers. I now learned this is not true in English, and it is best always in writing this language to use one’s own words. Therefore

I went over the manuscript again, deleting the phrases I had so painfully put in.

"But it was worth the effort, for the little book made its way. Before *The Good Earth* was published, ten months later, *East Wind: West Wind* had become a successful book in its own right, and was in its third printing.

"So runs the slight story of *East Wind: West Wind*. The book is of value to me chiefly because it gave me confidence to go on writing, since now I had found a publisher who could be interested in what I wrote, even though I, knowing nothing else well, could write only about China."

ESCAPE IN NANKING

This account has brought us to May 1930, when *East Wind: West Wind* was published in America. In the meantime, however, there had been other incidents of bibliographical interest.

Upon her return to China in the autumn of 1926, encouraged by her year at Cornell and the acceptance by *Asia Magazine* of her fiction, she began to write constantly and in earnest. She took up as a major project the history of the Chinese novel, and she wrote what was to have been her own first novel. But in March of 1927 the Nationalist soldiers entered Nanking, looting and killing foreigners. By the narrow margin of ten minutes she escaped with her family.

Of this she wrote, in a letter sent to *Asia Magazine* a few weeks after the event:

"We were among the foreigners and like all the others, we lost everything we had in the way of home, clothes, and so forth. It was the most sudden thing imaginable. We heard at the breakfast table that the Southerners were marching into the city and were glad because the days of fighting had been tense ones and also because we, as a group of foreign university teachers, were heartily in sympathy with the national aims.

"Then in fifteen minutes we were fleeing for our lives. Our faithful servants came running in to tell us that the Nationalists were killing foreigners, and they helped us to hide. It was true, for our vice-president, Dr. Williams, had already been killed—shot

instantly when he did not give up his watch to a band of soldiers. We hid all day—thirteen hours, to be exact—in a tiny hovel where a poor woman whom I had helped, lived. We could not make a sound, since the soldiers were all around us—and *we* includes two babies under two and my six-year-old. But they were very good. All day we listened to the most hideous shouting and crashing in of gates and doors. Our servants crept in to tell us that the soldiers were urging the common people on to take our things, since now 'everything was to be in common, and there was to be no more private property.'

"Others were less fortunate than we, and had to face the mobs and were beaten and shot at and robbed of their clothing and rings and spectacles even, and some were killed. At four o'clock in the afternoon the English and American men-of-war in the harbor seven miles away began to fire shells and instantly the mobs quieted, a bugle blew, and the soldiers were called off. But several houses had been burned, and we heard the crashing walls for a long time. We were finally rescued by our faithful Chinese friends who did all they could to help us—our students and our Chinese faculty who were as much astonished and horrified by what had taken place as we were. We remained huddled together in one building, over a hundred of us, not knowing until the very end whether they planned to kill us or not."

This is one of the incidents of which she has said, "I have had that strange and terrible experience of facing death because of my color. At those times nothing I might have done could have saved me. I could not hide my race. . . . The only reason I was not killed was because some of the others in that race knew *me*, under my skin, and risked their own lives for me." When on the following day the members of the white colony were taken off by an American destroyer, they left behind everything except the clothes they had been wearing when the looters came.

"Incidentally," she wrote at the time, "my manuscript for a novel, which I had just finished, was scattered to the four winds with everything else in the house. I console myself by thinking it probably was not any good. At any rate, it was a lot of work—gone for

naught." Thus was lost, and thus casually did she dismiss, her first completed novel manuscript.

She went to stay in Japan until the storm of revolution should blow over. "We are very glad to be here," she wrote from Unzen, "perched in a tiny Japanese house among pines on a mountain-side—perched indefinitely, I suppose. Most of our group are 'through with China,' and have sailed for America and their respective countries, but I have an insatiable curiosity and want to hang about a bit to see what else is going to happen."

When she went back to Nanking a year later, it was to find the house gutted by fire. Her observation of this and other scenes of revolution is to be traced in the volume entitled *The First Wife and Other Stories*, and also in her short book *The Young Revolutionist*. The latter was written at the request of the Missionary Education Movement for use among young people in the churches and was published as a minor work.

"THE GOOD EARTH"

The course of *The Good Earth* is too familiar to need much reference here. Completed in 1930, it was published in 1931. It was hailed in chorus by the critics and for twenty-one months it stood on the American list of "best-sellers," a record made up to that time by no other book since *Quo Vadis*, thirty-five years earlier.

It was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for the best novel of its year by an American author. It was translated into more than twenty languages, including the Chinese, in which there are several different versions, and was the basis of a play by Owen and Donald Davis from which the motion picture was made.

Upon her arrival in America in July 1932, for the first time in nearly three years, Pearl Buck found herself in demand among editors. She was also called upon for various addresses. One of these, given before an audience of Negroes in Harlem, in December 1932, was a deeply moving discussion of race relations and race pride. Ever since, she has taken a constant interest in the race problem in the United States, meeting often with groups of colored Americans and writing regularly for their press. In an article in *Asia Magazine*,

March 1941, entitled *Warning to Free Nations*, she linked the colored American with the peasants of China and the oppressed millions of India, and said in a characteristic passage, "I speak of thirteen million Negroes in the United States of America, who are oppressed by race prejudice which prevents their taking any active share in the life of the nation. They are excluded socially and economically and culturally by the white American, and yet they are being told today to fight for the liberty and equality of democracy. Who can blame them if they ask: 'Whose liberty? What equality?'"

Sons, the sequel to *The Good Earth*, published in the autumn of 1932, was characterized by William Lyon Phelps as "one of the outstanding works of our time." The concluding book in the saga of the family of Wang, *A House Divided*, appeared early in 1935, and at the same time the entire trilogy was brought within the covers of a single volume under the inclusive title, *House of Earth*.

Meanwhile her separate novel, *The Mother*, was published, in 1934.

In the autumn of 1933 there was published her largest single undertaking, the translation of one of China's most famous novels, *Shui Hu Chüan*, to which she gave the English title, *All Men are Brothers*. This classic novel has one hundred and eight chief characters and as many more minor characters. The English text, consisting of about six hundred thousand words, represents an amount of research and sheer labor which would have discouraged any but a sincere and tireless scholar. Beginning in the autumn of 1927, she worked upon it almost daily for four and a half years. Her enthusiasm for the tale itself is expressed in her preface:

"*All Men Are Brothers* is a great pageant of China. I think it is one of the most magnificent pageants ever made of any people. Before your eyes upon the pages of this book march the people of China—all the people, men, women and children, priests, scholars, robbers, courtesans, soldiers, emperors, captains, kings, princes, governors, gaolers, vendors, prisoners—the whole past passes by. They are a host living and vivid beyond belief. Some of them will pass you but once. But others will pass you again and again until you

know them and know their names.

"Therefore when you read this book, forget it as a book. Think of it as a great procession of humanity. Do not try to remember the names of any of the people as they appear, or the names of the places they frequent. Simply watch the people pass, letting them impress themselves upon you of their own accord. If they do not impress you, let them go on. Do not even try to read every word or see everything. Where the marching lags, look on more quickly until your interest catches hold again upon some bold figure. When you have finished the book to its triumphant end, you will find that, without your knowing it, there will remain in your mind certain unforgettable men and women, whose lives you have lived with them, across the seas and centuries."

RETURN TO AMERICA

Yale University gave her in June 1933, the honorary degree of Master of Arts. Soon thereafter she returned to China, by way of Europe, and a year later came back to America.

On June 11th, 1935, after obtaining a divorce, she was married to Richard J. Walsh, the president of the John Day Company and editor of *Asia Magazine*. They make their home on a farm in the remote countryside of Pennsylvania, and have adopted four children. Her writing is done in an office at her home, but she often visits New York. She has for some years written regularly book reviews for *Asia*, the magazine in which her early fiction appeared, and she acts as advisory editor of the John Day Company, which has published all of her books. It was through her that the work of Lin Yutang, the great Chinese writer, was first published in America, and later the books of his brilliant daughters, Adet, Anor and Meimei.

In November 1935, she was awarded the Howells Medal. Robert Grant, in making the presentation, said:

"The donor of this gold medal provided that it should be given every fifth year in recognition of the most distinguished work of American fiction published during that period. The first recipient of one of these gold medals was Mary E. Wilkins Freeman in No-

vember 1925. The second was Willa Cather. . . . For the third time the medal is to be awarded to a woman, a choice acquiesced in by the four Academicians serving as the Committee, three of whom are men, and approved by a majority of the members of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

"It is to honor those who can write so convincingly of people, whether in the tragedy or comedy of human life, that the puppets cease to be puppets, and live and move and have their being, that this memorial to William Dean Howells was endowed. Because she has done this so unerringly and with such an artistic sense of values, I am commissioned to bestow upon the author of *The Good Earth* this medal of gold for the five year period just ended."

In responding the author laid stress upon her gratitude to her own country. She said:

"I find here, surely more than in any other country in the world, opportunity for a writer, unknown and obscure, with no influence of any kind, without money or particular friends, to come into recognition, to find generous praise and welcome and many friends. No one could have had more unpromising beginnings than I—to write of subjects so foreign, to live so far. And yet, at every step I have found open to the writer one opportunity after another. I am constrained by my own experience to believe that only complete lack of any merit prevents a writer from generous, often too generous, recognition here. And I am further persuaded to this belief because I now see for myself the eagerness with which all young talent is searched for, encouraged and developed. I have as part of my own work these days the reading of many manuscripts, which I do partly to discover more of people's minds, but also and more for the delight of finding unknown gifted persons, who need the help that I did. And I am not in the least unusual. In many a publishing house, I do not doubt perhaps in all, there are those who, apart from any commercial interests—indeed, usually in the case of unknown authors, against all commercial interests—search for talent in the piles of manuscripts before them.

"Mine is indeed a country of matchless opportunity for the artist. I cannot ask for more. When I remember the little distant poor

room in which I began to write, and when I look about me today in your presence, I cannot but feel a great humility and gratitude for opportunity, so freely given, and so richly rewarded, in America."

In January 1936, she was elected a member of The National Institute of Arts and Letters.

In her next books she turned to biography. *The Exile* and *Fighting Angel* are the life stories of her own parents. Everything in them is true except that the names of the people are changed. The stories of these two were told in different volumes, for although they were married forty years, they lived such separate lives that what the man did and thought does not in the least duplicate the story of the woman. "These two finely wrought portraits," said the *New York Sun*, "are complementary and inseparable," and the *New York Times* said of *The Exile*, "It is one of the noblest epics of our day."

The author's new acquaintance with her own country was now beginning to become evident in a succession of short stories, novellas and articles in a wide range of American magazines. *This Proud Heart*, published in 1937, was her first novel dealing wholly with American characters and with the American scene.

NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE

In 1938 she received the Nobel Prize for Literature, the first American woman to be so honored. The award was made not for one book, as is sometimes mistakenly said, but for the body of her work, which was reviewed at length in an address at the ceremonies in Stockholm, by Per Hallstrom, secretary of the Swedish Academy. In referring to the novel *The Mother*, for example, Dr. Hallstrom said, "She is the best characterized of the author's Chinese female figures, and the book is one of her best." The citation for the award read, "For rich and genuine epic portrayals of Chinese peasant life, and for masterpieces of biography"—the latter phrase referring to *The Exile* and *Fighting Angel*, and it is no secret that these two biographies turned the scale in the Academy's final vote to choose this author for the highest honor given in the world of letters. In 1944 the two biographies were brought within the covers of a single volume under the title *The Spirit and the Flesh*.

Journeying to Stockholm to receive the prize, she delivered before the Swedish Academy on December 11th, 1938, the Nobel Lecture. This brought into form for the first time some of her research into the history of the Chinese popular novel which had shaped her own efforts in writing. It was later published under the title *The Chinese Novel*.

Although she had by this time projected a series of novels about Americans, the Japanese invasion of China again drew her attention strongly to the Orient. *The Patriot*, published in 1939, was a swift-moving story beginning with the revolution of 1926-7 and ending in the conflict between China and Japan, built around the poignant love story of a Chinese man and a Japanese woman.

In 1940 she returned to the American scene with *Other Gods*, which she calls "an American legend." Its theme is hero-worship, the impact of the crowd upon those individuals whom it chooses to deify. The fact that this theme was made even more timely and pointed by events after the novel was written, is further evidence of the author's insight into the sources of human feeling and action.

The honorary degree of Doctor of Letters was given to her in June 1940, by the University of West Virginia, her native state. St. Lawrence University gave her the degree of Doctor of Letters in 1942.

WIDENING FIELDS

Stories for Little Children, published in the autumn of 1940, was her first work in this field. It contains a series of the stories which she tells to her own children about the large common aspects which the world presents—sun and moon, clouds and snow, rainbow and thunder and darkness. She has since written four more books for children, each for a year's higher age level, as her own children grow.

Another volume of her stories about Chinese people was issued in 1941. Under the title *Today and Forever* it brought together in logical sequence a selection from the many short stories she had written since *The First Wife* was published eight years earlier. In a foreword she said:

"Since I came home to America I have not ceased to follow China's changes and struggles with unending interest, sympathy, and implication, and from time to time this implication has expressed itself in stories. This volume contains a group of such stories, written during the past several years, some of them during the past few months.

"The least extraordinary in incident are purely imaginative, if by that one means the absorption of facts until they are an atmosphere of truth. The most extraordinary incidents, such as those in 'Tiger! Tiger!' 'Golden Flower,' and 'The Face of Buddha,' are based upon true happenings, some of them told me by Chinese who have come to see me straight from the scenes of which I have written in this book.

"I hope that the reader will feel as I do the continuity in these stories. It begins with the older Chinese and traces their increasing contact with this terrifying new age, and it goes on to the immediate moment of Japan's war upon China. If I have at all portrayed what I feel so deeply, the tough resistant indomitable quality of the Chinese people, then I have done what I wished to do."

Being deeply concerned with the sufferings of the Chinese people in the war, she took early and active leadership in raising funds for relief. Through her work in writing, speaking and acting as chairman of national committees—the latter a task most uncongenial to her—she is credited by many with having done more than any other one person to awaken the American people to the importance of making common cause with the Chinese in preserving democracy. And looking even beyond China, she founded in 1941 The East and West Association, devoted to mutual understanding between peoples, of which she is the active president.

In the spring of 1941 the Chinese government conferred upon her a high decoration, the Order of Jade, White Cravat with Red and Blue Borders.

Hardly less than the plight of the Chinese and that of the colored American, the position of women in the United States engaged her interest. After several years of observation and inquiry, she began to write on the subject, first in *Harper's Magazine*, and in a wide correspondence which her articles stirred up; then to speak about it

before meetings, large and small, in discussion groups and in private talk with many men and women, old and young.

She began to make a book of it only after she saw that more was at stake than the happiness of individuals, important as that is. Our very democracy, she believes, is threatened by the unbalance between men and women. The book, *Of Men and Women*, was published in the spring of 1941. Two more collections of her articles and speeches, *American Unity and Asia*, and *What America Means to Me*, have been issued.

In her novel, *Dragon Seed*, published in 1942, she again wrote of China. It is in the vein and mood of *The Good Earth* and *The Mother*, for like those classic novels it tells of plain people living close to the soil and little aware of the world crashing beyond their walls. The scene is chiefly outside Nanking, the city where she lived for many years; the time just before and since the Japanese invasion. The motion picture made from it was first shown in July, 1944.

On the subject of style she has said that in her work, style grows out of the characters of whom she is writing. When they are American, she writes instinctively in shorter sentences, sharper phrases and quick dialogue. When the characters are Chinese, she actually thinks in the Chinese language and in effect translates into English as she sets the words down. Hence the style of *The Good Earth* and, eleven years later, of *Dragon Seed*, and of its sequel, *The Promise*, published in 1943. Her next novel, *Pavilion of Women*, to be published in 1946, will be in the same style, though it tells of the middle class rather than the farmers, of China.

Meanwhile she has published, in 1945, *Portrait of a Marriage*, another novel in the American scene, and indeed in that of the Pennsylvania region where she has lived since 1934.

She also published in 1945 the first two of a series of "talk books," the first, *Tell The People*, based on talks with James Yen about the Mass Education Movement in China, and the second *Talk About Russia*, with Masha Scott.

Since Pearl Buck is above all a novelist, it is appropriate to end

this sketch with a quotation from her remarks about the craft, as made in a lecture at the Columbia School of Journalism:

"Never, if you can possibly help it, write a novel. It is, in the first place, a thoroughly unsocial act. It makes one obnoxious to one's family and to one's friends. One sits about for many weeks, months, even years, in the worst cases, in a state of stupefaction. Even when from sheer exasperation and exhaustion one lays down one's pen, the wicked work goes on in one's brain. The people there will go on living and talking and thinking, until one longs, like Alice in Wonderland, to cry out, 'You are only a pack of cards after all!' and so brush them away and wake from the dream to find only leaves gently falling upon one's face; wake again to real life and people.

"For the man or woman obsessed by these dream people can never be a very happy person. He lives a thousand lives besides his own, suffers a thousand agonies as really as though they were what is called actual, and he dies again and again. He is doomed to be possessed by spirits until he cannot tell what is himself, what are his real soul and mind. He is thrall to a thousand masters. He is exhausted bodily and spiritually by creatures alive and working through his being, using his one body, his one mind, to express their separate selves, so that his one poor frame must be the means of all those living energies. It is no wonder that much of his time he sits bemused, silent and spent.

"If you would be yourself, therefore, free and unpossessed, never begin to be a novelist."

On the matter of personal freedom the author herself is alone competent to speak. Certainly the world at large has passed its judgment that the creation of her novels, and of her other work as well, far from being unsocial, has been a social act of a high order. Few modern writers have done so much to further the common understanding of the human heart.

R. J. W.