

CHAPTER IV

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INNER-SELF

What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul?

The Bible

What can it profit a man to gain the whole world and come to his property with a gastric ulcer, a blown prostate, and bifocals? 138

John Steinbeck

John Steinbeck is criticized by some as being inconsistent but there is a consistency in the works nevertheless. What is consistent is implied in the above quotation. He agrees with the quotation from the Bible that the soul is the most precious part of man but it is useless if man ignores it in order to gain material comfort and worldly success. Steinbeck sees the modern world as a conflict between science and nature or between man and God. In his writings, there is no admiration for the destruction of nature or for those who live only in a world of cold facts, rejecting the world of the spirit, love and compassion.

Steinbeck questions the value of scientific progress to the degree that spiritual values are destroyed and the essence of man's humanity is restricted or lost. He does not criticize the times but looks with great unhappiness at our tendency to value the product more than the man. In The Grapes of Wrath,

¹³⁸John Steinbeck, Cannery Row (London: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1967), p.99.

Steinbeck cautions of the danger of over-emphasis on scientific progress to the detriment of the worth of the individual. He describes the loveliness of the spring in California when fruits are ripe and flowers bloom.

Behind the fruitfulness are men of understanding and knowledge and skill, men who experiment with the seed, endlessly developing the techniques for greater crops of plants whose roots will resist the million enemies of the earth ... Those men are great men ... Men are proud, for their knowledge they can make the year heavy. They transform the world with their knowledge.¹³⁹

But fruitfulness is useless because it does not help those who starve. The owners let the fruits decay to keep the price up. The concern for profit limits men from using scientific progress for the benefit of their fellow men. "Men who have created new fruits in the world cannot create a system whereby their fruits may be eaten."¹⁴⁰ The danger that Steinbeck sees is that the over emphasis on science and its production makes man more concerned for things than for ✓ spiritual values such as sympathy and understanding which affect man's relationships with his fellow man and reduce the quality of human existence. "Science has misled us," writes Dr. Henri Baruk, chief of medicine at the Maison nationale de

¹³⁹John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.474.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p.476.

Cherenton, "into regarding the moral problems as useless."¹⁴¹
 As already stated Steinbeck shows in his novels the great
 interest for success and slight concern for the means to it.
 The temptation of material success in The Winter of Our
 Discontent indicates that he agrees with what Dr. Baruk says.

Steinbeck obviously sees science as the proper servant
 of man and questions the quality of "progress" if it does not
 develop man's relationships with his fellow man. He questions
 the advancement of science again in Sea of Cortez through the
 Indian he meets in the Gulf. "Is it advancing, and toward
 what? Or is it merely becoming complicated?"¹⁴²

It would be interesting to try to explain to
 one of these Indians our tremendous projects,
 our drives ... the clutter of possessions
 which enslave whole population with debt, the
 worry and neurosis that go into the rearing
 and educating of neurotic children who find
 no place for themselves in this complicated
 world ... It is quite possible that to an
 ignorant Indian these might not be evidence
 of a great civilization, but rather of incon-
 ceivable nonsense. 143

Steinbeck is too realistic to condemn modernization or
 to think that it can be avoided or to insist that to live
 simply is necessarily good.

It is not implied that this fishing Indian
 lives a perfect or even a very good life.

¹⁴¹Paul Tournier, The Whole Person in a Broken World
 (London: Collins, 1965), p.79.

¹⁴²John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez
 (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.260.

¹⁴³Ibid., p.259.

A toothache may be to him a terrible thing, and a stomach-ache may kill him. Often he is hungry, but he does not kill himself over things which do not closely concern him. 144

Moreover, the use of science in the wrong way can destroy nature. Nature is the thing that Steinbeck loves most because he feels there is a holy element in it. For him nature is God. It is in nature that man and God are joined. Steinbeck's love for nature is seen in every book he writes. He disagrees with the destruction of nature for scientific purposes. This anxiety is shown in America and Americans:

...our rivers are poisoned by reckless dumping of sewage and toxic industrial wastes, the air of our cities is filthy and dangerous to breathe ... we have destroyed the natural balances our survival requires. All these evils can and must be overcome if America and Americans are to survive. 145

What seems to worry Steinbeck is that science is in some ways opposed to man's inner nature. Although science continues to progress, to control many aspects of nature, it can never replace nor be a substitute for nature. Scientific progress has brought such a rapid change that many people cannot keep up with it. The world seems to move too fast for the average individual to understand and adjust. Almost every field of knowledge has entirely changed in the past fifty years. What

¹⁴⁴Loc.cit.

¹⁴⁵John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.144.

one knew ten years ago is mostly out of date. By nature, man does not like rapid change. A preference for things as they are is a part of his nature. This does not mean that man does not like changes of any kind. He wants progress but at the same time he wants to understand where he fits in. In order to adapt to change man must understand the new environment and the nature of the change, from what to what. When change is too rapid, it is difficult for man to adjust. By the time he understands, what he understands is out of date and he must start to understand other new things in order to adapt again. Man's mind cannot be accelerated as science can nor is the quality of life measured on a speedometer.

Man himself through the centuries has not changed greatly while the world around him has changed much and he must continue to live in this rapidly evolving environment without really coming to terms with it. This is very different from a century ago when changes took place gradually. There was time to assimilate, to understand and adjust. Steinbeck views the twentieth century as a time that has constantly and increasingly challenged man's ability to adjust. "We have things and we have not had time to develop a way of thinking about them... We have had a million years to get used to the idea of fire and only twenty to prepare ourselves for the productive-destructive tidal wave of atomic fission."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p.174.

A world of impersonal relationships is opposed to man's nature. Man prefers a world of personal relationships which provides the warmth and friendliness, the security which satisfy the basic need of love and affection. Science creates an impersonal world, a world of things in which man feels isolated. If science serves man it also dominates his daily life. Ernest Horton says:

... we're supposed to be a mechanic people. Everybody drives a car and he has an icebox and a radio ... but let a little dirt get in the carburetor and - well, a car has to stand there until a mechanic comes and takes out the screen. Let a light go off, and an electrician has to come and put in a new fuse. Let an elevator stop, and there is a panic. 147

Man is not a machine, but science is a world of machines and tends to force man to live like one. Man needs relaxation as well as stimulation but constant change hardly lets him relax. In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck suggests that we do not take time to relax and contemplate.

Only in laziness can one achieve a state of contemplation which is a balancing of values, a weighing of oneself against the world and the world against itself. A busy man cannot find time for such balancing. We do not think a lazy man can commit murders, nor great thefts, nor lead a mob. He would be more likely to think about it and laugh ... wars are activities of busy-ness. 148

147 John Steinbeck, The Keyward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.187.

148 John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.237.

Steinbeck is aware that in the modern condition, it is not easy to find time to contemplate and to be near nature. "We have not had time to learn inside ourselves the things that have happened to us."¹⁴⁹ Jim in In Dubious Battle is so occupied with his goal that he forgets other aspects of life. In the end, Jim seems to recognize this and he says to Mac:

I never had time to look at things, Mac, never. I never looked how leaves come out. I never looked at the ways things happen. This morning there was a whole line of ants on the floor of the tents. I couldn't watch them. I was thinking about something else. Sometime I'd like to sit all day and look at bugs, and never think of anything else ... just once in a while you get that feeling. I never look at anything. I never take time to see anything. It's going to be over, and I won't know even how an apple grows. ¹⁵⁰

Another aspect of science which opposes man's basic nature is its objectiveness. It refuses what cannot be proved by reason. The final proof of science depends on what can be seen and tested. It can be measured on a yardstick. But a man is not like that, he cannot be entirely objective but has feelings and human needs which cannot be satisfied by objective testing. These abstract things such as love, justice, goodness, a sense of fulfillment are not susceptible to scientific argument. It is very difficult to prove why love is better than

¹⁴⁹John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.175.

¹⁵⁰John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1966), pp.239-240.

hatred, why a bunch of flowers is more beautiful than a bunch of iron keys. These are questions which assume an area of man beyond the reach of scientific method and that is the area of special interest to John Steinbeck. Man is both facts and imagination. He wants nourishment for both but science relates only to facts, not to imagination.

The over emphasis on material things or scientific products makes man forget the important thing which is his very essence - the soul.

We have forgotten something in our study of man during the course of these last centuries; that we have closed our eyes to that which is specially human in man; that which some called spirit, others the heart, still others love or moral consciousness... 151

Man by nature needs something more than food, clothing and shelter. He has a spirit, a deeper self that should not be denied. According to Steinbeck modern man tends to use science as the answer to everything. He is reluctant to accept anything that science cannot prove. What the soul needs are intangibles such as the idea of good, beauty and justice. A society bent upon acquisition of things and their enjoyment may overlook individual needs. John Steinbeck does not overlook the importance of the soul. To him, the nourishment of soul is at least as important as physical comfort. In Sea of Cortez, he says, "Who is to say that an emergency of the soul is not

151 Paul Tournier, op.cit., p.68.

worse than a bad cold?"¹⁵²In modern times, the vitality of spiritual values is disappearing and with it the importance of conscience. In The Wayward Bus, the bus of Juan Chicoy is the symbol of this change.

The front bumpers of the bus had once borne the inscription, still barely readable "el Grán Poder de Jesus", "the great power of Jesus". But that had been painted on by a former owner. Now the simple word "Sweetheart" was boldly lettered on front and rear bumpers. And the bus was known as "Sweetheart" to all who know her. 153

The bus can be interpreted as a microcosm of the world. Warren French interpreted this quotation as Steinbeck's comparison between the world of the past and the modern world. The spiritually oriented world of the past has gone and a modern world of materialistic sweetness has replaced it.

In a world of facts, there is a tendency not to believe things which cannot be proved. Myths and legends are useless nonsense in the world of facts. Myths and imagination from Steinbeck's point of view are useful because they nourish the soul. We need something beyond reality, or mystical. Old Man of the Sea that Steinbeck mentions in Sea of Cortez is only the imaginative figure that man wants. "Men really need sea monsters in their personal oceans. and the old man of the sea

¹⁵²John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Fan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.251.

¹⁵³John Steinbeck, The Wayward Bus (London: Corgi Books, Ltd., 1966), p.13.

is one of those ... for if the Old Man of the Sea should turn out to be some great malformed sea-lion, a lot of people would feel a sharp personal loss - a Santa Claus loss."¹⁵⁴

The need for something beyond scientific reason is pointed out again in an episode in Once There Was a War. Steinbeck talks about the importance of amulets to soldiers. Amulets may be coins, stones or an odd-shaped metal. They need these things because they feel safe when they have something to hold on to. Amulets give the men psychological security but there is no scientific proof for this need.

It would seem that in times of great danger and great emotional tumult a man has to reach outside himself for help and comfort, and has to have some supra-personal symbol to hold to. It can be anything at all, an old umbrella handle or a religious symbol. 155

Science cannot give nourishment to the soul. Man needs something to believe which gives security to spirit. Man needs something beyond reality but science gives only reality.

For the ocean, deep and black in the depths, is like the low dark levels of our minds in which the dream symbols incubate and sometimes rise up to sight like the Old Man of the Sea - And even if the symbol vision be horrible, it is ours. An ocean without its unnamed monsters would be like a completely dreamless sleep. 156

¹⁵⁴John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.97.

¹⁵⁵John Steinbeck, Once There Was a War (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1969), p.146.

¹⁵⁶John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.97.

Religion can be put into this category and the soul tends to be ignored. In America and Americans, Steinbeck says, "Here is a world or a universe unknown, even unconceived of, and perhaps at last open for exploration: the great and mysterious mind and soul of man, a land full of marvels."¹⁵⁷

Man has not changed much through ^{the} centuries, the world of the soul is still full of marvels and deserves attention. In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck compares tidal effects to the soul.

Tidal effects are mysterious and dark in the soul, and it may well be noted that even today the effect of the tides is more valid and strong and widespread than is generally supposed.¹⁵⁸

Steinbeck believes that man needs something beyond the world of facts. There is something that does not stand to reason and cannot be described by facts. In To a God Unknown, Joseph is in love with nature because he feels a holy element and God in it. His belief in nature is a guide in his life. His belief is not nonsense in Steinbeck's point of view. Throughout the story he seems to indicate that man cannot get away from nature. Not everyone pays attention to his relationship with nature and those who do realize that they are a part of nature are afraid to show it. The rock in the glade is something ancient and holy, a symbol of union. At first, when

¹⁵⁷John Steinbeck, America and Americans (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1962), p.178.

¹⁵⁸John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.99.

Joseph and Elizabeth are married, Elizabeth cannot communicate with Joseph because she does not quite understand him and his belief in nature. Later, when she discovers the rock in the glade, she begins to understand Joseph and she, too has the same feeling as he. As her understanding and affection deepen, Elizabeth one day climbs the rock, falls and breaks her neck and dies. This "sacrifice" of Elizabeth and subsequent suicide of Joseph on the rock are pagan and Christian symbols, an attempt for union with God, the unknown.

The old man in To a God Unknown feels a compulsion to sacrifice animals to God before sunset. He does not know why but he feels he must do it. In The Short Reign of Pippin IV, the old man feels good to pull the statue from the water. He cannot explain why but he must.

Modern man tends to refuse to believe what cannot be proved. Yet, the need for religion, the need to believe in something outside of himself remains in man's subconscious. In In Dubious Battle, the Party men deny completely belief in God and substitute a belief in the Party, the System. Steinbeck indicates through their words that though they try to repress their belief many feel a need for it. Doc Burton recognizes this conflict in Jim and says, "...I mean you've got something in your eyes, Jim, something religious. I've seen it in you boys before."¹⁵⁹ Jim protested, "I don't believe in

¹⁵⁹John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1966), p.145.

Heaven ... I don't believe in religion."¹⁶⁰ Doc Burton seems to see something in Jim which is different from other Party men. He needs something Godlike and religious but he always tells himself that it is not the religion. He once told Mac about the time he saw his mother with a ring of little stars over her head like Mary. "Really saw them, I mean. It's not funny, Mac. This isn't religion - it's kind of what the books I've read call wish-fulfillment, I guess, I saw them, all right. They made me feel happy, too."¹⁶¹

Steinbeck seems to say through Doc Burton that man should not and indeed cannot give up belief and spiritual need.

You practical men always lead practical men with stomachs. And something always gets out of hand ... They don't follow the rules of common sense, and you practical men either deny that it is so, or refuse to think about it. And when someone wonders what it is that makes a man without a stomach something more than your rules allow, why you howl 'Dreamer, mystic, metaphysician.'¹⁶²

Dick and Root in The Long Valley are injured after having been beaten by the mob. Their conversation in the end shows that their faith in the "system" is not enough and they feel it as expressed in their fight against it. Root's expression for religious feeling is laughed at by Dick who says, "You lay that religion stuff ... Religion is the opium of the

¹⁶⁰Loc.cit.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p.219.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp.105-106.

people.¹⁶³ Both try to repress their need for spiritual faith but they still feel they need it.

Steinbeck sees an importance in religion as the root of moral conscience. His interest in religion can be seen throughout his work. There are many references, parallels and symbols drawn from the Bible. East of Eden, for example, is a parallel to the story of Cain and Abel. The immigration of the Joads to California may be compared to the flight of the Israelites out of Egypt. At least two of his heroes may be considered as images of Christ. Joseph in To a God Unknown, is described several times as Christlike. During the wedding ceremony, Elizabeth looks at Joseph and in her vision he has Christ's face. In the end, Joseph sacrifices himself as Christ sacrificed himself to save mankind. Juan Chicoy in The Wayward Bus is interpreted by some critics as a symbolic Christ who comes to help the situation.

What interests Steinbeck is not the form of religion but its essence. The reverence for life and the feeling of Oneness, sympathy and understanding are the essence of religion and Steinbeck sees them as cornerstones to a healthy society. For Steinbeck, a firm belief in God is a good religion in itself. What Steinbeck states through Jim Casey in The Grapes of Wrath, "All that lives is holy."¹⁶⁴ is also a precept of Buddhism.

¹⁶³John Steinbeck, The Long Valley (New York: Bantam Inc., 1967), p.73.

¹⁶⁴John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.196.

Religion having only form but no essence is satirized by Steinbeck in "Saint Asty the Virgin", a short story in The Long Valley. A Church itself has only form. He suggests in this short story that the Church is not as interested in sympathy and understanding as in material benefits and social respectability. He speaks satirically of Brother Paul and Brother Colin who go collecting tithes together. "The people called Colin a fine man and Paul a good man. They went tithing together because what Brother Colin could not get by persuasion, Brother Paul dug out with threatening and descriptions of the fires of Hell."¹⁶⁵ In To a God Unknown, Steinbeck presents a character, Burton, who is a religious fanatic. Steinbeck has only contempt for his narrow outlook and religious attitude that do not include sympathy and compassion for his fellow man. He always think that his belief is right and any other point of view is wrong. He "...kept himself from evil and he found evil in nearly all close human contacts."¹⁶⁶ This is not the religion Steinbeck speaks out for.

Jim Jasy is a character that Steinbeck admires. He is a Christ image, interested in the essence of religion. He leaves the old formalized religion and goes into the wilderness to find truth by himself. When he returns, his preaching seems

¹⁶⁵John Steinbeck, The Long Valley (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1967), p.130.

¹⁶⁶John Steinbeck, To a God Unknown (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1968), p.20.

to explain the teaching of Jesus Christ that God is love. When Tom Joad asks him about his feelings Easy replies, "what's this call, this spirit?... It's love. I love people so much I'm fit to bust, sometimes."¹⁶⁷ He gains experience and truth from nature and he gets a holy feeling of Oneness - that man is related to the whole. "I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing."¹⁶⁸ This reply comes very close to Steinbeck's own personal religion. Over and over in his works, one finds this reverence and his personal utterances about Oneness.

In Burning Bright, Joe Soul accepts Victor's child born from his wife as his child because he comes to the conviction that "... to know that every man is father to all children and every child must have all men as father."¹⁶⁹ In Sea of Cortez, Steinbeck expresses the idea that feeling of Oneness is the foundation of religion.

And it is strange thing that most of the feeling we call religious, most of the mystical outcrying which is one of the most prized and used and a desired reactions of our species, is really the understanding and the attempt to say that man is related to the whole thing, related inextricably to all reality, known and unknowable. ¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁷ John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p.32.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., p.110.

¹⁶⁹ John Steinbeck, Burning Bright (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1968), p.155.

¹⁷⁰ John Steinbeck, The Log from the Sea of Cortez (London: Pan Books, Ltd., 1969), p.267.

The Great Tide Pool mentioned in Cannery Row is the microcosm of the world and nature where living creatures fight in order to survive. It is both tranquil and murderous. The tide pool is life and man, too, is in it but at the same time he has ability beyond other creatures. Man is capable of rationalization and the feeling of Oneness. His horizons can go beyond the actual limits of the Tide Pool.

... a man looking at reality brings his own limitations to the world. If he has strength and energy of mind the tide pool stretches both ways, digs back to electrons and leaps space into the universe and fights out the moment into non-conceptual time. Then ecology has a synonym which is ALL. 171

Steinbeck offers his solution to the problems of modern man. That solution must come from man himself, who is at the same time creator and victim of the condition. The solution is to find time and a way to restore the importance of the soul and the value of the individual. He suggests that love and a sense of responsibility towards one's fellow man can make life more worthwhile and give a greater meaning to it. In Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck presents a natural scene, similar to the symbol of the Tide Pool, in which a water snake becomes the victim of a heron. There is a cruelty in nature; big animals eat small animals but animals do not have the quality of compassion. Man alone is capable of love and understanding but he does not always use the quality he possesses. Doc

¹⁷¹Ibid., p.146.

Burton has this love and understanding, George has it for Lennie. His life is not empty when he has Lennie with him.

In The Pearl, Steinbeck says the same thing again using a fish image. Kino is described as a little fish, a symbol of little people, the helpless ones trying "...to escape a school of great fishes that drove in to eat them."¹⁷²

In The Grapes of Wrath, though the Joad family suffers, the family has a will to live and in the end they learn to share and have compassion for their fellow men. Tom follows Easy's discipline of sympathy and love for all people. Steinbeck seems to suggest that the things that help people toward inner fulfillment in life are those which satisfy the needs of the soul.

In spite of all the complexities and problems of modern living: rejection, loss of communication, loneliness, emptiness, boredom, mechanization, materialism, the lack of trust, the loss of soul and the impersonal mass oriented world with its submerged individuality, Steinbeck is not without faith. His trust lies in the possible awakening of the human heart. But he knows that if the situation is to be improved or changed, it will have to come from within, from the human being. He is not a pessimistic writer but retains an enduring faith in humanity.

¹⁷²John Steinbeck, The Pearl (New York: Bantam Books, Inc., 1964), p.42.

The writers of today, even I, have a tendency to celebrate the destruction of the spirit and God knows it is destroyed often enough. It is the duty of the writer to lift up, to extend, to encourage. If the written word has contributed anything at all to our developing species and our half developed culture, it is this - great writing has been a staff to lean on, a mother to consult, a wisdom to pick up stumbling folly, a strength in weakness and a courage to support weak cowardice. And how any despairing or negative approach can pretend to be literature, I do not know. It is true that we are weak and sick and ugly and quarrelsome but if that is all we ever were, we would milleniums ago have disappeared from the face of the earth and a few remnants of fossilized jawbones, a few teeth in strata of limestone would be the only mark our species would have left on the earth. 173

His enduring faith is expressed again in The Grapes of Wrath this way:

For man, unlike any other things organic or inorganic in the universe, grows beyond his work, walks up the stairs of his concepts, emerge ahead of his accomplishments. This you may say of man - when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic grow and disintegrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward, he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back. This you may say and know it and know it... 174

¹⁷³Peter Lisca in The Wide World of John Steinbeck explains that this passage is quoted to Steinbeck from his own journal by Pascal Covici in a letter dated June 6, 1952. The last sentence of this passage appears in East of Eden, where it is among the last words spoken by Samuel Hamilton.

¹⁷⁴John Steinbeck, The Grapes of Wrath (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), pp.204-205.