

The Calf Path

One day through the primeval wood
a calf walked home as good calves
should;
but made a trail all bent askew,
a crooked trail as all calves do.
Since then three hundred years have fled,
and I infer that calf is dead.
But still he left behind his trail
and thereby hangs my moral tale.

But the trail was taken up next day
by a lone dog that passed that way;
and then a wise bell-wether sheep
pursued the trail o'er vale and steep,
and drew the flock behind him too,
as good bell-wethers always do.

And from that day, o'er hill and glade,
through these old woods a path was
made,
and many men wound in and out
and dodged and turned and bent about,
and uttered words of righteous wrath
because 'twas such a crooked path.
But still they followed—do not laugh—
the first migrations of that calf,
and through this winding roadway stalked
because he waddled as he walked.

This forest path became a lane
that bent and turned and turned again;
this crooked lane became a road
where many a poor horse with his load
toiled beneath the burning sun,
and travelled some three miles in one.
And thus a century and a half
they trod the footsteps of the calf.

The years went on in swift fleet
the road became a village street;
And this before men were aware,
a city's crowded thoroughfare.
And soon the central street was this
of a renowned metropolis
where men two centuries and a half
trod in the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a hundred thousand rout
followed this zig-zag calf about—
and o'er his crooked journey went
the traffic of a continent,
And hundred thousand men were led
by one calf near three centuries dead.

They followed still his crooked way
and lost three hundred years a day.
For thus such reverence is lent
to well established precedent.
A moral lesson this might teach
were I ordained and called to preach.

For men are prone to go it blind
along the calf paths of the mind,
and work away from sun to sun
to do what other men have done.
They follow in the beaten track
and out and in, and forth and back
and still their devious course pursue
to keep the path that others do.
They keep the path and sacred groove
along which all their lives they move,
but how the wise old wood-gods laugh
who saw the first primeval calf.
Ah! many things this tale might teach
but I am not ordained to preach.

Sam Walter Foss