

## WinkWorld October 2004

### 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 two hundred years have fled,  
And, I infer, the calf is dead.  
But still he left behind his trail,  
And thereby hangs my moral tale.

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 those 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 wood-way stalked,  
Because he wobbled when 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 on beneath the burning sun,  
And traveled some three miles in one  
And thus a century and a half  
They trod the footsteps of that calf.

The years passed 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;  
And men two centuries and a half

Trod in the footsteps of that calf.

Each day a hundred thousand rout  
Followed the zigzag calf about;  
And o'er his crooked journey went  
The traffic of a continent.  
A hundred thousand men were led  
By one calf near three centuries dead.  
They followed still his crooked way,  
And lost one 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.

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

1858-1911

(1989, American Society for Quality Control)