

## MOON-CALVES OF DEMOCRACY

BY HARDIN T. MC CLELLAND

**F**OUR years ago this Spring Floyd Dell picked out a national characteristic of the contemporary world when he personified our common faults and foibles all under the somewhat piquant term, "moon-calf". But I claim to have made observations around and above those which he thought sufficient. First of all the moon-calf's function always appears to be the mad pursuit of whatever is inconsistent and anachronistic; he is chronically provincial and morbidly muggletonian, he has the Jenkins mind and his tastes forever waver somewhere between chauvinism and marivaudage. If there is the least prospect that a certain course of conduct will allow a person's propensities to seek their fill unhaltered and insatiably, the moon-calf takes to it like a bird to garden-seed. And if there is the least rumor of adversity either from the housetops of public opinion or from the aromatic cellars of those not yet moon-struck, he likewise flees the ominous circumstances as if they spelled War and hides behind some popular intellectual fad such as Futurism, Bolshevism, Success-Psychology, political flapdoodle, flapperism and international conferences on disarmament and dope. Such an individual thinks nothing (absolutely nothing!) of wearing long hair, flowing ties, polkadot sox, green shirts, blue gloves, et al., nor does he greatly hold aloof and scruple about joining as many clubs and lodges as his memory for passwords will permit. Self-assertion and the motlibriste acquisition of material accoutrement are the prize mottoes of his peculiar metier; to be exclusive in his very forwardness and folly is the patent of his ignobility.

When he grows up and his penchant for the superlative has at last become more suave and soidisant, the moon-calf then seeks to become a captain of industry, a social lion, a despotic boss of

something or other, or at least his fancy dreams how regal his capacity is for absorbing and exploiting others' efforts at production and, like Bernard Shaw's modern gentleman, he often feels fatigued over the vicarious exertion for the merest sort of lazy livelihood. If chance has made him a Wallstreeter his affliction may be called Bovine Lunacy; if he becomes an acrobatic dispenser of promiscuous charities his name stands loudly advertised in electrical blazonry; while if he has been chosen as a college president he takes out an endowment policy and swears allegiance to the prince-regents in all the patriotic terms of free-alty. But, alas, if his neighbors fry fish with their kitchen doors open or forget to pull down their bathroom shades, his whole directorate is called in special session and the courts are importuned for warrants or contiguous restraining orders. In fact, no one near or far can exercise the divine and democratic right to do as he pleases except the superspoilt and subsnobbish son of Selene!

Futile dreams of wealth, power, ease and luxury are his daily proprium and exercise; the vainglory of vulgar conquest over some equally stupid fellow man is his ecstasy at night. The plain and honest medium of life's genial mint is all too vapid for moon-born exchange, and the unique ritual of Christian generosity is mediocre prattle to the lunar saint. Fear, incompetence, sorrow or fickle pride may be the misfortune of others, but they are there as golden opportunities lackeying his Mammon creed; and crime is one way or another invariably the explanatory footnote to his daily text. Who then would expect a trapper to forego his catch? And who would claim to know one single postichee free from latent greed and insincerity. Divine healers have little sense to pass a hand over wrinkled brows, and social reformers have little chance to choose a working force between shrewd loup-gartus and fickle dilettantes. The cheap burlesque of rogues and fools will always hold the center of life's stage it seems.

Still, for those who have no fancy notions or illusions, everything in this world has its proper value and pursuit; but the nature of this value and the motive of this pursuit depend upon our own impulsive whims or compulsory desires, our own flowery viewpoints or self-serving aims. Thus human affairs are so diverse they often seem quite anti-thetical and opposed to the very moods which sponser them. To one man wealth is an obstacle and a spiritual calamity; to another it is a primary interest and necessity

of life, the perquisites of its possession being just so many expressions of individual spirit, power and prestige. To one man culture is a daily communion with the good things of life, a Pierian Spring wherein to quench his soul's consuming thirst; to another it is anathema, a waste of time and effort, being born of human pride and pretense it cannot serve any other purpose, and a nonconformist decretal to that effect is posted on his door. But the henchmen of weird satellite conceptions balk the dual role and weepingly claim a singular tho solipsistic immunity. They are not guests of either host, and weigh their welcome as being truly hospitable only when they cross their own dark dungeon thresholds, apparently having dined with Damocles before. It is these who are moon-calves seeking some strange exotic transcript from Democracy, and if not already worldly-wise and wealthy, they are at least seeking to be such and a sadist chill of mercenary hauteur veils their smirking countenances as they ape the nouveaux riches.

Eugenics will continue to be a failing science just so long as lunacy in any form is permitted to flourish and promiscuously propagate itself. The machinery of criminal and divorce courts will continue to grind out semi-accurate solutions to our social problems just so long as sheer folly and stupid selfishness dictate fashions to the poor old spiritually incompetent world. And the shrewd unscrupulous wizards of the economic bourse will keep on shrinking the matrix power of life's peculiar alchemy until what little honor, courage, justice and heroism we do now enjoy will be deflated to the miserly poverty that right today marks their own souls' desolation. How soon then will our domestic rectitude be a component part of our public debauchery? How soon will that gradually dwindling minority of saints and sages die out altogether and leave the world to blunder on toward degeneracy and destruction? And will that heretofore amiable and energetic genius of religious faith, philosophical insight and artistic creation share the imminent degradation by turning into alignment with the perennially critical situation of today with our jazzy congregational entertainments, our worldliness and sham psychologism, our periodical decadence of taste and patronage of commercialized exhibitions? These are questions which no honest thinker or sincere social worker will try to evade or equivocate.

It is far from a trifling point of wit to make mention of man's present situation for he is on a hazardous enterprise and his future

happiness, nay, his very existence and security as a moral entity, is fast coming into jeopardy. In all apparent immunity and blasé ignorance of their connection with surrounding conditions, the moon-calves of health, wealth and culture think, or at least affect that chief delusion and self-opinionated *forte* of the intelligentia, that life is just now at its very best, no former age quite so wise and rich and brilliant, that the world is a free-lance arena for all competitors whether right or wrong, and that the merry-go-round of destiny has no hold on human ken. Such innocence of mind is totally unwarranted by the facts which any fool with half an eye for experience can see on every side. And yet it is perversely assumed for reasons of shrewd expediency; the policy is part and parcel of the moon-calf's weird protocol of redoubt. Too bad we do not have some energetic and courageous Julius or Sixtus with us today to annihilate a few of these modern barbarians of the vulgarian world!

Man's life is bound on every side by loves and laws, relations and restraints, he knows not of, or at least he shows but little consciousness of them. He goes about his duties and his recreations thinking, naively enough perhaps, that he has conscious sense of every mood and manner of his makeup, and emphasizes the high intelligence of his aims and methods in current tokens of rhyomism and self-esteem. But the arts of speech and dress and livelihood do not rest wholly on such superficial means as man devises. His very soul is not his own in face of love or hate, in prospect of reward or retribution. He has a higher life to live than the little private one he is capable of planning or affecting in this poor old mediocre nether-orb. And that life is one of high communion, esthetic taste and mystic exaltation. It is his truer self which he lets come forth in free spontaneous expression of the spiritual delights and delicate moral decisions so seldom visioned from the overworld down to this. It is the soul-spawn of one who returns instinctively to the mother-stream and original environment of Nature. Never yet has *she* done man an injury for she is man's great spiritual exemplar, his mother, nurse, reliable guide and counsellor.

Man's spiritual refuge then is the ready and ungrudged return to Nature's bosom, Nature's truth and Nature's law. By virtue of these he has the bodily, mental and emotional structure of a man; so should he likewise be natural and perform the functions

proper to a man. His evolution is continuous either up or down in the scale of existence, either progressive or atavistic just as he wills and wishes. Baron Cuvier's great law of correlation between structure and function (or between physical form and vital process) in organic life intended to show them in constant relation and influence one upon the other. One of his illustrations referred to the horns and hoofs of vegetarian animals—a reference which probably holds good for the present geological era. But recent discoveries of fossil remains in Nebraska reveal an early specimen of the preglacial *Moropus*, a sort of rhinoceros-horse-giraffe with claws, stiff clubby feet, a hard cerated nasal structure and teeth fit only for eating vegetation. It would thus seem that the famous Baron's law requires revamping, or at least the qualification of an amendment, because through the course of time evolution has passed through creative labors showing us that the physical structure and organic function of complex organisms are not constantly correlative, but are often anterior and posterior items of a continuous process of evolution. If therefore this applies to spiritual structures and functions, we had better go back further than mere historical traditions and studied moods for our wisdom and virtue. Back to Nature herself for our actual personality, mind and soul, for she created them, nurtured and developed them as they are today. Wisdom and virtue cannot be *read into* a man's character; he must have some inclination to be wise and good already inherent in his makeup, else he can read himself blind and still be an ignoramus and vulgarian. The average man has merely accepted Nature's gifts and has not had the sense, the responsive feeling, not even the gratitude to acknowledge them and treasure them in a pure naturalness of thought and emotion, will and spontaneous expression.

Artificial living has all too ominously become the bane of man's conscious progress. Too much confidence in a code of luxury and ease; too much strategy for self and legislation for others; too much dress rehearsal and too little actuating motive of honest work behind the scenes of his insipid mimicry. Sceptics galore are born and rail at all man's pride and artificiality; cynics come and go with their sneering scorn for all man's petty vanities and cultural veneer. But no sober man will deny that there is *some* measure of truth and just insight in their condemnation and revolt; he will understand that in such part or proportion at least human nature

is apparently corrupt and forward, not necessarily incorrigible from innate perversity, but really peccable and problematical and therefore only with the utmost difficulty ever reformed or brought to a realization of its culpable position. It is not exactly to our sage advantage either when casuists join in the general debate with proposals that we should give this half-infernal creature called man the benefit of the doubt in matters moral and economic, because we can hardly see how thoroughly the risks and liabilities outweigh the virtues and assets of human nature. The casuist plea only serves to obscure the issue with its chronicle of sophist questions as to what are the benefits of doubt, who so benefits, and whether it is not fair to consider that there is no doubt in the first place. But fortunately, and strange to say, I have lived long enough to know that something is wrong with people who counsel us to throw doubt and caution aside while credulity and devout cupidity are left to give rogues easy entry to our treasures.

Anyone who wants to test the depths of human credulity does not have to expend large sums lackeying alley-cats or ex-horsecar heroes, but he does have to be able to differentiate closely and intelligently between the knaves and fools who make up the personnel of every situation where credulity is the pivotal weakness. As such they may serve as the *caractères données* of the situation under analysis, but should not by any weak apology or casuist plea be excused or given the benefit of any sucker's doubt that they really are fools and knaves. We might as well talk about the advantages of ignorance in our individual opinions about life, people and things, or about the expediency of absolute faith when dealing with hoodlums, thieves, ghouls or dope addicts. They and their kind are glad enough to come upon someone who will be fool enough to doubt *all* the misanthropic maxims of the cynic and the sceptic.

Philosophers have for ages been trying to tell the superficial casuists that whenever weak hearts find specious virtues gainful in any certain course of conduct, the honest cause (their so-called battle for true ethical motive and practice) is as good as lost. But no cause that is worth while, no purpose that is ideal in aim and inexorable in determination, is lost to Nature. She created them and she alone preserves them. It is man who gets and loses, benefits by increase or suffers by decrease of moral patrimony. It is man, the artificial, stupid, selfish, ignorant little insect of the sea-

son's pool, who has not intelligence enough to choose nobler patterns than his own devices argue, who cannot even see the advantages of shaping his life after the fashion of cosmic sobriety and universal integrity, who lacks the power to create anything and can't seem to ever have sense enough to preserve it when Nature gives it to him. What hope for man then can be derived from any sphere of action short of naturalness and humble lessons learned by honest contact with experience. What future worth his effort awaits him if he does not first seek security in such spiritual refuge as is offered by toil and faith and love, sincerity and thought and sacrifice.

We have been told with vague remonstrance that "Life's the thing". But what life, what manner of life? Mere vitality and its muscular effort at this occupation or that sport, this exploit or that pastime, are not all there is to actual living, and they make but little provender for our philosophical digestion. Mere intellectual conquests of fleeting duration over matter, poverty or the opinions of our neighbors, are but feeble adjuncts and make little difference in the ethics of our conduct. The capacity to undergo long periods of wickedness and woe or the more or less questionable moral competition with others for economic prestige may speak well for our fortitude or industry, but we cannot yet consider ourselves very far advanced on the road of Life.

A well rounded, serene and happy life has balance of all these talents and credentials, it grows symmetrical with every phase of activity in whatever good we are capable of achieving or aspiring to. There should be no question as to what the really good things of life are. If we only lay aside our petty spites and spoils, our mad harangue and hellbent diligence in satisfying selfishness and vulgar pride, folly and extravagant whims, there would be opportunity for the good things to shine forth and give us beckoning glances. We would then have clearer vision and could see that the good things are composed of such rare treasures as books, friends, music, art, science, philosophy, love, courage, sincerity, justice, generosity, chastity, commonsense and religious faith. With these we are capable of all else worth our while, though not here enumerated. They make for a worthy balanced life, for a joy in living that knows no sad regrets, for a flowering spiritual beauty which never wilts nor withers even in the driest closest atmosphere. It is a minor or secondary premise to say "Life's the thing". The

major premise is to say "*Soul's the thing*", for there may all our treasures and our refuge from the rancorous world be found. At least it is the term we use to cover a composite character of all that is wise and good and energetic in human life.

In the old slow days of prescientific habits and unpretentious living, men had no fancy notions about life, no unscrupulous ambitions to own the world, no vain desires to industrialize everything, no scoundrel schemes of economic mischief, no sham irenic to conciliate their moral antinomies. About as far as they went in forecasting our mad delinquency was to say somewhat after the fashion of Pope:

"The Golden Rule, it is sad to admit,  
Seems quite contrary to human wit;  
But being the maxim of modest minds,  
It requires more virtue than it ever finds."

The anxiety of the age was to reach some cool romantic refuge from the vulgar world, which was a worthy aim, well worthy of our own emulation. But many of the foremost writers were more concerned to strike upon ambiguous similes and sparkling epigrammatic turns than in that cooler and more useful *cos ingeniorum* which Milton said could make an idiot think. They knew what they wanted perhaps, but they had no very definite plan of how to go about getting it. And so it is today; we are cursed by the selfsame incapacity to readily realize our dreams, and in our quandary we cast about desperately for some means of sanction and support for our moral incompetence. We do fortunately see that these mushroom magicians of "the new psychology" are usually financial fakirs as well; that our thousand and one cult-crazes and fad-follies, all in the blatant publicity of the most greedily exploited dernier-cri (Success), are still but so much froth and foam and flotsam on the ephemeral tides of life. And glory be! We are even getting intelligent enough to see that one of the best sumptuary movements of a reconstructive program in social hygiene in its economic phase would be to supplant the old hypocritical *caveat emptor* advice with the more honest legislation of *caveat vendor*. With that accomplished we would at least have no more high speed salesmen trying to see which could soonest get some rube to buy the New York Subway or "invest" his savings in a discounted mortgage on the Treasury Building.



Man's proper life does not require nor ask for those base expediencies so often culled from the social garbage and miserly glutted by the rakish fool whose paltry thinking process makes him believe and practice them. Real living has its problems of livelihood and leisure, to be sure, just the same as any other flesh-and-blood creature must have food and shelter and raiment. (A mere tadpole or fish existence is perhaps the only exception.) But by the token of this very commonplace resemblance it is however not subject to mere appetite and opportunity all the way through. It is the real life verily because it is not ruled by the exigencies of its specious present, neither passion nor perversion being able to reach its inner sanctuary. One who really lives does so by additional process of spirit, not by virtue of physical organism and bodily function alone. He is not set on realizing any of the common passions or fads of the day; he is too intelligent and busy otherwise for that. He is not anxious to satisfy any vanity of popular success, nor does he seek any putrid power wherewith to exploit others, for he sees in these the all too Gadarean theriasm and Sadist degradation of dissipated roués and *mechants derniers*.

Where soul is, these things are not; where spirit dwells in quiet refuge from the worldly vices of foolish men, these leprous inclinations are unknown, or if seeking entrance, are soon routed and repudiated. A certain respite from life's rancorous wreck leaves the soul at leisure to take exercise in her chosen disciplines and dreams, whence she may grow devout and daring for heroic deeds of valor. We do not need blind fatalism and soft resignation to whatever life's storm and stress betide. But we do need, vitally enough today I am sure, faith and courage, generosity and justice, moderation and moral honesty, clear-seeing intelligence and cordial good-will, the power to love nobly and the heroic faculty for dauntless effort and unselfish sacrifice. These are the means, these are the aims, these are the functions of spirit which give zest to man's truer nobler life. They show him as of higher mold than beasts of prey or burden, they make him wish to be divine and ill-content with any mediocre mundane fate. They give him visions past the narrow limits of his petty little frog-pond selfishness, they raise him up above the swampy slime of his lazy vulgarian ooze and *actually drive him to shuffle off his gnarled shell of low desire*. They make him see, and help others try to see, that life is but an empty mess of strategems and spoils if there is not some little

occasional refuge for man's spirit away from the blustering billingsgate of the workaday world, where soul can give him rest and make the necessary repairs that he may go on with the never-ending struggle between good and evil.

If men but knew wherein their bounden duty lies. Their duty toward themselves as units in a moral world; their duty toward others as brotherly constituents in a social world; their duty toward the Universe (both natural and spiritual) as the ultimate ground and destiny of their lives; their duty toward God as that final judge and arbiter of their slow and painful progress through a thousand evolutionary cycles. To develop themselves physically, mentally, spiritually; to work, fight, sacrifice and even suffer for the common good; to have faith in the final upshot of it all, courage to bear with the inevitable hardships of existence in an adolescent world, and yet the noble aspiration to be a citizen of the Cosmos when this nether life is done. *That is the Life*. And it's no sham gesture of precocious perfection either.

Mazzini's sublime confessional recognized the glory and the power of such a rich heroic aim, and it has made his name immortal in the humble archives of good men. And when the last great panoramic chronicle is written the chapter titles of man's cosmic biography will read in practically the same identical order as his spiritual progress here on earth. Hence, with this as code for nobler living, no one need have dull sorrows or regrets; no one is really lost to hope's bright visions but those who deliberately renounce the clear direction of their light. The air is free (thank God!), the sky is clear, the sun shines ever benevolently, if we but breathe, look up, and relish what God's vast creation was meant to be. Nature is forever trying to make us see the righteous way, and if we are only halfway willing (and are not aimless blathering imbeciles) she will give us aid and comfort for our every hope or hindrance. From those few scraps of meagre knowledge, from those few tokens of the good and true, which man has so laboriously won from life and the natural world, resurgent souls have tried to guess the rest, have felt it strongly probable that the obdurate surface of man's life holds vaster cosmic principles in store unseen, but which we may some day discover and put to useful exercise. They therefore try to show us that it is wicked to remain so mediocre when a few years of effort will bear us into a far more joyous and enlightened world. They try to show

us that it is quite possible to rise above the vulgar importunities of self and bodily concerns, to view with rapture that overworld of truth and beauty and goodness. They even try to push the inert vulgarian up a peg or two, that he may see more broadly than what his ephemeral mischiefs promise him, that he may realize that pure aspiration and courage, intelligent thought and energetic social work are still prime requisites to the efficiency even of his own narrow attitude toward life.

This world can boast of but very few resurgent souls, but with the few that do come forth and volunteer their various aids and comforts the heights are soon achieved, the lesser life is soon recast in nobler mold and a far more peaceful spirituelle radiates their refuge from the rancorous world. Is theirs not indeed a charmed life, a life well worthy of our emulation? Do they not indeed realize far greater blessings and sweeter because more innocent and durable joys than the fool, the coward, the debauchee or knave? And do they not treasure the rewards of friendship, love, peace, happiness and spiritual relief which inevitably follow such benevolent and useful lives? No doubt about it!

Some people may be content to say "Life's the thing" and be fairly happy and successful; but they do not know how much they miss of true and glorious living until they can with full conception and devout intent begin to claim instead that "Soul's the thing". Then only do they begin to get faint visions of Man's Spiritual Refuge from a mad and blasphemous world. Then only do they begin to come into their own, that legacy of peace and understanding which has been in probate, lo, these last two thousand years.