

*The Wasp*  
January 23, 1886

### *The Discalfed Cow*

From the earliest times the cow that has been parted from her calf has been held in great reverence and cherished with pious solicitude. Diodorus Siculus tells us that among the Stulti, a numerous and powerful people inhabiting the northern slope of the Montes Johanasinorum, the “discalfed cow” (if we may venture to create an English equivalent to his Latin term) was worshiped with public honors next in solemnity to those accorded to Juno—a goddess herself distinguished in the minds of her early adorers by a certain cowiness of character and attributes. Herodotus mentions a people living in the valley of a river which he does not name, but which is without doubt the stream known to modern geography as Smith’s Branch, who held annually a religious festival of which three days were devoted to rites and ceremonies in commemoration of a legendary cow that had “raised Ned,” as Herodotus quaintly phrases it, when deprived of her calf. She was said, indeed, to have overrun and occupied all Asia Minor and to have spread as far eastward as the Ganges. It is thought by some that the great Chinese Wall was built to check her encroachment, but this is uncertain. From Arcuproductus we learn that Hypocritus Potator, the Lemnian advocate of temperance, wrote an account of the Slunigulliones, among whom he passed a period of six years, and whom he describes as adorers of the Bereaved Cow—a worship that must have commended itself to Potator’s favor through its suggestion of milk, a favorite fluid with teetotalers, even in our day. The work of Potator is not extant.

Now it is a very remarkable and significant circumstance not hitherto noted in connection with this subject that all these three peoples severally mentioned by these three great writers, Diodorus, Herodotus and Arcuproductus, as worshipers of the Discalfed Cow were deaf! Of this fact, although it seems to have been unobserved by, or unknown to, the writers named, we have abundant testimony in the works of others; and it is of overwhelming importance in its bearing upon the question of the physical basis of religious belief. It seems highly improbable that any nation having the use of its ears rent free would ever worship the *bos resonanta*, although no people having a wholesome love of sustained energy, laryngeal endurance and unchangeable fidelity to a single note could fail to feel a profound respect for the species. The Assyrians and Egyptians, who, as appears from the development of ear in their sculpture, were distinguished for acute hearing, treated the Discalfed Cow, doubtless, with favor—perhaps loved her as a sister—but their real adoration was given to the bull, which the pious imagination of Assurbanipal’s subjects endowed with wings, and which the riparian populations of the Nile country stabled in temples, the sacred animal blowing its bellows to augment the fervor of their zeal. To the vocal supremacy of the Discalfed Cow the three obscure peoples who worshiped at her shrine were entirely insensible; their veneration must therefore have been given to the very least of her virtues—her faculty of standing in her tracks and gazing through a gate for twenty-five hours a day. This is a noble peculiarity, certainly, but not nearly so striking as her power of song. In this respect she knocks the nightingale perfectly cold. She is a daughter of Stentor and Calliope: she

is a megaphone of the top class, and does not require the adventitious aid of high license to choke off competition. When she catches the speaker's eye the house wakes up, and by the time she has finished her argument the gallery is abhorred by Nature.

At a well known California milk-and-watering place was a famous echo which had its headquarters in a vertical cliff about a quarter of a mile from the hotel and half a mile high. This echo was the sole attraction of the place. If you stood in the right place and called out, "Hello!" it would reply, "Hello yourself and see how you like it." Hearing two or three words of Shakespeare or Adair Welcker, it would repeat them, and then, after thinking a few moments, go on and finish the quotation. This echo would answer conundrums and compute interest. If a dog barked it would copy the bark in a nice round hand and yell "Sick him!" It was altogether the best all-round working echo that has ever been seen in California.

Well, one day the proprietor of the hotel took a calf away from its mother and shut it in a field lying in front of the cliff. Directly in the focus of the echo was a point from which the field could be seen. Pretty soon the cow struck that spot and made a reconnaissance of the situation. The place seemed to suit her and she went into camp there, with her neck over the fence. Pretty soon she ventured a remark expressive of her sense of the situation. After throwing down a neighboring wagon-shed, and stopping a clock in the hotel, the remark went across to Echo Rock and being multiplied by ten and reinforced by the line, "Though lost to sight to memory dear," started on the return trip. About half way back it met remark number two and returned to the rock with it because it was the weaker vessel. The two were now thoroughly overhauled and refitted, and being strengthened at every point and supported by the assertion that "absence makes the heart grow fonder," done in a variety of keys and seven languages, they set out for the authoress of their being, intending to paralyze her. They had the misfortune to encounter remark number three—a warble of truly cosmical energy, for the maternal heart had now settled down to steady and effective work. Just where this third complaint met the allied echoes of the first and second stood a calf, which, roused by the repeated summons, had managed to mount its tall uncertain legs to overlook the landscape and get the bearings of its natural provider. It was a melancholy incident in that calf's history. It was caught in the sound-waves on both sides and they nipped it flat. Then it spun round like a top, and joint after joint of its tail snapped off, like the cracker of a whip. Finally it was lifted in the air like a broad leaf in a whirlwind, and shot against the face of the cliff, maculating it from base to summit with a crimson spatter-work of minced veal. That ended the phonomachy: Mr. Echo made no further back talk but the bugle of the victress rang for the next forty-eight hours, impelling against the subdued stronghold successive rollers of sound, which burst against its eternal front in vast and thunderous confusion. But there was no undertow.

Not a response has ever been got out of that rock since: you might as well yawp at a wet blanket on a clothes-line. The landlord had to alter all his advertisements in the city papers, the summer boarder steered his plummy body elsewhere to be defledged and the place is now a ruin, an owlery, a bat-ranch, a cow-blasted desolation. That is why we say with Diodorus Siculus that the Discafted Cow is no slouch.

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