

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

---

Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)

Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)

---

1915

## The Man from the Moon

W. G. Langworthy Taylor

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly>



Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

---

Taylor, W. G. Langworthy, "The Man from the Moon" (1915). *Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918)*. 57.  
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/midwestqtrly/57>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Mid-West Quarterly, The (1913-1918) by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

## THE MAN FROM THE MOON

### THE MAN FROM THE MOON, A JEFFERSONIAN, AND A SOCIALIST

**M. FROM M.** I thought I knew something about mundane affairs from my study of the newspapers; but to see a Jeffersonian with a ring through his nose led about like a dancing bear by a socialist! It's enough to make a man believe in possession—or what amounts to much the same thing, conversion. But hold; I will accost him. (*To Jeffersonian.*) Why do you offer yourself to be bullyragged by this person, whom I recognize by his salt-and-pepper suit, white tie, and kid gloves to be a follower of the creed, "property is robbery"?

**JEF.** Why, I do this quite willingly, sir.

**M. FROM M.** My reading of history is that you used to stand up bravely for the "rights of man," intending thereby the claim of each man to the fruits of his own labour. By that you understood, further, his security in undertaking anything that might bring him either a wage of labour or a rent of luck.

**JEF.** Let me see! I believe I did, but that was long ago. I began to perceive that propped upon this theory, the able, the quick, those on the spot and ready to take advantage of opportunities, like Rockefeller and Carnegie, gained a long lead on the rest. At first I said: "Very well! that is their good fortune; if it isn't one man, it's another,"—as is very true. But I had then no conception of the immense handicap of a late start in the pecuniary game. The man who once succeeds in getting on the market his trademark for a razor, a soap, a shoe, a pill, and firmly implanting it in consumers' memories, has entrenched himself in an inexpugnable financial fortress. Similar advantages attach to the early contracts for supplies and to well planned, speculative purchases of land.

**M. FROM M.** And that thought offered an opportunity for Socialist to put the ring in your nose. He is the lawyer of the wageworker. Wageworkers constitute a large and useful class, who must needs act *en masse* in order to protect their

interests, which they habitually misname "their rights." But he takes the extreme position that every gain by capitalists is robbery of labour. Now, "robbery" is a legal term of criminal law. It evidently is not applied by him in the juridical sense. Its loose and figurative employment in this way amounts merely to a reiteration, in a deceptive form, of the envy and hatred of the poor toward the rich.

JEF. But I did not adopt the formula that "private capital is robbery."

M. FROM M. Not in set terms; the inconsistency with your former individualism would have been too glaring. You saved the form, while surrendering the principle; for you charged "democracy" with a new content: formerly it meant "equal opportunity for all"; but now it reads, "the masses *vs.* the classes," or "appropriation by the employees of the whole product of everybody's labour," or "no show for capital."

*(At this point, Jeffersonian makes a violent but vain endeavour to part himself from Socialist.)*

SOC. (*finally*). I think I have him pretty tight now!

M. FROM M. But are you not afraid that he may perceive that after all he is not a "wageworker"? He has only been travestying one.

SOC. Well, if class interest is not a strong enough bond, I shall, for a while, at least, succeed in leading him about on the string of maudlin utopianism. Marx knew well how to bait the hook for the masses. The premise that only labour deserves reward looks good. However, a definite content for the classification of "labour" presents difficulties. Of course the hand worker is a labourer. But then the foreman, the clerk, the bookkeeper must also be let in. Then come the authors and the men of science and the teachers. These categories are often closely associated with capitalists and inclined to sympathize with them; but not being capitalists, could not easily be excluded from labourers.

M. FROM M. And the capitalists themselves, do not they labour? They may be observed going daily to the routine of their offices. But their contribution is claimed to be immaterial and hence unworthy. Marx undoubtedly succeeded beyond expectation in persuading labourers that capitalists were non-producers. But then his task was

favoured by the proneness of human nature to believe that to be right which is merely selfishly advantageous. What would the workmen do if the capital were all neglected or consumed?

**Soc.** There is no danger! Be easy on that score! The state would be the capitalist.

**M. FROM M.** This kind of social organization is more readily imagined by the ingenious theorist than by the practised investigator or man of affairs. Would the state, let me ask, possess the requisite abstinence, such as is displayed by capitalists?

**Soc.** Abstinence of capitalists! You amuse me. That talk of John Stuart Mill's about the "abstinence of the capitalist" is the great joke of us socialists. Why, who drink the champagne, keep the race horses, squander princely revenues on yachts and strings of polo ponies, and untold millions on "the latest creations of Worth," but the capitalists? Where does their abstinence come in?

**M. FROM M.** Where, then, does the capital come from? Who drinks all the beer, whiskey, and gin, and consumes the vast mass of the tobacco crop; squanders his little surplus on fake picture shows or catch-penny advertisements of impossible nostrums, and otherwise violates every rule of common sense, hygiene, or foresight in the distribution of the purchasing power attributed to him? In the gross, the wealth squandered by the masses is as great as by the classes.

**Soc.** But the classes neither spin nor toil.

**M. FROM M.** Where can you show me a government that "saves money"? The province of government is to spend—ideally on education, which is the best investment of a nation, but which is still not a store of material goods that afford well-being; on amusements, to which similar remarks apply; and on parks and recreations—always non-productive expenditure; or again, on lighthouses, railways, postoffices and other means of communication, which assume the existence of a vast body of private capital to be served, protected, or taxed.

**Soc.** Railroads and canals are national capital.

**M. FROM M.** Very true; and the state railways of Prussia are said to be run at a profit, but there exists much dissatisfaction with their service and rates. But since this public business is a natural monopoly, it would be daring to affirm

that the so-called *profits* are not veiled taxes. They are applied to the expenses of other departments of the Prussian government. A large part of the municipal enterprises of the world admit heavy losses; the cities groan under the burden of rapidly growing debts.

Taxes fall, from the nature of the case, on *private* enterprise. *State* socialism has but served to pile up indebtedness to *private individuals*. Who is to pay it finally if not taxed *individuals*, capitalists, business men, even labourers?

Capitalists constitute the class that *refrains* from consuming wealth but *preserves* and *augments* it perpetually, when not prevented or wiped out and destroyed by predatory taxation, as in oriental countries. They are observed to possess a special faculty. Their disposition is so ordered and arranged as to enable them to keep their itching fingers off of the wealth that could easily be consumed and to maintain an authority which keeps others off, as long as the state defends or even recognizes the so-called "institution of private property."

Soc. What is private property?

M. FROM M. It is an authorization, a commission, granted by the state—or at least, by society—to properly disposed persons, to guard that portion of the social wealth entangled in production till it is ready for consumption. I am not here speaking of your other privileges with regard to objects dedicated to immediate satisfactions. Even socialists admit the necessity of such property.

If capitalists drink champagne, is it largely at their own risk. They may consume and destroy their own prospects along with those of society; but that they do not, the swelling statistics of tangible wealth eloquently testify. The extent to which wealth *may* be squandered is limited only by wealth itself. If Mr. Rockefeller were to distribute his millions in gratuities instead of donating the *income* of some of his wealth to an eleemosynary institution for rational apportionment, it is little exaggeration to say that in the lapse of a year or two not a tenth of it would be left actively contributing to social welfare or to the industrial or pleasurable betterment of the masses. Nine-tenths of the recipients, say, of Standard Oil stock, would seek to exchange their treasure trove capital,

directly or indirectly, for pleasures such as automobiles, or foolish, ill-considered objects, which do not, or at least in their custody would not, form part of a well-thought-out, socially productive, totalizator.

The result would be that the "lucky" recipients would be no better off than before, except for the passing enjoyment of the act of a single consumption. Oil might continue to sell and oil shares survive the shock of being thrown broadcast on the stock market; but the wealth paid for them by their purchasers would become wholly non-productive, although previously it may be assumed to have been productive, and a severe blow would have been struck at the nation's income and hence at its industry. If capitalists generally were as foolish as I have supposed Mr. Rockefeller to have been, society would be rapidly impoverished.

Soc. But, I repeat, the state could own all the capital.

M. FROM M. A difficulty is that the state is put together, in large part, out of these very masses, and it is doubtful whether they, as a political body, will seriously sustain a policy which they individually are too weak to carry out.

Soc. Drunkards vote for temperance.

M. FROM M. They get the tippie all the same.

Soc. But the stronger citizens would exert an influence in favour of conservation, as they always have done.

M. FROM M. I am surprised that you appeal to the conservatives. You have always maintained that they are a drag on progress. In the economy of free competition the means whereby they have exerted influence has been called capital. You propose to take their tool away and still to rely upon them for the old, beneficial results! Then, why go over to socialism at all? The triumph of the labour party would be short lived, or, at most, nominal. In the revolution wealth would have disappeared along with its owners; but essentially, the leaders of industry, if industry there were, would be men of the same type. They would not enter the game for nothing.

The distinctive quality of the capitalist is the strength of character which *preserves resources*. Your jokes about champagne are most appreciated by those who know least of the real basis on which social prosperity rests. The way to bring about distribution of champagne among labourers,

if that be desirable, is for them to look out intelligently for their *interests* rather than stand out obstinately for theoretical *rights*. A political majority, largely drawn from labour, could, perhaps, continue to elevate the tax rate some further without driving capital to despair. Taxation may easily be overdone, however, and it is difficult to reform back the finances of a state in the direction of a smaller budget. The cessation of warfare and of military preparations would be an excellent device for lightening public burdens, if our vast modern populations could dispense with the discipline and the education which the modern popular army affords. The bulk of the indebtedness of our cities is incurred for the introduction of public utilities at private expense—so called state socialism. Socialism cannot pay its own way. It looks not to the economic future. Its indebtedness is a confession of its dependence on private enterprise. Who is to pay these vast debts? The taxpayer, the owner of "private property."

Soc. Then all you claim for the capitalist is a negative rôle: he guards capital from destruction.

M. FROM M. Can you deny its importance? What concern of yours is it whether capitalists patronize art or amusements or bars? Perhaps some capitalists are so unworthy that they are mere figureheads, titular chiefs for a self-perpetuating management, which, once set going, works automatically to hold great estates bound together.

Soc. I should prefer to see all this conservation done by the state. Your capitalist as figurehead does not appeal strongly to me.

M. FROM M. You will have to accept him, I fear, like many other natural phenomena which may produce an unpleasant impression. Statecraft should not be a matter of whims and fancies.

Soc. Really, I do not so much object to this sort of capitalist, who shuts himself off with his kind to enjoy a life of unalloyed pleasure, as I do to that other variety, his father or grandfather, who laid the foundations of the fortune. That man was the original robber. He was an oppressor. He took every advantage of labour. He imposed fines and penalties and kept a company store. He charged exorbitantly for the blasting powder. He employed child labour and neglected safety devices.

**M. FROM M.** Would the state be a better employer? In some cases it errs on the side of indulgence. The "government stroke" is a byword. But your old argument, that there could be no strikes in state industries, has fallen into innocuous desuetude. In France the state railway employees, the postmen, and even the school teachers have learned the gentle art of striking. And if the suppression of a strike be imperative in order that the interests of the common citizen may not be sacrificed to the whim and violence of a guild or clique, the French government is, at times, obliged so to stretch its authority that the basis of all order is rudely shaken. On the other hand, the abuse of the convict in the chain gang gives some idea what is in store for the government employee who happens to belong to a political minority or to some department of production or class of the population which is not in favour. Factions of the Federation of Labour are fighting each other in your country to-day. So are the "tongs."

**Soc.** The general progress of civilization may be relied upon to guarantee the achieved standards of humanity in their everyday application.

**M. FROM M.** Don't you believe it! In highly civilized countries the even balancing of the particularists and the centralizers, of the radicals and the conservatives, of the short and the long time mentalities, of the enthusiasts and the doubters, of the idealists and the agnostics, goes far to ensure fairness. But as long as brutal men exist, there will be brutal work and need of brutal masters. The public is taught by prints, professors, and politicians always to side with the men, and to assume that employers who succeed with raw labour in large blocks are unnecessarily severe. Put yourself, for a moment, in the place of an enterpriser bound to extract a social service from a horde of half-savage anthropoids, eager to murder or dynamite upon an artful suggestion applied to their unresisting, inflammable nerves. The employer or superintendent must become, to an extent, calloused who can, at the same time, face down such a mob and bear the brunt of an unsympathetic public opinion, worked by yellow journalism. There are captains and lieutenants of industry who daily risk their lives in personal dealings with the dangerous classes who are encountered in

certain lines of work. Recently they have been officially notified that they have forfeited the sympathy of government because they are only "in it" to make money. This is enforcing individualism with a vengeance in order to destroy supposed enemies of socialism. The captain of industry who succeeds in extracting a social product from this grade of labour certainly deserves well of his country.

The claim of a skilled elephant to appropriate the whole product of its labour would not be wholly ungermane to that of a human toiler. Elephants are employed extensively to carry and pile up logs, and some complete the rather complicated operation without the mahout on their necks. Would it be robbery or not for the elephant to sell the timber and deposit the money to its own account? The dependence of the workman on his immediate boss is not so very different from that of the elephant on his mahout. Indeed, the elephant has the advantage of the human labourer in that it combines the efficiency of a whole gang or shift.

SOC. Don't you believe in the "closed shop"?

M. FROM M. The "closed shop" is a matter of fact rather than of belief. It marks a stage in the warfare incident to industrial competition. It is the monument to a victory won by labour over capital. The employer is a pretty supine one who yields to this principle without a fight. To say that it is inevitable and should be accepted as such, is quite beside the mark. All sorts of things are inevitable sooner or later. There is hardly a petty tribe on the map of Europe but sometime has been arbiter of that continent. Presumably such pre-eminence was "right" when it occurred and "wrong" when it did not occur. Does it follow that other tribes were "wrong" not to recognize that moment and yield fealty without striking a blow?

The contest of labour with capital is quite analogous. The relations of the classes are adjusted on the principle of competitive *interests*. The closed shop has, in some form, been the bone of contention ever since there were shops. There is no abstract question of right involved, except the *right to contend*. But it is probable that too facile yielding on this point of policy would, in many cases, be fatal to an industry. Much depends on the temper of the men. The interest of government is to keep the peace. Otherwise

the public is little concerned in the contest, but is called on to admire the courage of the enterprisers and their managers who risk their lives in the attempt to make fruitful the class of labour, for instance, that may be obtained for mines.

Soc. Well, it does take courage, true enough, to command certain classes of labourers and operatives! See what plucky fellows our labour leaders are! But in the socialist state the common man would be better disposed and have a more social disposition.

M. FROM M. Tell that to the marines! It is precisely in the socialist state that men would quarrel. The truth is that the individualist state alone can develop the social instincts.

Soc. But the socialist state is desirable.

M. FROM M. When industry, in all its myriad ramifications, can spontaneously organize itself; when every man can fall into place without direction, is eager to do and is never disposed to quarrel, the rôle of the enterpriser will be less dangerous, more honorary, less pecuniary. But the capitalist, as the educator of the future ideal workman, has still a long bit of work cut out ahead for him. The capitalist commands through his funds, money, or capital; and, conversely, he who orders, organizes, and directs labour is bound to become a capitalist. It is an error of socialists to try to persuade us that men can be found capable of directing labour, who will not tend to become capitalists or to call in the co-operation of capitalists.

Further, as a result of his command over men, the organizer must be authorized to lord it over things to an extent which will allow of the completion of the work; and that license is ordinarily called "property." If you don't like the word, we shall have to find an equivalent. Let the capitalists be registered like blooded stock and take out licenses to propagate wealth. The licensees will be no other than the old capitalists, working for approximately the same pay. The non-capitalistic quality or temper of the masses is shown by the fact that the efforts of the trades-unions are directed towards higher wages, in other words, towards an *immediate pecuniary benefit*, the amount presumably to be expended in "better living," *and not to be saved*. No guaranty is demanded or offered that the *source of income* should be correspondingly strengthened.

But the efforts for *permanent betterment* of the masses emanate from the classes. Capital, philanthropy, social science, economy, learning, philosophy, the sciences, and the universities are originated, developed, supported, and perpetuated by the classes.

JEF. He's let me go at last. Those last remarks of yours were too much for him.

M. FROM M. Congratulations! But what's become of your ring?

JEF. He must have taken it to snare the progressives.

M. FROM M. And yet I believe that the progressives would have been glad to catch you themselves.

JEF. Their "policies" are too radical for me.

M. FROM M. I see you believe in tariff reform.

JEF. Yes; they are decidedly weak there.

M. FROM M. And in "curbing the trusts."

JEF. On that, they say, I don't go far enough. They play to the galleries on "trustbusting."

M. FROM M. Are they socialists?

JEF. Worse—imperialists.

M. FROM M. Why not say, "egotists," and be done! . . . How about bank and currency reform?

JEF. Yes; I am after a scientific currency.

M. FROM M. Your bankers *seem* satisfied; they are no longer in revolt. They see the door of the pantry ajar and the pie on the shelves.

JEF. Another subject on which they have no convictions. But I cannot regulate the trusts enough to suit them, *so they say*. But what they would do, if they had the power, is problematical.

M. FROM M. And there is the control of the tropics; they have announced no policy on that.

JEF. Right there is where they have most. The other questions are political conundrums; but the man that made the Panama Canal is not saying all he thinks about Mexico.

M. FROM M. But you have already a protectorate over Mexico, or at least a "sphere of influence."

JEF. How so?

M. FROM M. You have expressed a preference for one of the factions.

JEF. I felt great sympathy for Señora Madero.

M. FROM M. And you made the incident of the flag an excuse in the hope of lending a hand to your friends.

JEF. I swear I never thought of such a thing!

M. FROM M. And when you became disgusted with the barbarity of the Constitutionals (God save the mark!) and illuminated on the dangers of your fatuous originality in international law, you went into training to drop your friends behind the veil of strict observance of neutrality, something like Gladstone in the Civil War, and behind a conference at Niagara Falls, the diplomacy of which I do not deny; but you were balked again.

JEF. Don't you think the peons are horribly abused?

M. FROM M. Doubtless. But Villa is not the man to help them.

JEF. Why not?

M. FROM M. Mexicans cannot give Mexico the really paternal government it needs.

JEF. I believe in Mexico for the Mexicans. Let them elect a president.

M. FROM M. So do I; but let us waste no more time in silly talk about a free and fair election in Mexico or the Philippines or India or any other tropical country. Foreign domination alone can make it technically independent; but who can make the voters spiritually so?

JEF. Then what is to become of them?

M. FROM M. The white man is on trial. Can he carry his burden? He cannot evade it. Having worked out, in a measure, the problem of justice and spiritual uprightness at home, he must not be indifferent to the needs of the rest of the world. He cannot shut himself off from extra-territorial mankind. He cannot meekly let them despoil him. He *must* conquer, but like a crusader. Once the sphere of his responsibility was confined to the little circle of western Europe, then were added the North American colonies; but now the marvellous inventions of news-distribution and of transportation have brought within their scope countless millions who never could have originated them and are unqualified independently to exploit them. Why, Villa telephones!

JEF. Should their incompetency affect our principles of conduct towards those peoples?

M. FROM M. Decidedly. The political freedom which you

enjoy, the free competition and enterprise, the right of free speech, the social regulation which is nothing but a formal expression of an evolved public opinion—these you have won by hard knocks within a favourable environment.

But those peopling a less favourable one, where climate is less stimulating and less persuasive to capitalization, where the waters are less attractive to navigation, where the seasons are less certain or the heat is less friendly to staple cereals, or the vapours calculated to spread miasma and languor, can never, unaided by you, attain to the great goods of Right and Justice.

JEF. I believe I am doing the best possible for the Mexicans.

M. FROM M. Perhaps so: but either you don't know why or you will not let others into the secret. You have spurned experience incarnated in international law. You do not admit or apparently understand that you have established a protectorate. The nations know that language.

JEF. But there is no protectorate.

M. FROM M. You should not have taken part in Mexico's internal affairs.

JEF. But protection or interference is not individualism.

M. FROM M. No; not in any narrow sense, for it involves the application of a superior, external force, even of armed force.

JEF. Which I detest.

M. FROM M. But which you do not hesitate to use, just as a bluff.

JEF. Well, a man must be practical.

M. FROM M. So I say. Take, for instance, internal affairs. You do not hesitate to lay down stringent rules for large business, to provide state and national agents for trust regulation, and special courts to hear complaints against corporations. I concede that you sincerely desire to open a fair field for persons, especially of the coming generation, to take a new start. You do not want it said, in these United States, "the box office is closed; all seats sold!" or, as the sign reads on the Paris omnibuses, "*complet!*" You call this a favouring of competition. You might as well have called it obliterating the effects of competition.

JEF. But what power can do this for the tropics?

M. FROM M. Precisely the power that does it at home, the real *vox populi*, the power of public opinion. A strong nation

thoroughly saturated with an enlightened public opinion can rule the world, as England has partially demonstrated with her colonies. A concert of such nations can elevate the rest of mankind to its own level—falling short, perhaps, in the difficult task of imparting to them the requisite inborn force—and conceivably *above* its own level.

JEF. You talk in riddles. I thought *I* was the theorist; I now see that it is you.

M. FROM M. Honours are easy.

JEF. Talking of armies, I was hoping to get rid of them entirely. The sight of a soldier is so disagreeable, it makes me want to join hands—or noses—with my old friend, Socialist, again.

M. FROM M. I think your feeling is partly a traditional hatred of redcoats. The Kaiser complimented the socialists on their discipline, when they paraded in order to show their strength. There is certainly something admirable and stirring in the spectacle of a body of disciplined troops. It was in war that man early learned lessons of co-operation, social action, and mutual aid. I say this knowing that some philosophers vaguely hint that the psychology of the earliest savages was essentially that of group sympathy. Perhaps so. But it was sympathy on a low plane of consciousness, like the mutual aid of ants.

In theory, war is an anachronism. In practice, wars prevail with alarming frequency. But the rules of warfare adopted by civilized nations are very different from those of uncivilized or ancient peoples. The modern soldier is as up-to-date as the modern schoolmaster. The parallel is not a chance one. They are both trained to spread an example more exalted than that of the enemy or of the schoolboys. Unfortunately, the chivalry of warfare is only too prone to a breakdown, as in the Balkan wars, in which the ferocity of antiquity was cast in the shade.

Progress goes on by jerks; at any moment it appears to be a regional or a class movement. But *in dealing with tropical tribes* and races (one can hardly speak of a Haitian “nation”) the white soldier exerts, on the whole, an elevating influence. Brown men foolishly refuse to discount certain defeat; but, when humbled, adopt outwardly the better manners of their masters. Inward compliance and adjustment follow slowly.

They are a secular affair. The true principle of tropical pedagogics is founded on the imitation of outward motions, gestures, habits, and manners. In these respects the pupils come readily to outdo the masters. At first the latter must treat the former with somewhat of the severity they await and respect. But the white conqueror is little disposed to excesses. The brown man knows no self-restraint toward the vanquished. Moreover, the white man is rich enough to reward as well as strong enough to punish. Paternal treatment calls for both methods.

JEF. Do you still believe in war?

M. FROM M. "Believe" is naïve. I believe what I see going on about me. Otherwise I should be self-effaced. But the ideals towards which the military profession strives certainly indicate an advance that does it credit. Instead of the ancient "no quarter," prisoners nowadays are fed and clothed. Cold-blooded execution of captives, honoured in Mexico, is elsewhere exceptional. Missiles causing painful wounds are forbidden. The health of troops and prisoners alike is watched and cared for; the hospital service is prompt and available to both sides. In ancient battles the wounded were left to perish.

The great armies of Europe to-day are compulsorily recruited; but there can be no resentment at the enlistment, when it is a nation called to arms. The training is received at home, the reserves and *Landwehr* even continuing to reside at their own firesides. Training for health and in order to counteract the softening effects of commercial, academic, and industrial life, would be a sufficient ground for universal conscription. Modern armies are, in effect, complements of the public school systems.

JEF. Evidently you are not thinking of the Huertist, Carranzist, or Zapatist soldiers.

W. G. LANGWORTHY TAYLOR.

Lincoln, Nebraska.