

Slaves to Duty

John Badcock, Jr.

1894

Slaves to Duty is an address delivered by John Badcock, Jr., in 1894, before the South Place Junior Ethical Society, London, and printed as a pamphlet by William Reeves in the same year. Owing to its rarity, being long out of print, and the apparent unfamiliarity with the subject with which it dealt, the publisher considers its presentation timely in a world infested with professional saviors and dictators of every description.

Page titles [ed. note: redacted] are the publishers presumption, and were suggested by sub-titles appearing with excerpts from Badcock's lecture which were printed in *Instead of a Magazine*, a mimeographed anarchist monthly edited by Herman Kuehn, from where some of the titles were taken.

Job done with worn type, hand set, and printed on the 'antique' Washington Jobber on which my father used to print booklets of his verses,—by an amateur, which may account for imperfections. L. L.

* * *

Ladies and Gentlemen, —

When some little time back, I was cogitating on the sense of duty, and wondering how we should get along without it, my mind reverted persistently to that typically dutiful child Casabianca, the boy who, according to Mrs. Hemans,

"stood on the burning deck
Whence all but he had fled."

For that boy had figured in my school-lessons as a praiseworthy example of devotion to duty — the duty of obedience — of obedience to authority — the authority of superiors: Father, Country, God. I suppose it has been much the same with the education of other children. By pictorial example and precept the idea of duty is impressed into the soft brains of juveniles, and, along with the cane, the devil, and other moral and religious influences, helps to restrain the rebellious, happy-go-lucky spirit of youth, teaches the due performance of ceremonial antics, and gives a serious aspect to life. But now, after many years the childishness of Mrs. Hemans appears to me

to be on a level with that of her hero. The natural desires of both of them had been warped by the overpowering sense of obligation — duty. To call Casabianca “a creature of heroic blood,” because he stood where he was told to stand, without attempting to save himself from the shot and flame which came nearer and nearer; because, rather than disobey the word of command, the boy gave up his life (a sacrifice which had no compensating good effects); for all this to be considered worthy of eulogium, is to me sickening. For the boy, if he ever lived, I have only the most profound pity — and think the pity of it is that he did not run away with the rest of the crew.

Having looked on *that* picture, I beg you will look on *this*:

In the first act of Offenbach’s opera, “The Grand Duchess,” a young soldier, by name Fritz, is discovered strutting up and down before the imperial tent.

He goes with the regulation step, and holds his head erect in the regulation attitude. Presently a beautiful damsel, the soldiers sweetheart, comes upon the scene. Seeing Fritz, she rushes up to him, but he scarce deigns to notice her. He does not stop marching, and dare not even bend his head when on duty. He merely mutters aloud: “I must obey the reg-u-la-tions!” This exasperates the girl, who answers, “Confound the regulations!” She presses her attentions upon Fritz, who, however, stiff as a clothes-prop, repeats: “I must o-bey the reg-u-la-tions.” The conflict between love and duty goes on apace — but, at last, Fritz unbends, puts down his musket, kisses his sweetheart, and they both dance to a song whose chorus is “Damn the Regulations!”

With these two extreme and opposite examples — Casabianca and Offenbach’s Fritz — before us; seeing that the path of duty is beset with many temptations; and that the pressure of obligation has to compete with the allurements of the sensual for the guidanceship, or mis-guidanceship of youth; we will now try to find a basis in reason, if we can, for that duty or subordination of self which most people believe in to some extent.

Let us begin with *political duty*. From the belief that the levying of taxes and the conscription is right and proper follows the belief that it is the *duty* of the subject to pay the taxes and fight in obedience to command. If you grant the *right* to command to anybody or to any thing, be it the king, parliament, church, or conscience, you as a natural consequence inflict the *duty* of obedience on those who are subject to the commander. Political duty usually takes the form of allegiance to government, to either a present form of government or an ideal form. And here a distinction has to be made. Those who pay their taxes voluntarily for their own protection, and who can conceive of no better means whereby their homes and country can be saved from invasion except by the government method, do *not* really support government from a sense of duty. It is self-interest, clearly, in their case; and, when they force others to pay taxes and preach duty for others to follow, against what appears to them as their interests, they are attempting to bind obligations upon their fellows which they do not feel themselves in the same way.

To defend one’s home and country is patriotic. Patriotism is a fine, healthy, selfish feeling; but it is comparatively little developed, owing to its subordination to political duties. Reverence for the national flag, and duty to rulers, is frequently *mis*-called patriotic sentiment. You, however, are able to disconnect *fatherland* and *government*, and will understand that patriotism recognises *no* difference between a foreign king and a home king, *i. e.*, between a foreign foe and one in possession, — and that the most truly patriotic people are those who try to preserve their homes and country from all kinds of invaders, from military conquerors to School Board inspectors and rate and tax collectors.

If I am compelled to labor and pay tribute to somebody, what does it matter to me (except as a choice of least evil) whether I do so at the bidding of Napoleon or of a majority of elected representatives of my fellow-slaves? While on the look-out for an opportunity to repudiate the obligations thrust upon me, it makes no difference whether succour comes from abroad or from within my own country, so long as I gain in freedom.

When, in 1887, a war was talked of as imminent between Russia and Germany, the hope was expressed by a considerable number of Russians that, in the event of war breaking out, their own side would be defeated. Said Georg Brandes, alluding to this *patriotic* feeling, "No other possibility of liberation from the predominant misery presents itself than that which is offered in the weakness which an unsuccessful war will entail on the ruling system."

If I am duty-bound to the particular government in possession of the country I live in, I stultify myself. So I do whatever or wherever the government. The feeling of duty prevents my judging correctly as to where my self-interest lies. To act for my best advantage, I require freedom to act as I like, and, so long as I allow the same freedom to others, the just demands of others can no further go, as far as I am concerned. I, who recognise *no* political duty, am free to form an opinion as to whether the great political machine over me — the British Empire, to-wit — is worth preserving. There's a gain in being able to take that standpoint; on the other hand, men become voluntary slaves to the State by harboring ideas of political duty.

See how far political duty was carried in old Japan. To protect their lord and master was taught as a sacred duty to all subjects. Political education was thiswise: "Thou shalt not lie beneath the same sky, nor tread on the same earth as the murderer of thy lord," and the rights of the avenger of blood were admitted even though he should pay the penalty of his life. The story of the 47 Ronin exemplifies this: — It is related that when the Prince of Ako was executed, through the mean contrivance of some other lord, that 47 gentlemen, faithful vassals of the dead Prince, swore to avenge the honor of their master. For this end they put aside all other considerations and, through every obstacle, pursued their plan up to the mo-ent when they surprised the object of their vengeance and cut off his head. They then surrendered themselves to their government, and were allowed the privilege of committing *hara kiri*. Thus did these 47 noodles do their duty to their murdered lord by slaying his murderer; their duty to their government by surrendering themselves to it and voluntarily acquiescing in the righteousness of the punishment awarded to them; and their duty to themselves by committing suicide in the most honourable way. Such "noble" conduct as theirs became immortalized, and has been the stock example for teaching the young Japs how to be good down to the present time.

At the present time, to the present generation, mastership in its nakedness is distasteful. Arguments have, therefore, been invented to reconcile the governed to their governors. Majority rule is now the fashion, and is called *representative*, — i. e., representative of the majority of those who cannot govern themselves or who wish to have a hand in governing others. Majority rule is said to be sanctioned by the consent of the governed. Unfortunately for that theory, it so happens that all of us have to submit whether we consent to be governed or not. It is also said that people govern themselves by delegating powers into the hands of representatives. Do they, indeed? It rather appears to me that, when a man relegates the control over his purse, the control over his body, or the direction of his energies, to others, — as if he had lost the use of his head, — *abdication* best describes his performance. In the present state of political education the *representative* theory certainly gives to majority rule the semblance of a justification, and a respectability not otherwise obtainable; so it will stick for a time. It may be better than monarchy — it may, or it

mayn't (we receive the blessings of both, by the way); but when we realize that all government derives its "rights" from its might, and that majority rule is merely a short cut to the victory of the numerically-stronger party, we see that the ballot confers *no rights* upon majorities or their representatives that are inviolable, and imposes *no duties* upon minorities that are binding. The plea for the ballot, and of the whole of the electioneering machinery, is to make out a case of free contract between the people and the government. But the case is a miserable failure. Free contract implies free individual consent of all the contracting parties, and that is one thing never allowed by any kind of government.

From acting under the idea that we subjects are duty-bound to support the doings of the Government we have taken part in the election of, we find ourselves to-day saddled with enormous debt responsibilities not of our making. The holders of Consols, India 3 per cents, Turkish bonds, Corporation Stocks, Savings bank pass-books and other such "securities," labor under the belief that they have a perfect right to receive interest on the money they have lent to government, as per agreement; and that the people and their descendants must be taxed to pay such interest *for ever*, or until such time as they choose to pay off the principal. If the repayment of the principal is an impossibility, then taxes will be permanent for the benefit of the heirs of stockholders. This is all said to be supported by *free contract*! Well, as far as I am concerned, the mere statement of the case is sufficient to show, its absurdity. As a private citizen of the world, in no way sharing with any government the responsibility of contracting debts, being in no sense a consenting party to what a government does in my name, I entirely repudiate the duty that has been put upon me of paying a quota of either principal or interest of the government's debts. Let National Fund holders fight out their claims before impartial juries; and if the Royal Family, the Peerage, and the whole of the House of Commons get sold up to satisfy those creditors, I shall not shed a tear.

The saying that "treaties are made to be broken," evidently originated in the easily-perceived fact that war-treaties are never free contracts. A promise, wrung from a people at the sword's point, counts for nothing. Let the tables be turned, and the vanquished gain strength enough, and the promise is repudiated as a matter of course. Between individuals the same rule of equity holds as between nations. Only when my contract with my fellow-man is considered fair by both of us, will we both do our utmost to fulfil its terms. We would not have contracted did we not think our interests furthered by such procedure; and, under free conditions, each knows that the gain must be mutual to make the contract binding. If I enter into an agreement, on an *equally-free* footing with another person — and by *equally-free* I do not mean *equally-forced*, as the Fabians interpret equal-freedom, but the *condition of fullest freedom* required by both of us, in order that the contract shall not be stained by force or fraud over either, or over third parties — then such agreement contains the appeal to the *sélef*-interest of each party to fulfil what he has undertaken. Of all contracts that require to be backed by fines and penalties, the freest and, therefore, most equitable; contracts require these threats least of all, if at all. The pity of it is that, nowadays, the vitiating element of force enters into nearly all contracts — a statement I ask your patience while I prove.

Let me first draw your attention to those despotic ordinances, known as the Bank Charter Acts, of 1844–5, and the Coinage Acts. Those Acts are commands of the British Government to all its subjects in this manner: "Thou shalt use no other money than mine, or such as is issued by those bankers whom I have granted special privileges to." Other governments have enacted currency laws to much the same effect as ours. You understand that, owing to the indirect nature of all exchange, due to division of labor, a medium is required in order that exchanges be com-

pleted. This medium, money, is necessitated in the transactions between shopkeepers and their customers, between capitalists and laborers, and, in fact, whenever producers want to exchange their products with one another. Given division of labor, and consequent indirect exchange, and money is a necessity. It is, in fact, the first necessity in any community that has advanced beyond direct barter. It goes without saying, therefore, that any tampering with the money-supply will have far-reaching effects, and that whenever currency laws exist trade cannot be free. Laborers may not receive wages *in kind*, the law has made that penal. Nor may they receive wages in notes issued as liens upon their employers' property; or upon general products in possession of issuing bankers. Nor are they allowed to receive wages in any money but the legal tenders defined by statutes. The old private issues of tokens, usually made of lead and for a long time very abundant, have been suppressed, as have also many forms of bank note. The general ignorance and prejudice in favor of a gold money now support the money laws. But it must not be forgotten that the repeated interference, by law, of all private enterprise in attempting to supply the money-want, has prevented the development of the banking trade to the point where the wants of the people in this line are *fully* met. The law now says, in effect, to the laborer "You must buy gold, or some of *our* tokens, before you will be allowed to eat bread; and if there are not enough of these trinkets to go round you may starve." When the supply of money falls below the demand of those who have all the other requisites to exchange, someone's goods won't sell except at a loss, someone will have to go without dinner, and unproductive idleness for some capitalists and some laborers is inevitable. At the same time, those who do, obtain the use of the scarce money have to pay the scarcity price for it. The holders of money are thus able to corner those who don't happen to have any — to keep the needful medium from circulating, and so cripple trade — to lend it at interest, and so live without work. These results follow, whether the limitation of the money-supply is caused by statute law, or arises from lack of inventiveness. The effect upon contracts is obvious. If contracts are entered into beyond the means of the allowed monetary credits to liquidate, men of business are pushed toward bankruptcy, and have to pay usury, in order to raise the needful cash. Then, again, with a short supply of money, the unit of value appreciates. When contracts are worded in terms of a monetary unit that alters in value, an element of uncertainty is introduced which is capable of upsetting all values, and traders may at any time find themselves playing a game of chance, running risks they did not intend to, and forced to speculate to save themselves. It is impossible for contracts to be equitable with the antiquated money-systems now in vogue.

The most calamitous effect, however, of a restricted currency, is seen in the labor market. Consider: an increase of population is both an increase in the demand for food and an increase in the *supply* of laborers (potential). But no equivalent increase in the *demand* for laborers can take place with money fixed. Ability to pay wages is limited to the extent that employers have command over the money supply, no matter how much command they may have over other wealth. While our legal counters cannot increase except by new discoveries of a scarce metal, or by the issue of tokens upon which the government makes a profit, *i. e.*, robs laborers, it follows that wages in the aggregate are kept down to a dead level. The supply of laborers is ever growing, and their requirement is that production, all round, shall increase. But farmers and manufacturers will not increase the production of food and other necessities unless they can sell such increase. This they cannot do, except at a loss, while the total *purchasing power* of the masses is kept down by a limited and expensive and taxed currency. The competition amongst laborers to get some of the needful but short cash (in order to buy food, etc.) reduces wages to the lowest, ' *i. e.*, compels

workmen to give a great deal for a very little return, *i. e.*, compels inequity. The fact of a luxurious aristocracy existing side by side with the other extreme of hard-worked poverty — in fact, the whole glaring inequitable distribution of wealth — is mainly the effect of our antiquated money system.¹

If a man binds himself to work during long hours for low wages (in default of getting better terms in a State-limited labor market) I cannot say he is under an obligation to fulfil his tasks on those terms. If he scamps his work, or uses fraud to obtain a more equitable return for his labor, I cannot accuse him, *under the conditions*, of violating the just rights of others. He might reasonably say that his rights have first been violated; tho' generally he would not be able to show how. I could not possibly deny him the right to resist force by force. I might warn him of the risks he ran of injuring the wrong party and of imperiling his own means of earning anything. I would compare, with him, the gains that would accrue to him from peaceable methods over those expected from forcible methods. I would try to convince him that the attainment of perfectly equitable conditions between men depended upon a widespread clearness of perception as to the real causes of the bad conditions; that while so few people saw at all clearly into this question, the use of violence was no cure at all, and would give plausible excuse to the powers that be of curtailing still further the public liberty and so make the condition of him and his fellows worse than before. I would point out that the domain of economics contained much debatable ground, and that, so long as free speech was allowed, the road *was* open for him to influence the minds of his fellows and so gain justice by the surest way.

Such considerations as the foregoing are, however, only those of expediency. According to the conditions in each case of oppression, more or less force may be the only means left for the wronged ones to assert their rights and to get some satisfaction out of existence.

To return to the contract question. Putting aside the vitiating effect of force, it will still be asked if I admit that, under perfectly free conditions, men are in duty bound to fulfil their promises. I reply: there is no duty in the matter. The binding power of a promise has limits, as anyone can see who appreciates the uncertainty of human expectations. Promises have to do with the future, an uncertain factor in any case. Alterations may occur in the value-measurer, whether it is one chosen freely or one imposed by authority — and inequity may result. If I promise to deliver a ton of coals to Smith by next Saturday, but fall ill, or find I have miscalculated the time necessary to get the coals over to Smith, what becomes of my duty to fulfil? It is useless to tell me I can fulfil that duty later on, or that an equivalent fine will put things straight. For those makeshifts are not fulfilments, but alterations, of the terms and, therefore, a qualified repudiation of the promise.

Following the example of shipowners in their Bill of Lading clauses, exempting them from completing their contracts should an Act of God or any other enemy of the State intervene; many merchants, for the same end, insert strike and lock-out saving clauses in their contracts. But it is impossible to foretell and specify all the occurrences, outside the contractors control, which might interfere with contract anticipations. All the uncalculable contingencies should, theoretically (one might suppose) exempt contractors from penalties as much as the specified ones. Not that I have any deep-rooted objections to risks, nor that I advocate insurance against

¹ In the 1894 edition the reader was referred to Henry Semour of the *Free Currency League* for the remedy for financial ills. The present reader may find views substantially the same as held by that league in the works of Wm. B. Greene, Benj. R. Tucker, Hugo Bilgram, James Mili, and "the father of them all," Pierre J. Proudhon, whose modern followers are known as Mutualists. (Pub.)

every blessed little contingency that happen. I simply assert that the chances of the unexpected happening *do cut* under the idea of the sacredness of contract.

Contracts will be kept, when all idea of their sacredness has disappeared, because it is for the contractors' self-interest to keep them. If any one thinks he can take advantage of a general D. V. unwritten clause, in order to repudiate his promises on the strength of his unexpected weakness, he does so at the peril of losing the confidence of others in him, and of being "left." Jails are not the most potent enforcers of contracts. The attractions of the benefits which a good reputation confers are greater.

Moreover, the keeping of promises is an essential feature of the condition of *equal liberty* so much desired. If I do not keep my promises to others, they need not keep their promises to me; and I, besides, give them an excuse to treat me as an inferior person altogether. The condition of equal liberty is nothing more than a condition arising out of free contract, when each agrees to respect the liberty of others *in consideration* of having his own liberty respected. Such social contract is not drawn upon parchment. When I and my neighbor appreciate the economies and other benefits obtainable by treating each other as equals, we don't go to the expense of putting our new reciprocal relationships into legal contract form, but put the thing into practice.

The condition of equal and fullest liberty can only be attained by those who desire it. Those who can only contemplate equitable conditions with angry feelings cannot be under an obligation to further the attainment of the same. Neither can those who find consolation in dutiful obedience to monarchs and other masters. None of these people are under any obligation to further liberty or to respect the liberty of any one. How can they be, seeing they do not believe their interests run liberty-wards? How can they be under obligation to injure themselves? But — let them take warning. Be they fools or knaves, kings or slaves; be they county-councillors, tax imposters, or other invaders — if they will not respect the liberty of others, they thereby give up all title to have their own respected. When aggressively-inclined legality-mongers see the force of this argument they may, perchance, hesitate before accepting positions of privilege and rulership.

What has to be guarded against is an unreasoning, slavish adherence to *written* agreements, as if the fact of their being *in writing* made them more honest than otherwise. The important thing is that the contract be *equitable*, i.e. honest, — not that it be written in black or red ink, on parchment or straw paper. Do not let us miss the substance. In all cases where breakage of contract is an invasion of another's liberty) injuring, perhaps, those who depended upon fulfilment of the contract), the injured parties may justly use force to defend themselves. Those who were upholders of equal liberty would be the most punctilious in keeping contracts, i.e., *equitable contracts*, just because equity is the condition of liberty.

Still, after all, liberty is only a means to happiness. Those who sacrifice happiness to liberty commit suicide. In nine cases out of ten, say, I find my self-interest prompts me to fulfil my promises. In the tenth case, which I deem antagonistic to my interests, I am under *no duty* to fulfil. Of course, if I see in time that the consequences of repudiation, in this case, will be more disastrous to me than fulfilment, I fulfil, as the course of least evil. But I may think otherwise, and even find dishonesty my best policy. I take the natural consequences of my conduct in any case.

Let those who judge harshly the breaker of laws and contracts reflect that, while dishonest laws create privileged positions for some, the only defense of those who are enslaved by such laws may be underhand, dishonest practices. If the self-preserved instincts are not allowed free play in honest channels, they are forced into *dishonest* channels. A man will be honest when

he sees honesty to be his best policy. Those who preach honesty as though the expediency of that course did not depend upon the conditions prevailing preach rank superstition.

If a poor man steals a loaf of bread to feed his starving children, I believe the act would be excused by most of us. My dearest friend may have no written claim upon me, yet I may be irresistibly drawn to help him, even though by so doing I render myself unable to pay those who have written claims, and honest ones, against me. I do not pretend such conduct can be justified. But I am under no duty to consider the claims upon me as measurable by a pecuniary standard, or by a legal one, or by priority as regards lime. Only the person who has to act can know the relative intensity of the claims he is confronted with; or, in other words, which are the claims he gets most satisfaction in satisfying. No duty to follow any code of morality is imposed by Nature upon any one. All the codes are made up by men as fallible, and no less ignorant, than yourselves.

There are many persons who claim to be superstition-proof, who yet insist upon the inviolability of contract, especially written contract. But I say that if Antonio really believes he is under a duty to let Shylock take his pound of flesh, just because of his promise, he makes of his promise a god or fetish, and degrades himself into a superstition-ridden barbarian. And for Portia to have to rely upon the quibbling subterfuge of insisting upon such an interpretation of the contract to the letter, as awarding a pound of flesh without blood, the same to be weighed to a mathematical point — in order to save the life of Antonio — showed how superstition-ridden were the judges and the populace she had to deal with. I wonder some modern Portia does not try the trick upon her butcher, in order to get off paving his bill.

Courts are erected now, as they have been for ages, to insist upon human sacrifices being made to the contract deity. The whole duty of man as a social unit is to fulfil his contract *to the letter*; as, likewise, his whole duty as a political subject is to obey the laws *to the letter*, and nothing else.

I know well, how some thinkers are swayed on this point. They say, as did one of the gang who tried the Merchant of Venice, that the Court exists to uphold a principle embodied in the laws of the realm, and so forth. But, I ask, why should any principle, or any law be considered of more importance than human life, than human happiness? If it be urged that no laws could be enforced if exceptions were allowed, I reply: the need for the exceptions shows the foolishness of the laws. Cease to make any more laws, and put those you have upon the shelf.

The trouble with contracts is: to know when a breach of contract constitutes a breach of liberty, i. e., an invasion. When it comes to be seen generally, that that is the only question for juries and other defensive institutions to argue upon, we shall be nearer the realization of equity than we are at present.

If I choose to fulfil a promise of life-long marriage, I can do so. If I choose to pay usurious debts to a Shvlock, I can do so. But neither the woman nor the Jew should, in these cases, have any help from the Courts of Justice, any more than betting creditors now have in this country. The *natural* consequences which I take in breaking those promises — (say I am shunned in the one case and lose my credit in certain circles in the other) — I must take, and may deserve. But as the keeping of either of those promises might land me in slavery; would give to the Jew the gains of his cunning upon which he had no just claim to rely, while to the woman it would give a hold upon my future upon which she, also, had no business to rely; it is clear to me that equity does not require the fulfilment of either promise. We do not require institutions for the upholding of extortion, or usury or slavery of any kind, just because those things have been previously agreed to between both parties in writing. As *no aggression* has been committed when a person refuses to fulfil his promise to give something for nothing, such a promise is not enforceable in defense

of liberty. Let the cunning intriguer stand upon his merits, upon his own persuasive efforts, to get his one-sided contracts fulfilled to his own enrichment and another's impoverishment.²

As for the duties said to be created by the relations between husband and wife, and between parents and children, these require special notice.

To commence with, the marriage contract is not a free contract. The Powers only acknowledge one form of it, and put disabilities upon the offspring from those who have not obeyed the marriage regulations. Therefore, the parrot-like, repeated-after-the-official, marriage vows, can no more be considered as the voluntary expression of the free desires of both contracting parties than can any other promises that are dictated by public usage and law. Therefore are we *not* justified in condemning, offhand, those who are nonconformists to marriage. When the law threatens, society ostracises, and education produces its bias against those who participate in free natural unions, and against "natural" children, those who are too weak to openly face the tempest need not be restrained by "duties" from seeking in secret those satisfactions denied them openly.

As the poverty-producing currency laws, land laws, and taxes, intensify the struggle for an enjoyable existence, the marriage market inevitably feels some of the resulting speculation which runs through all markets; and this must sometimes subordinate, distort and degrade the natural attractions which alone give to marriage a *raison d'être*. In one of Ibsen's plays, Mrs. Tesman is asked by an old lover, why she had consented to marry Tesman whom she did not love. She replied: "He was the only one who offered to support me."

I do not doubt that the liberation of the means of subsistence from the usurious control of government will, eventually, increase the independence of woman along with the independence of men. When that time comes to pass, you may find the "duties" of a man to support his wife, and of a wife to obey her husband, and of both to remain bound together till death, to have lapsed and gone out of fashion because superfluous.

Women who are independent are not likely to bear more children than they themselves want. What they want — in that line — they will be willing to pay for, as far as the natural price of labor and pain goes. If the birth of a child is the realization of a want, a gratification of the maternal longing, then is the mother paid for the trials preceding her deliverance.

If a woman does not, with pleasure, contemplate having children, but bears a child in order to please a man whom she has married in order to have a home, she is a slave to circumstances; the conditions of existence are not free enough for her.

"Whoso cannot defend himself, will not be defended," is a remark of Emerson's that is as applicable to woman as to man. Those women who, through their beauty or lovely dispositions, find some men only too happy to be allowed the great pleasure of supporting them, have, thereby, defensive attributes against want, in addition to their working powers. The support granted them by their husbands is not given under a compulsory sense of duty — at least not at first — but from self-interest, evidently.

When we are taught to look upon women as, by nature, dependent, and that it is *the duty* of their husbands or fathers or brothers to support them, the tendency of such teaching is to hide from view any political compulsion that makes the dependence and to check practical measures which would emancipate.

² If impartially chosen, free and unfettered *Juries* were the *sole* tribunals for settling disputes, all persons would have to rely upon the *justice* of their claims for assistance from defensive associations, and the full development and expression of the sense of justice amongst the common people would rapidly proceed; instead of being hindered, as now, by statute laws.

What woman or women is each man in duty bound to support, and why? Has a bachelor no duties in this respect? If not, why not? Cohabitation, in itself, carries no obligation either from woman to man or man to woman. When it is free from all arbitrary restraints, and then mutually desired, the consequences are either discounted in agreement beforehand, or else are gladly taken as so much possible gain, which will exalt the lives of both man and woman. The mutual satisfactions of both participants cancel one another and leave no obligations behind.

The last stronghold for the reign of duty *to others* is, undoubtedly, in the relations between parents and their children. Yet, as with other duties, those who insist upon them do not tell us where they came from. Study wild nature from which we sprang, and see if there is any place for obligation to take care of off-spring. Is the lion under an obligation to kill the lamb, in order to fulfil his "duty" to provide food for Mrs. Lioness and her cubs? If so, perhaps the mother sheep is also in duty bound to keep her lamb out of the lion's way? The duties of the two species clash, and knock the bottom out of the duty theory. I would also like to inquire if the ichneumon insect is fulfilling its duty when it lays its eggs inside the body of a living caterpillar, for that act is necessary to the care of the young ichneumons. And are all the ugly and ferocious animals on the face of the earth blameworthy if they neglect their young, and if they do not their level best to bring their young to maturity, and so ensure the perpetuation of their own ugly mugs?

Whether *materfamilias* looks after her progeny to just that extent that it gives her pleasure to do so (the pleasure of the moment *and* the pleasure prospective), or whether she looks after them from a sense of duty, or from fear of penalties for neglect, we may be sure that only that treatment will survive that ensures, or at least allows, offspring to attain maturity, and that improvements in methods of treatment which give better chances of existence to offspring will (*cæteris paribus*) supplant less beneficial methods. Dispositions being inheritable, neglectfulness and brutality towards offspring lead directly to the extinction of those qualities, because those qualities are antagonistic to survival; while affectionate care perpetuates itself. Now, as the most affectionate parents are just those who find their own happiness furthered by, and dependent upon, the tender solicitude they show for their children's welfare; who, therefore, give their care voluntarily and in the easiest manner (i.e., at the least cost of effort); while, on the other hand, it is only the callous or indifferent parents who can be influenced in this matter, by the compulsion of the feeling of duty or of the force of the law; you see, at once, that all interference or teaching that insists upon the duty, either of the parents or of the community to preserve children is so much wasted force spent in trying to undo the beneficial action of natural selection.

I quite admit that there are cases where the help of outsiders is a benefit in preserving quite as good specimens of humanity as are born, for accidents will sometimes happen to the best of parents; but help given voluntarily, through sympathy, is given for the benefit of the sympathisers, who would have felt agonies of remorse if they had not eased their feelings that way. Besides, voluntary help still allows selection to go on — is a kind of natural selection, in fact — for the helpers select whom they will help, and to what extent.

In defending others against aggressors, we lessen the chances of being attacked ourselves. In pursuing such *egoistic* conduct, our sympathetic natures are developed, — i. e., we get direct pleasure out of the interest we take in others, in subserving our own welfare. As a consequence, the witnessing, or even the knowledge of the infliction of pain upon others produces pain in ourselves. So intimately is our own happiness bound up with the happiness of others.

With regard to children, all we can do (from the point of view of a far-reaching self-interest), beyond denying the rights of parents and others to ill-treat the children in their charge, is to

succour them ourselves whenever, and to what extent, our individual sympathies for the unfortunate ones may impel us. Any child must be allowed to accept such outside help, whenever its own parents forfeit their position as guardians by neglect or cruelty. To deny such liberty to the child would be an aggression upon the child.

When we consider that the care of children, when prompted by duty alone, is likely to fall far short of the care that is prompted by affection alone, and has a harshness about it sufficient to ensure dislike and thanklessness from the recipients in return, we see how the long-continued teaching of duty tends to maintain an anti-social and discordant attitude between parents and their children. Turn, now to the lower mammals, who only follow their instincts and appetites, and we see at once the all-sufficingness of uneducated physical forces to produce the perfection of maternal care.

Where, now, does *filial duty* come in? Men and women have children for their own gratification entirely. The desire for succession, the desire for the company of the innocent, happy little chickabiddies, the possibility of helpful children proving the best insurance and solace against old age and sickness — let alone the gratification of the sexual feelings preliminarily involved — is so alluring that the trials incidental to the realization of it are all voluntarily gone through, and the chances of a preponderance of unhappiness resulting are risked. As then, it is in the pursuit of their own happiness that adults bring children into the world and bear the cost of rearing them, it is clear that parents cannot saddle their children with any obligation, with any of the cost. The child is not consulted as to its creation, nor as to the home conditions into which it is thrust. The gift of life is not always worth having. The child may inherit pain. It may have to live in a dirty house and not have enough to eat. Its parents may beat it or relegate it to the care of harsh menials. They may thrash the child from a sense of duty as did the dutiful and brutal Mrs. Montagu. But even if born under the most happy conditions, its parents have merely acted in their own self-interest, and all self-sacrifices on their part have been part of the cost of obtaining the family happiness they so much desired. When children yield delight to their parents, the latter must often consider they are repaid a thousand-fold for all the trouble they have borne; in which case it would be nearer the truth to say that the parents are indebted to their children.

The idea of obligation (duty) directly diminishes the enjoyment of existence. When we adults are treated by a neighbor to a dance, a dinner, a present, or what not, we, like asses, consider our obligations and put ourselves to no end of inconvenience to make some return. That is, we do something to lessen, if not to negative altogether, the full value of the gift, and so *prevent* our kind neighbor from experiencing the delight of having really benefitted somebody.

Gifts *never* produce obligations upon the recipients. If they did, the obligation would, logically, be to return equal value and that is equivalent to annihilating the pleasures of giving and receiving. Children show themselves our superiors in these matters. They don't allow their enjoyment of what is given to them to be reduced by the terrible sense of obligation, but take their fill.

The teaching of duties to children is an attempt to supplant the teaching of the child's own experience by a superstition, the superstition that there is any other guide to its conduct than its own self-interest.

As I, a parent, have only the right of might over my children, and, in imposing my will upon them, seek my own personal happiness, it greatly depends upon my foresight or my shortsightedness whether I get what I want or something different. When the idea of duty ceases to have weight, parents will doubtless see that they must respect their children's wishes and feelings more than

they have done heretofore, in order to get kind treatment and respect for their wishes in return. For the moment let us leave specific duties and take duty in the lump.

Nelson is debited with saying: "England expects every man to do his duty." This expectation reckons upon the superstition and ignorance of the masses, and enables the governing classes to have a stronger hold over the classes beneath them than they otherwise would have. The jingo versemaker truthfully tells the dutiful what their place is:

"Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die."

Lewis Morris, in beautiful but unsatisfying verse, says:

"For knowledge is a steep which few may climb,
While Duty is a path which all may tread.
. . . . How shall each
Of that great multitude of faithful souls,
Who walk not on the heights, fulfil himself,
But by the dutious life which looks not forth
Beyond its narrow sphere, and finds its work,
And works it out; content, this done, to fall
And perish, if Fate will, so the great Scheme
God's onward?"

Stopford Brooke proceeds to prophecy: "Eighty years hence it will matter little whether we were a peasant or a peer; but it will matter very much whether we did our duty as one or the other." To which I reply that the reward put forward of the praise of posterity appeals to one's ambition; and that if that gain is sought, under the pretence of doing one's duty, a lie is committed — a deception practised upon the unwary. How is *duty* to be made operative upon a person who doesn't care a button for posterity? Stopford Brooke, by the way, should enlighten us as to whether the duties of peer and peasant are to keep in the ruts which God and the king have made for them, or whether it is their duty to fight each other. For the duties of peer and peasant may clash like those of the lion and sheep.

Says Whittier:

"Yet where our duty's task is wrought
In unison with God's great thought,
The near and futura blend in one,
And whatsoe'er is willed is done!"

No doubt. But the question presses: What is our "duty's task"? On Hospital Saturday the Salvationist spinster at the Street corner will enlighten you on that point. She is (or was when I saw her last) provided with an illuminated card on which are printed the words: "Give, for it is a duty." The magic word *duty* is supposed to be quite capable of opening sesame, *i. e.*, your purse. With susceptible natures it will sometimes induce self-sacrifice on the large scale, and pave the way to voluntary enslavement.

Tolstoi said to George Keenan: "I believd that it is every man's duty to labor for others who need assistance." In the course of conversation Keenan said unto him: "But suppose that your Chinese brethren came across the sea in sufficient numbers to reduce you to slavery; you would probably object to that?" To which the logical Tolstoi replied: "Why should I? Slavery is working for others; all I want is to work for others" Tolstoi finds his happiness in working for others and, according to report, works under healthy conditions, at occupations of his own choosing, alternating mental and physical work in a way that gives a zest to all that he does. Moreover, he does not suffer from want by his "working for others." Consequently, Tolstoi's "working for others" is no sacrifice; coinciding with his inclinations, it is no duty.

The call of duty is an internal compelling force which overcomes the individuals disinclination to do something disagreeable or indifferent. The person feels under an obligation. What he does under the impulse of obedience to the call of duty relieves him, like the payment of a just debt. (Such extreme cases — misnamed *altruism* — are purely *egoistic* — they are done for the relief — benefit — of self). He feels that his duty must be done, willy-nilly, whatever the consequences to himself; whether he accidentally gains by it or whether he 'falls and perishes', as Lewis Morris says the chances are he may. *Obedience*, self-sacrifice, unqualified and absolute, is the essence of duty.

If rewards are calculated upon, the professed *duty* motive is a sham. The soldier who fights because he likes that kind of work, or because he is forced to, or for the honors to be won that way, fights not from a sense of duty whatever he may profess. If I give all my goods to feed the poor, and my body to be burnt, on the understanding that I shall be compensated therefor by eternal happiness in heaven, or from the happiness I feel in giving, or in the expectation of the blessings of posterity, I act selfishly, and not from a sense of duty. How would I act, if no reward spurred me on?

I know that the most effective appeal for subm'ssion to authority is the appeal to *duty*, whether it be political, social, maternal, filial, ar other species of duty; for the whole of religious and moral society has agreed that those who do their duty are sanctified and elevated above all others. But the *attraction* of the religious and moral sanctions, whether the sanctions come by way of the priest, or public opinion, or the conscience, proves that the *dutiful* people are as fundamentally egoistic as the brute creation, and shows their altruistic contention to be lies, not willful lies, necessarily, but necessarily lies for all that.

It is inevitable that, even with the intensest altruistic desire, there is an egoistic basis, and the so-called altruistic motive is a secondary result which satisfies the ego. It is inconceivable otherwise. Try to imagine a body following the path of least attraction and of greatest resistance, and you fail. Try to imagine a man jumping into the sea, risking his own life in order to save a child who had fallen overboard, against his own interests as he feels them, and you fail. The deed could not be done except as the inevitable following of the path of greatest attraction and least resistance. Ask yourselves what attraction there is in doing a brave action, or what evil consequences are thereby escaped to the doer, — compare the probable effect upon your own and upon other witnesses' feelings, following the doing of the deed or the shirking of it, — and I doubt not you will perceive the physical basis of motive.

When the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes said: "Sanctification is the intense desire of the individual *not* to have his own way," he said something fit for the comic papers. If his "intense desire" is fulfilled, he *has* "his own way." If your actions are directed to the benefit of others, apparently regardless of self, the satisfaction of desire, or the escape from the feeling of shame, prove your

actions to have been regardful of self. *Consciousness* of the fundamental primary egoistic motive is not required to prove its existence. The secretion of bile by the liver is none the less egoistic and self-preserved because it goes on unconsciously. Hence, to speak of any motive as altruistic *in its source*, is false.

Here I indict the *duty* idea for giving a glamor of nobleness to actions that have no claim to be so regarded. When a person is referred to as having “done his duty,” there is an endeavor to show up his conduct as being antagonistic to his self-interest; the egoistic motive is left out of account altogether, and false values given to his conduct in consequence.

If, as I say, the individual can only follow that path to which he is led by his nature and environment, see the uselessness and falsity of preaching *duty!* Duty to whom? Duty to what? Where does the obligation come in at all? The individual must knuckle down to the inevitable, duty or no duty. He has no choice.

“Consequences is the only god,” says Benjamin R. Tucker; but the duty to consequences is absurd. Consequences act by weeding out the most thoughtless and providing the remainder with food for thought. Thus is the individual induced to weigh the chances between any two courses for benefit or detriment to himself; and his ultimate decision depends upon the intensity of the various opposing forces, is the resultant of the forces in action. Consequences can only appeal to a man’s self-interest, and this he already follows according to his lights. If his lights are only half-lights, and he is led to sacrifice his present existence for a fictitious future which never matures, he leaves the earth as an inheritance to those having sharper intellects and clearer perceptions, those who are “selfish” in the largest, broadest, thickest, longest widest sense.

When we come to consider that human beings are descended from ancestors who, over an infinitely long series of generations, owed their success in life, with ability to leave offspring, to the fact that their *self*-preservative instincts were in the ascendent, we may well pause at the unlikelihood of any thoroughly anti-egoistic course of conduct being able to secure the same success. Rather does it appear likely that those who have “conscientious scruples” about their conduct will have to take a back seat; while the altruists (if there are any) will spend their energies in making their enemies fat.

When a man realizes that, so long as he sacrifices for others’ benefit, from a blind obedience to duty, so long may he continue to do so; that, so long as he is willing to pay taxes so long will he be taxed; and other eye openers of a like kind, — he will decline to be duped any longer. Moralists will tell him, as a last straw to save a dying cult, that it is his *duty* to choose the path that leads to salvation *for himself* (if he will not for others.) These words are meaningless. To the satisfaction of his desires he needs no injunction, no command if duty, but only aid as to the safest means of obtainment without deductions for needless pains and taxes.

“Duty to self,” the last resting-place for the duty-superstition, is a self-contradiction. *Duty* is unthinkable, except as *obligation*. How can I owe myself something? Shall I transfer a shilling from one pocket to another to settle the debt? *Duty to self* is an account in which the same person is both debtor and creditor. Those who cannot see that such an account balances, that it is settled and cancelled by the very terms in which it is stated, require lessons in bookkeeping.

Some will doubtless say that “duty to self” is an abbreviated way of expressing the idea that one cannot effectively discharge his duties to others unless he takes care of his own health and wealth. Such an interpretation throws overboard duty to *self* and goes back upon duty to *others*. But how about these *others*? Unless others owe an equal duty to me that I owe to them, there is inequality of rights, that is, slavery. And if the duties receivable and payable are equal to each

other, they cancel each other and may be ignored. As it is, some people do their duties (pay their dues and taxes, render services without remuneration, &c.), and other people receive these as theirs by right. My duties are the rights of others over me. How came others to have rights over me? and how came I to be under these obligations, which bind me without my consent?

The only way of escape from bondage is to deny all rights and duties whatsoever. Look to self-interest *direct* for the attainment of your ends, and you will see that all the good things in life, all the harmonious relationships you cling to, will be preserved *because you like them*.

The vague way in which the appeal to duty is made, and the unquestioning saintly way in which the responsive dutiful actions are performed, smack of the superstitious, and show where the weak spot inhuman nature is to be found. A traveller on the look-out for signs of native superstitions in a far country, would be guided by all actions performed under the spell of duty.

Given a believer in duty, or one who is deeply susceptible to the feeling of obligation, and it becomes possible for him to be enslaved with his own consent.

The believer in *duty* is food for powder. He will either be enslaved by the crafty, or by what he calls his "conscience." His freedom is a limited freedom at best. Circumstances change, but he dare not take advantage of the tide which, taken at the flood, would have led him on to fortune and pleasures new. The propitious time, when tabooed pleasures offer themselves to him, he is afraid of. His duty to Mrs. Grundy, or Mrs. Jones, to the dead hand, to his religion or to a principle, binds him. He lives within boundary walls which he dare not scale.

"But our moral codes embody the experience of the race!" I hear some wiseacre exclaim. Experience, of your grandmother. Circumstances change, and your moral codes won't stand the test.

In place of duty I put — nothing. Superstitions never want replacing, or we should never advance to freedom.

Waste not your energies, but turn them *all* to your own advantage.

Instead of pretending to be "doing my duty," I will in future go direct to the naked truth, acknowledge I am actuated in all I do by self-interest, and so economise in brain-power, What I want is to discover where my true, most lasting interests lie. I am the more likely to find that out if I allow no moral considerations to obscure my view.

If I find the ordinary tread-mill routine of existence irksome, or tame and unsatisfying, I fearlessly explore further — allow my mind full swing, and see no good reasons for bowing to the limitations set by others. Perchance I am seduced by the sciences, or I pursue the beautiful and try to realize my ideal. My pleasure is my only guide; and in proportion as my sympathies are great, that is in proportion to my susceptibility to external influences, which is, again, the measure of my capacity for feeling pleasure, for appreciating and: receiving benefit by the most intense and most subtle impacts of which matter in motion is capable, — do I seek the welfare of all I come in contact with. Society may be everything to me, but it is nothing to me except in so far as it furnishes me with material for my happiness.

If I have a bad liver complaint, or am worried by a thousand anxieties, or find it difficult to get food for myself and for those who are a part of me — if, in brief, I cannot get happiness out of the conditions into which I am born, then the sacredness of those conditions is at a discount in my valuation of them, and their stability is not my concern. In the steps I take to satisfy my hunger, whether it be hunger of the senses or of the mind, I am brought face to face with the universal properties of matter and cease to consider codes, moral and political.

It may be as beneficial for a man, as it is expedient for him, under some circumstances, to deny himself many luxuries; to partake of meat sparingly, and of pastry only once a month, to drink only water and eat bread without butter, to live in one small room, to worship only one god and no goddesses, or to share his love with only one woman in a lifetime.

But the economies and abnegations found useful at certain times and places are not to be codified as the laws for all times and places. All Mosaic tables, constitutions, pettyfogging County Council licensing systems, and other strait-waistcoat regulations, necessarily suppress much enjoyment, necessarily cause a sheer waste of life — for they are born of ignorance of the possibilities of life, and of intolerance.

Working on egoistic lines, I see the necessity of forbearing from laying down the moral law for anyone. What another does is beyond my praise or blame. Each one's activities have been set in motion by his environment (past and present), and contact with others shows how far each can go. In furtherance and in defence of my own well-being will I use my argumentative or other forces upon others. My self-interest; teaches me to respect the liberty of others as the cheapest way to get my own respected.

The **Mother** is often held up as the pattern example of duty and self-sacrifice. But would the mother cling to her pains if she could get the blessings of maternity and the consolations of religion without them? Does she not, like the rest of us, follow the path of greatest satisfaction? Of course she does. This *stock* example of dutiful self-sacrifice falls with the whole show, and will not be resuscitated unless the typical mother comes up to the Fabian-Socialist's ideal, by being willing to endure the keenest of anguish: the sacrifice of her infant for the good of the community, because it happens to be club-footed, or has a birth-mark, or experts say it is not up to the regulation weight. I admire the natural mother as she exists to-day, because she consideres her child of much more importance than the whole human race; for her child's happiness is a necessary condition to her own, and a source of great comfort to her, while the rest of humanity possibly only worry her.

When we remember that this life is our first, last, and only chance, that

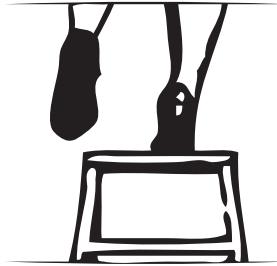
“Only to youth will spring be spring,”

while each day brings us nearer to our final dissolution, the cruelty of expecting any one to sacrifice his or her possibilities of happiness — whether the possibilities be of a high or low order — is apparent. And it is more apparent to those of the widest sympathies than to the narrow-minded regulationist.

So long as the superstition that there is any *ought* or *duty* by which conduct should be regulated, has a hold over the minds of men and women, so long will those people be incapable of appreciating the full value of existence; and their living powers will run to waste while they grovel in the altruistic mire of self-denial. Only when that superstition is abandoned is the mind really emancipated. Only then is the individual free to rise to the experience of the highest bliss of which his or her nature is capable.

May the evening's amusement bear the morning's reflection.

The Anarchist Library
Anti-Copyright



John Badcock, Jr.
Slaves to Duty
1894

Retrieved on January 6, 2013 from
http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/anarchist_archives/coldoffthepresses/SlavesToDuty.pdf
Published by Laurance Labadie
Detroit, Michigan
1938

Editor's Note: A more recent edition appeared in 1972, published by Ralph Myles Publisher, Inc.
as number two in its' *Libertarian Broadsides Series* of pamphlets.

theanarchistlibrary.org