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Sidney E. Parker
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1972

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ridiculous, but the mark of servility and self-abnegation to acknowledge such a thing. "Duty" boils down to imposed obligation, self-sacrifice, the thralldom of the individual to authority:

> 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 highest experience of which his or her nature is capable.

S. E. PARKER
London
July, 1971

SOURCES

The Adult, London, 1897–1899.

The Free Currency Propaganda, London, 1895.

When Love is Liberty and Natural Law. John Badcock Jr. Wm. Reeves, London, 1893.

Slaves to Duty. John Badcock Jr. Wm. Reeves, London, 1894.

Letters from Henry Meulen to S. E. Parker May 13, May 31, 1971.

the egoist's case shows itself when he is asked whether it can ever be a man's duty to sacrifice his life for another" (!) That such a question can be asked alone makes the reissue of *Slaves to Duty* worthwhile.

Acknowledging Nietzsche and Tucker as his inspiration, Badcock mounts a sustained attack against "duty," not only as a word without a referent but also as a disguise for the domination of some men by others and as an obstacle to the individual's self-determination.

A man is thrust into society by an act of his parents. He does not choose to be born. When he becomes aware of himself and his surroundings he finds that he is expected to conform to a way of life in whose shaping he has had no voice. He is supposed to fulfill the obligations it imposes upon him whether these are to his taste or in his interest. If he dares to call them into question he is told that it is his "duty" to do what the society demands. State, God, Society, Family, Morality—in the name of one or several of these the individual is to be sacrificed and his will subordinated. As Badcock succinctly puts it:

> If you grant the *right* to command to anybody or anything, 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... 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.

When a man has been given no choice, forbidden certain acts on pain of prison or death, hemmed in by laws and customs which make him an object for domination or exploitation, is it not ridiculous to pretend that he has any more "duty" to "society" than a slave had to his owner, or a sailor to the press-gang that conscripted him? Badcock answers that it is not only

Benjamin R. Tucker on John Badcock, Jr.'s *Slaves to Duty*: "A unique addition to the pamphlet literature of Anarchism in that it assails the morality superstition as the foundation of the various schemes for the exploitation of mankind. Max Stirner himself does not expound the doctrine of Egoism in bolder fashion."–In Charles A. Dana, *Proudhon and the Bank of the People* (New York: Benj. R. Tucker, 1896), p. 69.

John Badcock, Jr. was one of the small band who pioneered conscious egoism in Britain during the last decade of the last century. Along with the editor of *The Eagle and The Serpent*, John Basil Barnhill, the colourful master of alliteration, Malfew Seklew, and other virtually forgotten egoists of the time, he set himself against the prevailing altruism and proclaimed the sovereignty of the individual.

A surviving friend, Henry Meulen, remembers him as "an explosive little man; but undoubtedly a genius."[1] An accountant, he was married and had one son. After the company for which he worked for many years went broke, he lived frugally for a time on investments. He then visited China in 1902. When he returned he opened a shop in the City of London selling Chinese works of art, on which he was something of an expert. Like many others he was carried away by the militarist hysteria generated by World War 1 and broke with those of his friends who were anti-war.[2] He is believed to have died in 1926 at about the age of 65.

[1] Meulen recalls that Badcock "Once lectured on Egoism for us in Hammersmith (London), and he put his audience's back up by replying to questions almost entirely by 'Yes' or 'No.' He explained to me that the questions were too silly to merit a long reply." Meulen to Parker, May 13, 1971. [Henry Meulen is the Secretary of the Personal Rights Association in England, and also the editor of the Association's famous journal, *The Individualist*, which is now (1971) in its 101st year of publication. He is the author of the well known book *Free Banking* (Macmillan, 1934.)]

[2] "We quarrelled over the 1914 war. I joined the anti-war party, but he was very pro-war, and sent me abusive postcards at a time when the police were raiding all suspicious people. After the war, he wrote me to renew our

Badcock played an active part in the "free currency" and "free love" movements of the 1890s. He was the treasurer of *The Free Currency Propaganda*, whose corresponding secretary was Henry Seymour, erstwhile editor of *The Anarchist*. The objects of this group were: "The de-monopolisation of species-value as the sole basis of credit, and the generalization of real credit by the monetization of all suitable marketable value," and its eventual aim was the establishment of "banks of exchange." Its founders appear to have drawn their ideas from the mutualistic economic theories of Proudhon and William B. Greene. Both Badcock and Seymour were familiar with the propaganda work of Benjamin Tucker in the U.S.A., and Badcock at one time acted as an agent for Tucker's journal *Liberty*.

During the same period, Badcock was a leading figure of The Legitimation League, of which he was at first London Corresponding Secretary and later on member of the National Council. Formed originally for the purpose of legitimising the status of illegitimate children, the League later added the propagation of sexual freedom to its objects. Badcock seconded the motion to this end at the League's conference in 1897. One noteworthy intervention made by the League was in defence of Edith Lanchester, whose family had her certified as insane because she insisted in "living in sin" with a socialist workingman. Edith Lanchester was the mother of film star Elsa Lanchester. The Legitimation League collapsed around 1899 as a result of the arrest, trial and defection of its secretary, George Bedborough, who was charged with "obscenity."

Badcock's literary output was slight. Apart from a few articles, his published work amounted to two pamphlets. The first, *When Love is Liberty and Nature Law*, was given as a lecture to the Walthamstow Literary Institute in 1893. The second, *Slaves to Duty*, was given as a lecture to the London South Place Ju-

friendship, but I was young and stiff-necked, and I refused. He died soon afterwards." *Ibid.*

nior Ethical Society in 1894. Both were first issued in printed form by William Reeves, a London publisher of radical and anarchistic literature.

When *Love is Liberty and Nature Law* (the title is a line in a poem by Pope), is a plea for sexual freedom. Badcock argues that love is fundamentally egoistic as is demonstrated by the fact that we always seek to mate with someone we consider to be the best for us and not, altruistically, the worst. What is wanted for this fundamental drive to attain its best expression is freedom for individuals to make any kind of sexual arrangements that suits them: polygamy, polyandry, monogamy, variety, or what have you. If marriage contracts are needed, those who wanted them could have them, but their enforcement should be a matter for private agencies, not for governments which compel us to contribute to interference in things which are not our concern. Badcock's championship of sexual freedom faltered, however, when it came to incest. Here he drew back with a shudder, lagging behind his great precursor Max Stirner, who did not hesitate to carry his war against the sacred in this particularly tabooed area. The "bond of blood" proved too much for Badcock's egoism, at least at this time.

Although *When Love is Liberty and Natural Law* reads well and cogently today, its theme is fast becoming a commonplace among the more liberated elements of the contemporary world, as is witnessed by the so-called "permissive society." The theme of *Slaves to Duty* is still unfashionable, however, even among the sexual libertarians, who hesitate to raise a lance against morality *per se*. And in the realm of the professional moralist, the notion of "duty" still flourishes. A contemporary British philosopher, A. C. Ewing, in an elementary treatise, *Ethics*,[3] can still write: "It is a recognized principle of ethics that it is always our duty to do what we, when considering it sincerely, think we ought to do," and can gravely state, "A weak point in

[3] English Universities Press, London, 1969.