

Duty

Bruce Hamman

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW has defined duty as, "A stupid excuse for a foolish act." Shaw's definition hits at small men engaged in seemingly purposeless or criminal labor. Buttermilk Joe was a small man.

Buttermilk Joe was a milkman. He was called "Buttermilk" because it formed half of his diet. The other half was whiskey, and between the poison and the antidote, he managed to maintain a kind of equilibrium. Joe often came to work in such a condition that it seemed as if all the buttermilk in the dairy would not be enough, but no one could remember a time when he had not finished the job.

Joe and his wife had come from Hungary shortly before the first World War. They left Hungary for the usual reasons: constant conscription, no security, international "hot bed." In this country, Joe and Annette established a two wagon dairy. When Joe learned that liquids other than milk came in bottles, they had to sell the dairy. Joe and Annette never quarreled.

It was the practice at the dairy, on the day before Christmas, to deliver a double order to the houses and take Christmas day off. Joe always delivered a single order each day. Once, before Christmas, Joe came in very sober. The dairy room odor made Joe's eyes water and that had never happened before. He could not remember exactly what his milk orders were, but nevertheless he made his usual stops on the twenty-fourth and twenty-fifth.

On the twenty-sixth, Annette was buried.

Jack Meyers was a one hundred forty pound high school fullback. He graduated in nineteen forty two and immediately entered the army. In nineteen forty five he was killed after blowing up two enemy positions with hand grenades. He was trying to blast a third one. The citation called such acts, "Heroism beyond the call of duty."

Duty, according to Webster's definition, includes obedience, submission, respect, and moral obligation. This definition is brutally expedient. A dutiful child is an obedient and submissive child while a dutiful parent is demanding. A dutiful servant is respectful while a dutiful master is a respected one. Duty requires as many definitions as there are people fulfilling it.

A German writer recently classified duty as political, moral, and metaphysical. Political duty is the superficial act of choosing governors. Moral duty means upholding social laws and customs. Metaphysical duty is the responsibility one person feels for all others. A

bird is put back in its nest. Jack Meyers is killed. Religions are formed. Buttermilk Joe delivers his milk. These all grow out of a feeling of metaphysical duty. A university may be formed and a suffering dog may be shot. Metaphysical duty may give rise to didactic literature or soap box oratory.

Duty is, then, an innate individual means of choosing a course of action. It is different from habit because of its origin. The ultimate goal of duty is emulation of the Infinite Creator.

The Convict

Louise Grigsby

JED LOOKED at the closed door of the jury chamber, waiting nervously on the stiff-backed wooden chair beside the defense lawyer.

He remembered the day he had come to Pop's station to work. It was not really Pop's station, but he was the manager and could hire and fire people if he wanted.

The bus stop was half a mile down the dirt road, and his hesitating feet had scuffed little clouds of grit into the air, filming his black work shoes a powdery tan.

Pop had not asked many questions—just looked him over carefully and stated the pay. Pop was a shrewd old geezer, all right. Never one to miss a chance to make an extra buck, only it had to be honest.

Jed worked up enough courage one day to tell Pop about the reformatory; his clothes were packed, ready to move again, if Pop acted like the others. Convict—that's what folks had called him. Convict—for driving a souped-up car away from a hold-up. Convict—for being paroled on good behavior after only eighteen months of his sentence. Six months out of the white-washed barred cell and no decent job. Once a bad egg, always a bad egg, that is what lots of folks said.