

For moral character is an idea—as true, exact, and absolute, applied to a nation as to a man. A moral system which claims authority only in its private, personal application to men, but withdraws from them so soon as the individual is merged in the association or the body politic, is nothing but vagueness, darkness, and confusion. "Nations and individuals," says Channing, "are subjected to one law. The moral principle is the life of communities." Under no moral code can the individual eschew truth and justice. Neither can the nation throw them aside, and perform its functions, treating right, and truth, and principle as matters of indifference: for the magistrate and the lawgiver meet the august presence of Truth alike in all the details of administrative law, and in the commonest minutiae of civil regulation.

We cannot, indeed, speak of the *conscience* of a nation; for conscience is so personal a quality, that it is only by a strong figure of speech that we can apply it to nations. But all those moral qualities which are subsidiary to conscience are so manifestly brought out and recognised in all, even the minutest, acts and offices of government, that it is but a bare, distinct verity, and no metaphor, to speak of the moral duties and obligations of nations.

The internal moral obligations of nations are plain and evident: cultivation of religion, the maintenance of justice, the progress of education, the upholding of law and order, and national growth. All this arises from the *paternal* relation of government: a doctrine as old as it is true, and recognised by heathen nations, as well as by the Hebrew writers.

But now we are led to ask, "Are there not *external* moral duties resting upon nations?" Moral law applies to them in relation to their citizens and subjects; but does it not also apply to them with respect to bodies outside of their own rule and

power? Do not nations owe duty and obligation to other nations? Such, we cannot doubt, is the common consent of mankind and the teaching of all national history; though dimmed and obscured in olden times by cruel barbarism and savage wars. We catch a glimpse of this in the leagues, compacts, and alliances of Pagan nations. The treaties they formed for the promotion of commerce, the mutual obligation for aid and succour in times of danger, bespeak a sense of national obligation to benefit and bless. They showed the presence of these principles, in the very article of war, by beautiful displays of equity, of honour, and of clemency. When the thirty tyrants at Athens drove out the very flower of that city, and forbade the other cities of Greece to show them hospitality or to give them succour, the people of Thebes humanely received them, and, by law, threatened those of their own citizens who might refuse to assist these unprotected refugees. "War has its rights as well as peace," said Camillus,* the Roman Dictator, struck with horror and disgust at the treachery of one of the Falisci, against whom he was warring. Indeed, warlike and domineering as the Romans were, they frequently exhibited honour, magnanimity, and justice. Their common practice of siding with the oppressed and of defending the weak may have been policy, but it was also the teaching and the instinct of generosity and high-mindedness. And the equity and the faithfulness with which they generally carried out their promises to the vanquished, show the presence, even in their darkened state, of those large and noble principles of humanity which now are part of the law of nations; and they also teach that which I am endeavouring to elucidate—that is, that it is the moral duty of nations to advance human wellbeing and the civilization of the race.

* LIVY, b. v.

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The Maryland State Colonization Society Papers

XIII. Colonization Pamphlets

2. The Duty of a Rising Christian State to Contribute.... by the Reverend A. Crummell
London, 1856