SHOULD A NATION "TURN THE OTHER CHEEK"?

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THERE seems to be some confusion in these days concerning the relation of individual ethics to national codes of conduct. Is one and the same moral law applicable for the nation as for the individual? While a great deal of thinking is done upon this subject, it is feared that most folk take for granted there can be no difference. But a great deal rests upon a correct decision.

When an individual forgives freely, is railed upon but is not resentful, beaten but refuses to become bitter, the world recognises such as a righteous spirit. The world is right, since that is the essential element of morality, and so far as conduct is concerned, it is the highest aspect of conduct we can cultivate towards those who hurt us. Can it be that in a national sense there might be a law other than this law related to the individual? It seems to be taken for granted that the law of the unit must be the law of the aggregate: but must it?

Let us delve into it from another direction. Is the nation as the individual? Is there any difference between a people and a person? Is there such difference that determines law for a nation, decidedly discounting and even destroying the law of the individual? In short, can the nature of the meek and mild demanded in the individual take the same place in the life of a nation or a people?

Now, there are two things true about a nation that can hardly be said about a person. One difference is that a nation exists only in time. It is of the earth, earthy. It is temporal. We have arisen apart; developed different traits and territories; aspired to other ideals and aptitudes; had various histories and hopes; lived by numerous philosophies and moralities. There is a different brawn, and a different breed; into our bodies a certain brand, and in our souls a salient coherence setting us apart. In our nature has come a liking for localities; factors concerning families forced upon us, demanding a particular loyalty that we call patriotism. Being given to segregation, we have turned aside from others into separate nations and civilizations. We cannot ask how it came, but it is here, and

whether by divine ordinance or not, we feel we owe a certain loyalty to this development over the face of the universe. Thus we feel, by doing our noblest for our nation, we do our best for many other projects.

In the consideration of the eternal verities of conduct, we do not think of this realm of life in terms of any nation, since they shall cease. In the eternal kingdom they are done away, since there is neither bond nor free, Barbarian, Scythian, Jew, nor Gentile, before that Supreme Judgment Bar. We shall meet hereafter not as nations, but as individuals. Masses have little existence before the Supreme Being when values are estimated, only individuals. We owe our opportunities to our nation; our equipment in life is from its effort; our inspiration from its ideals; but they are by no means the criterion of our quality, and still less of our final place in God's eternal order. They are conditions destined to collapse; kingdoms of this waning world; scaffolding sure to pass away when the building is complete.

That is evidently the mark of nations, not of the eternal order, passing and perishing like a leaf from the tree of life. But a person is not so, because man belongs to the eternal order. The nation, while a temporary idea, nevertheless a very real one at present, is doomed to be transcended. Man is a being essential and eternal, with identity to survive. That is the difference, then, between the nature of a nation and the nature of a person.

Can there be bestowed on these different entities the same qualities? Have these different factors in the range of existence the same obligations? Can we be sure the same moral demands rest upon a mundane unit, as rest upon a unit challenged for time and also eternity?

This question brings us to the second difference between the nation and the individual. A community exists only by compromise. A nation possesses many kinds of persons, in different degrees of knowledge, intelligence, morality, and purity. Only on broad issues can a nation see eye to eye, accepting principles maybe, but with varying aspects of certainty. Provided all accept the principle, there is bound to be differing about the bearing of such principle upon conduct. Some are for consistency, others suggest, while accepting the principle, that it is not expedient to carry it into effect.

Those with defective intelligence, or intelligence not of high order, do not apprehend many things appertaining to

acuter minds. Those who are pure and true find themselves at odds with those who look upon moral sanctions as encumbrances. Thus legislation must needs lag a little behind the average position of any nation. Hence the actual working code of morals of most nations needs a persistent pressure from within the spiritual realms, so that it be made better. Thus it lags not only behind known truth, but further behind ideals already appropriated by serious persons. In short, it is compromise. When one says, therefore we should not legislate, we answer, we must work with things as they are, and not as they ought to be, nor must we despise the actual because we have an eye upon the ideal.

Ideals are for the individual. Hence a person in his own nature becomes ever conscious that he cannot allow compromise, but must needs ever follow the highest when he sees it. Thus while a nation cannot live without compromise, a person cannot really live if he does compromise. The nation having most skill in compromise amid its factions will have most internal peace and will rule itself; but the man, though skilful indeed in compromise, will surely fail and be ultimately known for no good, first to himself and then to others and finally to the Supreme Judge.

Thus, therefore, the same laws cannot apply to nation as to man, persons being precisely different from communities. The loftier the laws, the longer they take to work out. The more moral and spiritual in aspect, the less it will be found possible for them to pass upon nationalities, since nations have no eternity in which to reap.

Now let us return to where we started as to meekness and forgiveness. Are these graces proper to nations? Do they not possess powers that make them incongruous in the nature of nations? When we dwell together as nations, we are all guardians of another person's rights. We each have a duty to our neighbor, to the community, as regards its unity as well as its futurity. We cannot consider ourselves as alone, for when we do, we fail in a duty demanded of us, as well as break the bond by which the nation is bound.

Here is a simple illustration. Suppose, at a period of distress, the directors of our banks, corporations, and syndicates should meet as specific boards or committees, and without consulting shareholders or stockholders decide among them to present all assets to the Government. Without consulting anybody else, they meet in the official capacity they possess,

and agree to present a magnificent gift. What would the shareholders say to such a board? Among other things of course unprintable, they would surely say something like this: "You could rightly give what was your own, but have wrongly given what was ours, since even if we would agree upon such a gift, you have forestalled our consent, robbing us of practising personal philanthropy". Probably no board of directors would perform such an act, but if a nation's rulers show to another nation, which has wrought wretched mischief upon their subjects, meekness and forgiveness, have they not betrayed a trust; proved unjust stewards; and given that which was not theirs to give?

A man has a right to sacrifice himself, and give away that which is his, but he has no right to sacrifice another, or give away that which belongs to someone else. A man may let himself be killed by an enemy, but he has no right to let an enemy kill his fellow-citizen, he standing by and looking meekly on. We must defend one another in national life, and though allowing the matter to go as it may so far as we are concerned, we must not let any circumstance go that affects others as much as, even more than it affects us. Should we say a nation does well to be humble and forgiving, and, as its rulers, be meek and mild for the nation, will there not be danger and confusion in such vicarious meekness?

We must remember that in a community we each belong to one another, and recall that when we are defending one another, meekness and mildness are out of place. They are peculiar to a man's action for himself, but when he is a trustee, which involves others, he must possess a sense of justice. Justice is the foundation of a nation's existence; its oracle of establishment; its instrument of stability. The nation is a mutual trusteeship; hence, when defending another, to be meek and mild is to mistake the situation of its status, and to be confused in its character of duty.

A final illustration. You catch a thief, and hand him over to an officer of the law, expecting he will be tried in court, and others in your neighborhood protected from his further depredations. Suppose you meet the officer some days later and speak about the case, and he answers there will be no case, since he felt sorry and sympathetic towards the thief, and let him go: what would you think of such an officer?

We probably need not apply all you would say about the matter to the question in hand; but possibly it is plain that

while the duties of forgiveness and meekness may be assumed by the individual, they must not in the same sense be applied to the nation; and in some of the overtures of the present time applicable to national and international affairs we shall undoubtedly cause confusion and calamity if we are not clear in our contentions amid the grave concerns and circumstances that every individual everywhere faces at the precarious period of any people.