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MS-53: Moses J. Gries Papers, 1850-1934 (bulk 1890-1930).

Series D: Sermons and Addresses, 1893-1917, undated.

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“A Solution for the Problem of Poverty,” undated.

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American Jewish Archives website.

Rabbi Moses J. Gries, of The Temple,
Cleveland, Ohio.

At the Annual Banquet of the
Brooklyn Federation of Jewish Charities

A Solution for the Problem of Poverty.

Wonderful is the vision of a great city. It symbolizes man's achievement and power.

But a few steps lead from the parade of pomp and pride and power, to poverty. From the magic world of beauty, quickly we pass to squalor and wretchedness. In the shadow of the palaces of light loom dark tenements and dirty hovels which have no right to exist. Half the world does not know how the other half lives.

The problem of our Jewish poor does not originate in Brooklyn or Greater New York, nor yet in America, but thousands of miles across the sea and across the continent, in the benighted barbarism of tyranny, under the despotism of Russia and of Eastern Europe. It will never be solved here until it is solved there.

The immigrant comes, as Mary Antin says, poverty in his baggage, want in his pockets, but noble dreams and high ideals are hidden beneath his greasy caftan.

Give while you live. Carnegie says it is a disgrace to die rich. I believe it is a disgrace to live rich and not give.

Give your money and yourselves. "Not alms but a friend" is the watchword of modern charity.

The problem of charity is the problem of justice. The poor need not alms, but justice. Let us right the wrongs, ^{the} ~~of~~ inequality, ^{is the} ~~of~~ injustice^s, and the oppression of the poor. One thing and one only will solve the problem of poverty. I have faith in one mighty idea - in one all-conquering principle. I have abiding faith in justice.

Do not believe that whatever is is right; that what has been, must forever be. America is the last country in the world to have patience with that doctrine. We have revolutionized human government. We have dethroned aristocracy and have established democracy. We have changed the very character of human society.

It is one of my heresies, that ~~it~~ I will not accept either the

teaching of the Old or the New Testament, that the needy shall not cease out of the land, or that the poor ye have always with you. They have not ceased - they always have been - they will be for centuries to come, but not forever. It is contrary to my belief in God and to my faith in the fulfillment of the Messianic ideals. The coming of a Messiah will not bring salvation from sin, but must lift the yoke of oppression and break the shackles of suffering.



I believe what ought to be, can be and will be.

The religion of charity and of justice - the Hebrew word is the same for both - cannot be interpreted in terms of money, nor expressed by offerings of gold silver. Its interpretation must be through life and its interpretation expression in the attitude and purpose of life - in social enthusiasm - in the desire to serve our fellowmen - in the passion for justice, which will not tolerate injustice.

Everywhere the Jews of this country are waiting for the charities of Greater New York to federate. The poor of Brooklyn belong to New York. You cannot include Brooklyn for population and exclude its poor. Greater New York contains the greatest Jewish community of all history. It is biggest in number, in wealth and - in poverty. It should be the greatest in hand and heart and mind, in its firm grasp, in its genuine generous love, in its statesmanlike solution of our difficult perplexing problems - in the largeness of its charity and the earnestness of its humanity."

The Jews of America deserve everlasting credit for the courage and willingness with which they have met their great burden. There has never been a like burden in all the tragic history of Israel. It is the glory of American Israel, that its ablest and best men and women have given themselves in consecration to service. It is the greatest happiness to know one's life of value to one's fellowmen.

Coordinate the social forces of the city. Utilize the social power of the people.

The problems of the poor need you. If ever the same commanding ability, the same wonderful genius ~~for~~ organization, the same tireless and unceasing energy which have revolutionized commerce and industry, were applied to the problems of the poor, we would destroy the shame of our great cities, the tenements and the slums; We would rebuild and recreate the plague centers into health centers; and in one single generation, we would transform social disorder into social order and regenerate our human society for the happiness and well-being of humankind.