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“Am I My Brother's Keeper?,” 1902 December 7.

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Please return copy to Rabbi Moses J. Gries, 45 Oakdale St., City.

Dec. 7, 1902.

AM I MY BROTHER'S KEEPER?

"Am I my brother's keeper?" was the cry of Cain, freeing himself from the guilt of his brother's blood. Since man's first struggle upon the earth, he has cried aloud, "Am I my brother's keeper?"--denying responsibility for his brother. Ever since Cain struck Abel, his brother, there has been strife between man and man--between the strong and the weak--the stronger have struck down their weaker brothers.

Fierce is the battle for success. Every man must take care of himself. The rules governing the conflict are independence and selfishness.

Let them fight it out. We have no responsibility. We are and shall remain neutrals. Why bring injury upon ourselves?

Is not that our attitude in the repeated conflicts between capital and labor? Take the strike of the miners as illustration. Arbitration will establish justice, let us hope. But what man of us could hold himself wholly neutral, and could declare, "Let them fight it out! We have no responsibility. We shall remain neutral. Why endanger our own business and our own interests, and possibly bring injury upon ourselves?" I doubt not there were thousands who would gladly have taken refuge behind that too common shield of "minding their own business."

I hold it fortunate that the coal famine threatened us all. "You hold it fortunate that the country was threatened with the crippling of its industries and disaster to its commerce--with inevitable misery to its thousands of toilers? What possible blessing can there have been in the threatened danger--not altogether escaped--of cold and suffering to hundreds of thousands of the poor everywhere?"

I hold it fortunate because we, by danger, have been taught the great lesson that our interests were at stake in the conflict between the railroad and mining corporations and the thousands of miners--fortunate, that the truth was clearly emphasized that the public--that we, the public--had interest and right and responsibility. We are thoughtless until we are menaced in our own persons, in our own homes, in our own business.

All the world is learning the lesson of brotherhood. National boundary lines still divide nation from nation; racial differences are being emphasized and are not forgotten. Intense nationalism is being preached and fostered in our very time.

I have faith that nations are learning the great lesson even now: the old fires of national hates are burning out. The wars of nations will as surely pass away as have passed away the strifes and hostilities of the once independent states of our great nation.

All history teaches the law of unity. All peoples are learning the truth: that they are one in origin, and that they

must be one in destiny. The brotherhood of nations and the brotherhood of men rest upon the great principle of unity. Can we refuse to believe it?

Do men really believe in brotherhood? Do they live it? Remember at once the racial distinctions that continue and are justified even in the land of freedom. The black races are still too contemptuously dismissed as "niggers." President Roosevelt may invite a Booker Washington to be his honored guest. How few of us will ask him or his like as guests to our own table? Ah, we do not hesitate to associate with white men far worse--whiter in color, but blacker in character!

Great fraternal orders make loud profession of brotherhood. We know--some by unhappy experience--that their brotherhood is not genuine. Worldly prejudices rule even within the fraternities.

There is a growing conviction that man is his brother's keeper. The rich feel obligation to the poor; and the well-to-do, enjoying ease and comfort, to the less fortunate who suffer discomfort and hardship. Employers are discovering that they must do more than hire hours of time and the strength and skill of hand and body with so many pieces of money. Employers must do more than buy work and pay wages. They must reveal a human interest in human beings.

The nation is blessed with unusual prosperity. Unfavorable are the conditions abroad. We must naturally expect

a flow of humanity westward. The tide of immigration will rise and will sweep through Europe. Jews will come to the land of opportunity. Let us set our faces against the unwise and unnecessary restriction of immigration. Close the gates upon the criminal and the diseased: open wide the door of hope and opportunity to the unfortunate oppressed. It will mean temporary increase of burden for us. Let us cheerfully bear it. We, the emancipated who enjoy the rich blessings of peace, must help until our brothers are emancipated and share in the blessings of peace.

Are Roumanian misery and injustice as nothing? Do Russian cruelty and despotism mean nothing to us? As human beings, their miserable fate should rouse our human pity, and the cruelty and injustice of which they are the helpless victims should fire our American spirit until it burn in indignation against the wrongs that disgrace our civilization. They are victims through no fault of their own, except that they are Jews and insist upon remaining Jews. Social and economic reasons may publicly urge it, but a few drops of holy water have power to dispel all social and economic danger. The Jew who passes from synagogue to church escapes every peril and restraint and oppression to peace and opportunity and freedom. Perhaps a new era is dawning. The unspeakable Pobiednotseff, the holy Procurator, has resigned. He was the enemy of all liberalism. He stood for despotism as against democracy.

Man cannot live for himself alone. He is dependent upon every other man, near and far. He is his brother's keeper. It is true physically, and it should be true morally. I do not favor the narrow spirit that would thrust its narrow religious views and its narrow ways of life upon other men. But society must protect itself. We have a moral responsibility for one another.

"Am I the keeper of my brother's conscience? His business dishonesty and his private immorality do not concern me." They do concern us all. His dishonesty shakes the business world, and his immorality threatens the moral health of our community. There should be a moral public opinion to condemn the wrong and to commend the right. Here is one of the great duties and opportunities of the Temple and the church. It should uphold the standard of integrity and of the private moral life. Cities and states and nations are judged by their moral tone, by their spirit and by the living or sleeping conscience of the people. Jews should be the last among men to cry out with the voice of question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"