



THE JACOB RADER MARCUS CENTER OF THE  
**AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES**

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

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

---

Box  
4

Folder  
6

Item  
4

“Cleveland Chamber of Commerce Address,” 1899 June 6.

For more information on this collection, please see the finding aid on the  
American Jewish Archives website.

---

## ADDRESS

OF

RABBI MOSES J. GRIES,

Delivered before The Cleveland Chamber of Commerce,

JUNE 6, 1899.

AMERICAN JEWISH

*Mr. Toast-master and Gentlemen of the Chamber:—*We celebrate tonight our fifty-first anniversary. I do not therefore feel inclined to boast that we are fifty-one years old. Far rather would I boast that we were fifty-one years young. Age brings experience and conservatism; and I believe that here in the good old Western Reserve we have a sufficiency of conservatism. I wish that we were fifty-one years young, in order that we might have the courage and the enthusiasm of youth. I read recently, with regard to that adventurous man from Kansas, who went out into the Philippines—that man called Funston, who has won for himself the love and admiration of the American people, what seemed to me a rather interesting article in which some one said, explaining why it was that he dared to make a charge across the river on a raft, as he put it, that the reason of his making such a foolish charge was because he had in him the boy spirit. I thought of that when I said tonight that I wished we were fifty-one years young. I wish we had some of that dauntless courage, that daring enthusiasm, that readiness to take advantage of the opportunities before us. When we celebrate a birthday we must have a right to commemorate it; we must have something

in our history which makes an anniversary an epoch in our life. We must be not merely a trade organization. I rejoice that this Chamber of Commerce has within its body not only the men engaged in commercial and industrial pursuits, but men from every calling find their affiliation with this chamber welcome. This may be a source of weakness to this body in the matter of pushing trade and business enterprises, but as concerns its advantage to the city, I believe it strengthens the power and influence of the chamber. There are those across the sea who sneer at trade, who think it dishonorable to be traders. In the true American spirit, we think that to live by trade is more honorable far than living by the sweat of another's brow. They named us a nation of traders; but they discovered not long ago that this race of shop-keepers had within it power and patriotism to make a race of patriot soldiers. This Chamber of Commerce is the most representative organization in the city of Cleveland. It has no selfish purpose. Its purpose is the good of the city of Cleveland. It is not a partisan organization; within it are men of every party, men of every opinion. We may have within this chamber free discussion of everything that concerns the city of Cleveland, and we dare like men to have our honest differences.

Our city must not be something apart from ourselves. The glory of our city is our glory, and the faults of our city are our faults. We therefore must be true Americans, intensely absorbed in business success and commercial advancement, but at the same time, like genuine Americans, with hearts always open to the noblest impulses, ever loving the purest and finest ideals of life. Only the few among us are selfish; there are always some few who have selfish interests. I care not what their names or station or power may be, I say to you that those within our own body and within the city that have selfish interests are a danger to the city. This chamber must be unselfish, leading the hundreds and the thousands who seek nothing but the good. It is

difficult to be a patriot in the time of war, and it is perhaps more difficult to be a patriot in the time of peace. It is difficult for a man to venture his life on the field of battle, but it is perhaps more difficult at home, in the peace of the city, to live for one's city and for one's country. Are we patriotic citizens as we ought to be? Perhaps each one of you is ready to hurrah for Cleveland at every opportunity, each one of you is ready to declare that Cleveland is the largest city in Ohio and will be the most important city on the lakes. Even though it be true, I say to you that there are hundreds of men in this city who are not genuine citizen patriots.

There are evils in Cleveland, as there are everywhere. We may lay the blame on certain individuals, we may point our finger of rebuke at the bosses, small or great. But even though we do this, I say to you that we and not they are responsible. I deal not with men; I deal with principles; if the words that I speak hit any men and they choose to apply them to themselves, I have no objection. I venture to say that there is no private business involving the expenditure of millions of dollars which is conducted with as little sense and intelligence as are conducted the important interests of our great cities. What is the remedy? The remedy is not in the law. We know how the laws are made and how enforced. Therefore the remedy is not in the law. The remedy is in us. I like that man Roosevelt (he is a type of genuine American manhood). He has in him grit, pluck, conviction, backbone. I heard Roosevelt tell the members of this chamber, only a year or two ago, certain stories concerning corruption in New York City, and I remember how you and I greeted his stories with shouts of laughter. I thought about it when I went home, why you laughed and why I laughed, and I wondered again and again why every one of you, and why I myself did not burn with righteous indignation, why we did not feel within ourselves a glow of heat that would pass like a fire through

the community until it burned out everywhere this evil that is the curse of our cities.

I say we are not self-governing; our chosen servants domineer and dictate to us. I do not know whether you believe in evolution; perhaps it is against the religious scruples of some of you to believe in the evolution of the earth; but we have been compelled to believe in the evolution, not of the earth, but of the boss who wants to rule the earth. We have been witness to his evolution from the ignorant and despised ward boss until he becomes the city or county boss, then he is called a shrewd politician. He owns a city and county and would like to own a state. A strong delegation may have the balance of power, and suddenly our despised city boss blossoms out into a shrewd politician; then he may become a national boss and be called a great statesman. This ignorant ward boss, this shrewd city boss, and the national statesman are three of a kind, and they are a bad lot to be drawn to. I am not supposed to know what that means. But I knew you would know if I did not.

There are some "good citizens" that are not patriots, and there are some "patriots" who are mighty bad citizens. Look out for the man who goes around in the community shouting, "I am for the people." He wants the people to be for him. "Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel." Samuel Johnson said that a hundred years ago in England. I suppose a hundred years ago in England there were some politician patriots, and either we have imported them or we have them home-grown. That patriotism is false which is not rooted in right, which is not founded in justice. Just test a man's patriotism by his honesty and by his unselfishness. Bossism I believe is a danger to free government. The city boss controls the city, is a strong influence in the county, a mighty power in the state; ultimately he rules the nation. We see the county and state and nation controlled, and if we wish to see the influence that governs, we find it in our cities, in the city boss, a dangerous man.

I am old-fashioned enough still to believe in government by the people and for the people. I tell you I am weary nigh unto death of these everlasting "committees." We do not want any government by committees or factions, and we do not want to hear any more about deals and combinations, without ever a thought of the people self-governing. Back to the people once more, and no humbug about it! Some seem to have forgotten the very purpose of government—to care for the health and the life and the happiness of the people; to some it seems that the all-important municipal issue is always, to what faction or to what party does the man belong? Instead of asking, what do the candidates or the officials think and plan to do about our great and very important city problems, when campaigns are on men are wondering who will divide the spoils and share the incidentals that come with official honor.

Every great city presents great problems. We want to know where parties stand on these great questions. Usually they stand nowhere, and I believe that is where they ought to stand in the city. If our affairs are ever to be honestly administered, our citizens must not be so stupid as to be everlastingly shackled by and yoked to parties in spite of their dishonesty. Charity may cover a multitude of sins, but not necessarily does party cover a multitude of sinners. I believe in being loyal to the mayor of the city, and to the president of the United States, especially in the time of the nation's crisis. But while we are loyal to our appointed rulers, they must not forget that they too must be loyal to the people who chose them. In the crisis of the nation only a few years ago, we broke the ties of party, we forgot that we were party men, and on national issues we dared to vote and dared to do what we believed to be right. And only a few months ago, in the war crisis of the nation, we forgot that we were Republicans and Democrats, and we were, as we ought to be, every one of us, a true American.

If, then, we can do this in the crises of the nation, why can not we all stand together at home for the honor of our city and for the happiness of the people? The spirit of right has once been awakened in our city; it must never sleep again. The people must rule, and parties must learn that they must serve the people. All good men are not in one party, nor all the rascals in the other. Democrats are angels in New York, and Republicans have wings in Philadelphia; and I refuse to tell what Democrats are or Republicans have in Cleveland. I know that even in this era of trusts no party seeks to create a rascal trust. It can not be done. It is self-evident that the rascals cannot be trusted. We want less of party and more of patriotism.

I do not say that from an unworldly preacher's standpoint. I quote so eminent a person as ex-President Cleveland, who said, "I am not condemning party allegiance founded on reason and judgment. Party men we may all well be, but only with the reservation that thoughtful and patriotic citizens we must be." And if you do not like Mr. Cleveland's politics, I quote you from President McKinley himself, when he said, "If the party is wrong, make it better." No, it is not hopeless; we must not lose faith. What ought to be will be! Things once impossible are to-day! A few centuries ago there were feudal lords and serfdom. I doubt not, had we lived then, we would have declared it absolutely impossible that conditions ever could be otherwise. Go back one generation. There were slaves in a land of freedom. There are some here tonight who themselves heard wise and well-meaning men declare that slavery was of divine appointment, that slaves must forever be. And yet today, one generation thereafter, there is not a slave in the land and not one of us would ask that the old conditions be restored. Upon such facts of history I base my faith that whatever is right and ought to be, some day will be. Read the story of the reconstruction of Cuba. For four centuries Cuba has been under frightful condi-



tions. Evil and corruption have been everywhere, and I doubt not that men in Cuba thought it folly to dream that those conditions could ever change. A few months under wise and competent administration, and the evils of centuries have passed away. In cities where death threatened everywhere, healthful conditions have been created, lives are saved and there is a new happiness of the people. You ask for the cause? It is intelligence, the intelligence of the trained men that our government has sent to Cuba to administer its affairs. And a second cause not to be forgotten is the honesty and incorruptibility of the army officer. We may take a lesson from the example of Cuba with like intelligence, with like trained ability and with like honesty. We can reform our American cities. Therefore I believe in the merit system, in the city and in the nation. I believe that men throughout the land should be chosen for their ability to do the work they ought to do. I do not favor the modification of our merit system, nor its limitation. This chamber voted for the extension of the merit system even to the consuls abroad; surely we desire no limitation nor modification here at home. This body can help bring it to pass that in every city there can be honest and efficient government. How? By being true patriots in the time of peace, by remembering not only that we have rights which must be recognized but that we have duties to perform. The same willingness to sacrifice which sends a man forth to the field of battle must be in us at home, in the time of peace; in our own city we must be willing to make the sacrifices which our brothers have been willing to make on the field of battle. Our fathers, one hundred years ago, gave their lives for freedom, for independence. One generation ago our fathers gave their lives for the Union, and today our sons and brothers have given their lives in the cause of justice, to destroy Spanish oppression and injustice. I appeal to you, at home, to re-create our own freedom and to re-establish justice, by being patriots



in the time of peace. Let us give to our country the best that is in us. Let us try to make our city one of the happiest and one of the best cities in this land. We need patriot citizens everywhere to bring the new birth of freedom, and to re-establish what seems to have been forgotten or destroyed—a government of the people, by the people and for the people. I have not lost faith in the multitude. There are men of culture who find themselves so far removed from the masses that they lose their faith in them. The masses believe in justice, they want freedom, and are always trying to do what is right. Let those mighty ones in our cities who have a selfish spirit hear the warning, sometime the people will rise in their majestic might and crush them altogether. Who are the common people? Who are these masses that some refuse to trust? These common people are the noble volunteers, the very men behind the guns that I honor and esteem more than the great generals and the great admirals of the navy. The generals lead the armies, but the privates win the fights. In one instance at least a great battle in this recent war was won without the general, perhaps in spite of the general, by the brave privates in the ranks. If we are willing to trust the people in the time of war, we must be willing to trust them in the time of peace. Give them able leadership, in the cause of right. If our government be not founded on justice, it is built on the sands, which the rising tide will utterly destroy. France, our sister republic, has been shaken to its very center, and trembles between despotism and revolution. Why? Because it violated justice, without which there can be no true republic. You may trust the people.

I remember in 1896, at the end of the fierce national campaign, standing on the streets of our own city, when the good news came from everywhere, that the people did not greet that news, glorious as it seemed to them, as they greeted the simple picture of "Honest Old Abe." When

his picture was thrown on the screen they shouted, and following that, those thousands cheered the picture of the old flag, the flag of freedom, the flag they loved. You must trust the people. This chamber ought win the confidence of the people, and make its voice felt for the people's cause. And the people of this city must learn that this chamber stands for right and for honor and that we are with them for the people's good.

We must learn that the city is our city; and by that I mean that it is more than a good place in which to do business and to get rich. We must again develop that old home feeling which some of us have seemingly lost altogether. When another city seems to offer us a better market we quickly leave. Some even now are speculating about going to Cuba or Porto Rico or the Philippines to make a fortune. I know this is the same spirit that divided Africa, that covets China, the same spirit that peopled the earth, that moved the adventurers who dared the deep and pushed their way across the continents. But there ought to come a time in the life of every one when the city must be our city; it has made us and we must help to make it; our good fortune must be its good fortune. The community in which we live is the community to which we have a moral obligation. Every one who has won success owes the community a debt. Who then is the citizen patriot? He is not the man who merely lives here, not the man who attends strictly to his own business. Cities are business centers, but they are more than that—they are centers of civilization, and out of our cities go forth the great forces that shall govern and guide the future of our nation. From our cities there will go forth a power to make our civilization ugly or hideous, alluring or repulsive, a blessing or a curse. Not only should we have a pride in our city's wealth and business and its system of education, but also in the health and happiness of the people that live here. Our city must be the best city that it is possible to be. Every

city has certain possibilities of culture and refinement, possibilities for the development of trade, possibilities of life and beauty, and happiness. We men who live in this community must be true to this ideal; we must be citizen patriots. I believe not in the divine right of Kings, but I do believe in the divine appointment of nations and peoples. More than that, I believe in the divine right of the American king, the plain citizen of this land. And I look for the day when the name citizen will be a title of nobility; and the honored ones among us will wear no tawdry decoration, but in their hearts and upon their breasts will wear the badge of the Order of Citizen Patriots.

AMERICAN JEWISH  
ARCHIVES

