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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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“Problems of America - the Citizen,” 1904 November 6.

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Problems of America are to be my theme during the coming month. The place of the Citizen, of the Laborer, of the Immigrant, of the American in the Republic and what each contributes to the development and permanence of our Democratic institutions. These subjects are peculiarly fitting during this month of November. Again we are about to witness the inspiring spectacle of a mighty people determining the destiny of the nation. It is inspiring, considered historically. Here are men from all lands and of all races; from lands where they had not privilege, of races that have known subjection and oppression; more than 75 millions self-governing, choosing their own rulers. I fear that it is more impressive theoretically than in reality. Looking beneath the surface one is compelled to question whether the people do, in reality, govern themselves.

Government is a moral, as well as a political question. It is concerned with the happiness of the nation and with the development of freedom. Good government is dependent upon character, upon the character and the conscience of the people. Ours it is to educate the mind and heart of the people to a noble citizenship.

I speak of the citizen in the narrow sense, as belonging to the city. It is unfortunate that citizens are compelled at the same time to determine the policies of nation and of state and of county and city. It is unfortunate that we are asked to choose the President of a great nation, office of greatest honor and of the relatively unimportant minor local offices. It would have been better if our minds might have been centered upon the great issues that affect the national life, undisturbed by the clamor and confusion of those contending for mastery here at home. It would have been better if our minds could have been fixed upon our home interests undisturbed by the appeal to party loyalty and partisan passion. National and state elections should be separate from county and city. It would be better for both and better for the people. I have little patience with those who today are urging us to forget and perhaps to sacrifice our home obligations in loyalty to our party. Senseless the cry - "Vote the straight ticket.- put the cross under the party emblem!"

Unquestionably false is the assurance given us from the platform and in the public prints that all the candidates of our party are honest and capable. Let us not forget our home interests. I remind you of the schools for which we need men and women of honor and intelligence and capacity. I remind you of the important county business which has demands honesty and efficiency. Remember the judiciary, the higher and the lower courts. The court of justice is the safeguard of the Republic. What matter the party? We want judges of integrity and independence and peculiar fitness, with the judicial spirit and the judicial character.

Popular government in the great cities of the country is confessed a failure. The causes are many. One is manifest. The game of politics is being played and we are only witnesses. We are not active participants but idle onlookers. The most intelligent and the most virtuous citizens willingly and unwillingly exercise no real power in the conduct of public affairs. Yet the intelligent and the virtuous citizens are in the majority. Surely they hold the balance of power.

The citizen has not only the right but also the duty to vote - not only to vote - but to vote intelligently and independently. Let it not be said of you that you "voted a straight but unintelligent ballot". I appeal to the voters of intelligence and of virtue ; to men of sense and men of conscience; men of sense - choose officers of capacity for public business. Men of conscience - choose honest and not dishonest men. Be men, free men, not slaves to party. Public virtue is not other than private virtue; public honesty not other than private honesty. It is as iniquitous, as disgraceful, perhaps more so, to be dishonest in public office as in private business.

I know the answer: "Tis foolish to try, nothing can be done". It is impossible of belief. We dare not believe that the intelligence and the virtue of the people are powerless. I appeal to every man of intelligence, to every man of virtue and of character. If you love your city, if you believe in popular government, stand for the right, if you stand alone; have courage to stand for the right and thousands will take heart to stand and fight with you.

Cleveland is more fortunate than the other large cities of the country.



Two parties strive for mastery - two almost equal contending forces. Unquestionably the independent voters hold the balance of power. Voters, be independent and rebuke the nominations unfit and unworthy. Get good men by refusing to vote for bad men. Compel the parties to make their appeal to the best by the best. Hold the parties true to their highest. Be independent. Break the party yokes and shackles. Never mind the abuse and ridicule and slander and hate. Have courage to be a man, a freeman, a citizen, an American, in spite of the abuse and ridicule and slander and hate. Independent men are feared and respected.

We owe a debt to our city. Every man of intelligence and power is under obligation to be a citizen. Our city should be more to us than a place to do business. It is our place to live! to live in the largest and highest sense. Too many men of honor and of power, of integrity and of intelligence live no civic life. Good citizens are those who share and bear the burdens of their city. The best citizens are not the richest nor the most successful nor even the most virtuous of the community. Those are the best citizens who share most fully and bear most successfully the duties of citizenship. I appeal to all men of character, of intelligence and of power. Have courage to stand for and if need be to fight for honesty and decency- ay, the issue is far more fundamental than that, freedom itself is at stake, the right of self-government.

"Jerusalem, Athens, Florence, Venice, Edinburg, have all been relatively small cities; but they have been conspicuous in the higher life of humanity because they have stood for something which was distinct, individual, characteristic - some work of the mind, or of the spirit, as well as some work of the hands." The cities that live in history, the cities that have most vitally affected human civilization, are not the ancient commercial capitals. Nor will the modern centers of commerce and industry live in history and influence civilization unless they stand for something distinct and individual and characteristic. Here is a nobler conception of the city: "A really great city is one of the greatest human achievements." Let us make Cleveland great. Let Cleveland stand for something distinct, individual and characteristic.