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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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“True Social Service,” 1902 December 21.

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American Jewish Archives website.

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

Dec. 21, 1902.

TRUE SOCIAL SERVICE

Cleveland has cause for pride. We have more workers in proportion to our numbers than any other community of which I know.—But there is room for vast improvement. I wish to say a word of appreciation to and for our hardworked school teachers. They surely need recreation. But they know the conditions and the problem, and they are earnest workers, thoroughly conscientious. Workers do not abound because they are too busy and too selfish in the pursuit of money and of pleasure. Life should not be divided between business--money getting--and pleasure--money spending. Life should have worthier purposes. There can be no keener pleasure to a person of intelligence than to spend an evening with young eager minds, heart-hungry. Nothing can be more stimulating than to feel oneself of use to others. I appeal to men and women of brain and capacity and power: Have we been true to the higher call which comes to the educated and to the cultured? Educated men and women should cherish higher ideals in life and give a nobler direction to pleasures. They should uplift the purposes of a community. They should be slaves neither to business nor to pleasure.

You ask me, what are the opportunities for social service? The opportunities are definite enough, physically, morally and spiritually. Physically--improve the homes of the poor. Give money and give labor to abolish the tenement and

to destroy the slum. Prevent the building up of backyards-- prevent it by law, sustained by public opinion, which you must create. Pave and cleanse the filthy alleys. Improve the conditions of the neighborhood of the poor. Promote cleanliness and health. Furnish abundance of pure water and pure air. If we own buildings unsanitary, make them fit and decent for human habitation. Prevent the building of unfit houses, and help to destroy those already in existence. Do this selfishly, for the protection of self, our homes and our children from disease and crime. Do this unselfishly in humanity's name.

Morally--better the conditions of labor. Men who are willing to work should be able by their work to earn a decent living for themselves and their families. Give the poor a chance to help themselves. Protect the poor against the evils which multiply in their neighborhood. Guard the children of the poor against the temptations which surround their young lives. Guard them as we would guard our own. Suppress and root out, if possible, the open gambling where the poor live. Men and boys waste the money which their families need. Control the social evil, whose poison destroys the homes of the poor. Feel your obligation and responsibility for a better and purer citizenship among the immigrants who do not understand our American institutions.

Spiritually--do our religious duty by the children of the poor, even if we neglect the youth and elders. The Judaism of the elders gave them moral strength in spite of all the evils their unfortunate fate thrust upon them. Religion

gave them moral power for life. This moral heritage and the survival of the influence of home and of family life which are fast passing away, have safeguarded our boys, and especially our girls. We must prepare for the next generation and for the generations that are to follow. We must teach the children of today a religion which will give them and their children after them moral strength and moral heritage.

The opportunities for social service are most immediate and most important. The Council Educational Alliance and The Hebrew Relief Society are grappling with our most difficult problem. They need all the help we can give. Our problem of the poor would be solved quickly enough if we could find one friend for every family. The personal service of a friend will do more to help the poor and to help them help themselves than all the money we can give. The Alliance needs a hundred, willing to give themselves in honest friendship to groups of boys and girls, to young men and young women. We need money more than our poor need it--money to build and equip the physical workshop and money to pay for trained and intelligent leaders ^Ito guide the families of the poor on the way to self-help ~~with very little~~ needs the highest ability and unusual resourcefulness. The poor need opportunity more than help, guidance more than alms. ^POur greatest social need and therefore greatest opportunity, is with the boys. What can we not do for them, physically and morally and religiously? Is your sense of justice outraged when you read of children slaving in southern cotton mills, or but yesterday the story of

little girls toiling all night for a few cents per hour, in the great state of Pennsylvania? Who knows how children toil in our own community? I doubt not that here, many of them are helpers at home in the garment industries, as they are in New York and in Chicago. See the hundreds of newsboys upon our streets, eager and sharp and quick--self-reliant--who are too soon introduced to the hard world--too soon robbed of happy childhood. What can we not do for the men, especially the young men? Give them a neighborhood club--their club, in which they can enjoy themselves with honest pleasures such as would satisfy men. Our own youth do not hunger and thirst for social recreation. They are well-nigh satiated both in and out of their homes. The pleasures of the well-to-do need direction to nobler purposes. It is not thus with the youth in poorer neighborhoods. Their homes are not attractive. Necessarily they seek light and cheer and comfort and companionship away from home. Give them these and the surroundings that uplift and do not degrade, under influences that safeguard and do not endanger their moral well-being.

I call upon you for volunteers--one friend to one family, to help the parents guide the boys, misguided and uncontrolled. The work is waiting for honest workers.