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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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“Thou Shalt Not Covet,” 1904 January 31.

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

January 31, 1904.

The laws of the first table are the laws of man's duty to God. The laws of the second table are the laws of man's duty to man. The Tenth Commandment is a law for man unto himself.

I have considered the Commandments as laws of right living. I believe that they are based upon human necessity. I do not question that obedience to the Commandments brings rich blessings to mankind. The Commandments are not laws for the ancient Hebrews, nor for the old Land of Promise. They are laws universal. Laws for every age and for every country. "Thou Shalt Not Covet" is a law to mankind as concerns himself. Is the world free from sin? Surely there is enough covetousness in the world. It is the secret of unhappiness. It is the cause of the violation of most of the other Commandments. It is the law of the heart.

Is the Commandment unnecessary? The world is full of covetousness - envy, causing unhappiness - social envy, causing social unhappiness and social meanness - professional envy, marring the ethics of every profession - and business envy, responsible for cut-throat competition, - Social covetousness destroys ^{the} uprightness of nature's otherwise honest, - Political covetousness stirring false ambitions, - Religious covetousness creating unkind rivalries.

Covetousness is responsible for the avarice and greed and money-getting spirit, and the selfishness and ambition of the world today. Farrar quotes the Roman poet, "To what dost thou not compel the breaths of man, cursed longer for gold"! Felix Adler says modern society is "Infiltrated with the money-getting idea".

Wealth is not an evil and the possession of wealth is not an evil and the desire to possess wealth is not evil. Sensible men have no feeling against riches - riches earned with honor and spent in honor.

Yet is there truth in the old proverb that "Money is the root of all

Evil". Coveteousness is the root of dishonesty.

Capital and Labor are coveteous. The poor covet the belongings and the power of the rich, and the poor are against the rich. The rich covet the labor and the earnings of the poor, and the rich grind the poor. Coveteousness and selfishness are behind ^{the} social discontent that array capital against labor and labor against capital. Agitators appeal to the coveteousness and selfishness in our natures to arouse us to a sense of injustice because of the unequal distribution of life's treasures and blessings. Ofttimes this discontent is wholly unjustified. It is borne of coveteousness. Sometimes there is just discontent with the conditions of life and of labor. What is it other than coveteousness and selfish greed that suffer human beings to perish in unsanitary tenements, or hesitates not to endanger life rather pay the price of human safety.

Nations, too, sin against the law of coveteousness. The crimes of civilized nations in China and in South Africa, what mean they? What causes the war cloud that now darkens the Eastern world and threatens the peace of mankind? Lust for territory, greed for gold, expansion of commerce, increase of power and dominion. Are we of America altogether guiltless?

The Tenth Commandment is the commandment of the heart; a law against outward seeming - a law of the inward being. Let there not be pretense to nobility and fine sentiment and then ignoble passion and mean thoughts. Thousands are not master of the heart and the spirit. They lead a double life, one before the world and one within the heart. Man should be master of himself.

What we think, we are. Our thoughts ~~xxx~~ determine our actions. Give noble thoughts to the mind and noble works to the hand. Offer to men and women noble ideals and noble purposes. Seek and find noble associations. At home teach the simple life and emphasize by precept and by practice the simple ideals. Teach and live the gospel of work and the gospel of peace. These are the basis of content. The influence of our homes should be against coveteousness.

The world is struggling toward the good, upward to righteousness. The history of man has not been a history of goodness. There have been short-comings enough. Mankind is seeking the right. It is the work of all men and all women, not only of the teachers of religion. Vital interests are at stake. We must establish and safeguard a sabbath for man; the sanctity of life and of property; the purity of home and of family; Honor and truth and a pure heart. Every man and every woman must make decision either for or against these. There is appointment of duty to every human being, to the strong and to the weak, each one according to his knowledge and his power. The Commandments are the laws of right living.

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