



CHAPTER XIII

Personal Propaganda

THE GREAT VALUE of the 1910 Budget for Joseph was that its principle when fully applied would give opportunity to those desiring work, and would force the idle class to do some useful work. It would mark, as he said, "the greatest national industrial revival that the world has ever witnessed." For the very unequal distribution of labour, comes about through the monopolisation by a few of the resources that, rightly used, would be communal. "The tax," he told an audience in Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., "will be taken off industry and thrift and labour, all of which will be stimulated. Monopoly will be taxed out of existence, for all monopoly is founded on land. Competition will be free . . . the leisured classes are against the land tax reform because it will destroy their monopoly in land." He explained how the trusts of the United States would be affected by such a measure. "There is the oil trust. If it had to pay taxes on its great oil and gas fields at their real value, and not just as waste lands, how long would it hold them out

of the market, unproductive? It would produce all the oil it could sell, and kerosene would be cheap to the poor man and gasoline to the automobile owner. The trust would have to sell the lands it was unable to use, and there would no longer be a monopoly in oil."

That the working out of the Budget was a failure Joseph would have been the first to admit. The reason of that failure seemed to him sufficiently simple. When the administration of its principles came to be applied, there was a lack of courage for which he had scarcely been prepared. "He is not really a land-tax man," he wrote of Mr. Lloyd George three years later, when in 1913 he abandoned the Land Tax clause in the amending Revenue Bill. By so doing, Mr. Lloyd George had, in his view, failed at the critical moment to apply consistently the principles in which he had previously declared his belief. As also when he so framed the details of the Budget as to make possible endless delay and litigation. Joseph himself would have no agreement with a policy which made valuation dependent upon the decision of a court. The assessment, he contended, should be made once and for all by Government experts without what he called "the fanatical appeal to a court prejudiced beforehand" against the principle the Budget was intended to establish. It was to him a disappointment that so fair a promise should have issued in so meagre a fulfilment.

Whatever disappointment he felt was lost in the

activities which made more and more demands on his time. Any chronological record of his movements after 1909 becomes practically impossible. Roughly, it is true to say that half the year was spent by him in Great Britain and half in America. But there were two long Continental visits when he braved the difficulties of language and tried to stimulate the organisation of the Single Tax movement in Denmark, France, Sweden, Norway, Germany, Italy, and Spain. He sailed for the United States late in 1909 on the eve of the general election in Great Britain, and there spoke in many places in explanation of the British Budget. He toured through most of the Middle West of the United States. In the winter (1910) he was speaking throughout the Southern States. In 1911-12 he toured through Canada and the Far West. His time was filled with tireless activity. He wrote countless letters, considered schemes of propaganda, visited anyone from whom there was the hope of assistance. He did not hesitate to expose himself to rebuff if he felt that eventually he might be able to effect some good. He even approached Mr. Carnegie twice in a single year, trying, of course vainly, to convince that unsparing philanthropist that his right hand was endeavouring to re-erect what his left hand had destroyed. He attended congresses, meetings, lectures, debates. He sought out the prominent men of any town he visited and attempted their conversion.

To Mr. Carnegie Joseph wrote, in December 1910, shortly after Mr. Carnegie had made his gift of ten million dollars to the International Peace Foundation:

“You have given ten million dollars to an international peace fund. The object is worthy. The donor’s intentions are good. But a worthy object and a good intention cannot alone make a gift a real benefaction. Donations, no matter how large, to suppress evils, no matter how great, can accomplish nothing unless they should be used to remove the fundamental cause of the evils.

“Aggressive warfare is always the result of what appears to be an economic necessity. The last great war, that between Russia and Japan, will serve as an illustration. These two nations fought over the possession of Korea. Russia wanted Korea because she felt the need of a seaport accessible all the year round, that she might be able to export and import merchandise freely without being bothered with any tariff restrictions other than those of her own making. Japan felt that her independence would be threatened—that is, she realised that her refusal to trade freely with the rest of the world would create a temptation for other nations sufficiently strong to deprive her of independence.

“If conditions of absolute international free trade had prevailed, Russia would no more have felt the lack of an accessible seaport than does the State of Ohio.

If Japan maintained no custom houses, the Power that would try to rob her of her independence would have nothing to gain and very much to lose. Henry George made this clear in his *Protection or Free Trade*.

“‘What,’ he wrote, ‘are the real substantial advantages of this Union of ours? Are they not summed up in the absolute freedom of trade which it secures, and the community of interests that grows out of this freedom? If our States were fighting each other with hostile tariffs and a citizen could not cross a State boundary line without having his baggage searched, or a book printed in New York could not be sent across the river to Jersey City until duty was paid, how long would our Union last, or what would it be worth? The true benefits of our Union, the true basis of the inter-State peace it secures, is that it has prevented the establishment of State tariffs, and given us free trade over the better part of a continent.’

“The ‘need of foreign markets’ which is so frequently used as an argument to justify wars of criminal aggression is a ‘need’ that would not be felt if the aggressing nation enforced justice at home. Our own war in the Philippines would not have received popular endorsement but for the false hopes of ‘new foreign markets’ held out to commercial interests. This bait was held out and was swallowed, in spite of the fact that potential new markets exist here at home.

“The unemployed and partially employed popula-

tion and the underpaid workers form a potential market far greater than any war of conquest could secure. To secure this new market, labour need but be given access to the natural resources now withheld by private monopolists. The vacant and the partially-used city lots, and the valuable mining and agricultural lands held out of use for speculation, are causing poverty, unemployment, and low wages. The result is under-consumption of manufactured products, which manufacturers and merchants are bamboozled into believing can be relieved by forcing the people of weaker nations to purchase.

“Then, again, the interests which dragged the United States into the disgraceful Philippine adventure would not and could not have succeeded in doing so, had not the existence of land monopoly at home made it evident that the same institution would surely be continued by our Government in the Philippines.

“Will the Carnegie Fund be used to any extent in abolishing land monopoly, thus checking any possible repetition of successful appeals to commercial cupidity in support of land-grabbing schemes abroad? Hardly.

“A gift of ten millions to secure relief from malaria in a swampy district which could not be used to secure the draining of the swamps or the destruction of the mosquitoes would be just as effective as your peace donation.”

It goes without saying that Mr. Fels' advice was dis-

regarded; we cannot even find that his letter received a reply. Perhaps, as he suggested, he had made a proposal too radical even for a retired millionaire. But it was not only with the powerful that his enormous correspondence in these years concerned itself.

Some further correspondence in connection with a request for financial assistance is worthy of record. It shows that Joseph never lost an opportunity to enforce fundamental principles, or to make it clear that he had no desire to pose as a philanthropist. It also demonstrates how broad-based was his own religious belief.

“— Theological School.

“Mr. Joseph Fels, Philadelphia, Pa.

“Dear Sir,—Having read much of you and your many acts of charity and philanthropy, I write to ask for a donation from you for our institution.

“It may seem strange that I ask this of one who is not of our faith, yet I have read in some of your speeches that you make no distinction of race, creed, or colour, and that you regard all men as your brothers; that you believe in the Brotherhood of Man and the Fatherhood of God. Thus you are teaching what our institution teaches, and our school is doing as best it can with limited means the work you are trying to do.

“We are sadly in need of money. Many young

men who wish to enter our school and prepare themselves to teach the Gospel of Christ are without means to pay their board and buy books, and our means are so limited that we cannot help them. These young men, trained in our school to preach the Gospel, would, many of them, be fitted to carry the Word to the heathen of foreign lands, and thus be instrumental in dispelling the darkness that reigns among millions of our brethren in other lands.

"Can you not help us? What would be a very little to you would be a great deal to us, and might be the means of saving many souls.

"Yours respectfully,

"—, —, —"

"Dean."

To this request Joseph replied:

"Rev. —"

"Dean — Theological School.

"Dear Sir,

"Replying to your communication, I am at a loss to know where you have read of my 'acts of charity and philanthropy.' I am not a philanthropist and give nothing to charity.

"When you say I am not of your 'faith' I suppose you mean of your creed. Let me state my faith and we can see wherein we differ.

"I believe in the Fatherhood of God, and therefore

in the Brotherhood of Man. By 'Man' I mean all men. So far I suppose we agree?

"I believe that the Creator freely gave the earth to all of His children that all may have equal rights to its use. Do you agree to that?"

"I believe that the injunction 'in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread' necessarily implied 'Thou shalt not eat bread in the sweat of thy brother's brow.' Do you agree?"

"I believe that all are violating the Divine law who live in idleness on wealth produced by others, since they eat bread in the sweat of their brothers' brows. Do you agree to that?"

"I believe that no man shall have power to take wealth he has not produced, or earned unless freely given to him by the producer. Do you agree?"

"I believe that Brotherhood requires giving an equivalent for every service received from a brother. Do you agree?"

"I believe it is blasphemous to assert or insinuate that God has condemned some of His children to hopeless poverty and to the crimes, want, and misery resulting therefrom, and has at the same time awarded to others lives of ease and luxury without labour. Do you agree?"

"I believe that involuntary poverty and involuntary idleness are unnatural and are due to the denial

by some of the rights of others to use freely the gifts of God to all. Do you agree?

"Since labour products are needed to sustain life and since labour must be applied to land in order to produce, I believe that every child comes into life with Divine permission to use land without the consent of any other child of God. Do you agree?"

"Where men congregate in organised society, land has a value apart from the value of things produced by labour; as population and industry increase, the value of land increases, but the value of labour products does not. That increase in land value is community-made value. Inasmuch as your power to labour is a gift of God all the wealth produced by your labour is yours, and no man nor collection of men has a right to take any of it from you. Do you agree to that?"

"I believe the community-made value of land belongs to the community just as the wealth produced by you belongs to you. Do you agree to that?"

"Therefore I believe that the fundamental evil is the iniquitous system under which men are permitted to put in their pockets—confiscate, in fact—the community-made values of land, while organised society confiscates for public purposes a part of the wealth created by individuals. Do you agree to that?"

"Using a concrete illustration: I own in the city of Philadelphia 11½ acres of land, for which I paid \$32,500 a few years ago. On account of increase of

population and industry in Philadelphia that land is now worth about \$125,000. I have expended no labour or money on it. So I have done nothing to cause that increase of \$92,500 in a few years. My fellow-citizens in Philadelphia created it, and I believe it therefore belongs to them, not to me. I believe that the man-made law which gives to me and other landlords values we have not created is a violation of Divine law. I believe that Justice demands that these community-made values be taken by the community for common purposes instead of taxing enterprise and industry. Do you agree?

"I am using all the money I have as best I know how to abolish the Hell of civilisation, which is want and fear of want. I am using it to bring in the will of our Father, to establish the Brotherhood of man by giving each of my brothers an equal opportunity to have and use the gifts of our Father. Am I misusing that money? If so, why and how?

"If my teaching is wrong and contrary to true religion I want to know it. I take it that if you are not teaching religion in its fulness you wish to know it. Am I correct?

"What I teach may be criticised as mixing politics with religion, but can I be successfully attacked on that ground? Politics, in its true meaning, is the science of government. Is government a thing entirely apart from religion or from righteousness? Is not just

government founded upon right doing?

"If my religion is true, if it accords with the basic principles of morality taught by Jesus, how is it possible for your school to teach Christianity when it ignores the science of government? Or is your school so different from other theological schools that it does teach the fundamental moral principles upon which men associate themselves in organised government?"

"Do you question the relation between taxation and righteousness? Let us see. If government is a natural growth, then surely God's natural law provides food and sustenance for government as that food is needed; for where in nature do we find a creature coming into the world without timely provision of natural food for it? It is in our system of taxation that we find the most emphatic denial of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, because, first, in order to meet our common needs, we take from individuals what does not belong to us in common; second, we permit individuals to take for themselves what does belong to us in common; and thus, third, under the pretext of taxation for public purposes, we have established a system that permits some men to tax other men for private profit.

"Does not that violate the natural, the Divine law? Does it not surely beget wolfish greed on the one hand and gaunt poverty on the other? Does it not

surely breed millionaires on one end of the social scale and tramps on the other end? Has it not brought into civilisation a hell of which the savage can have no conception? Could any better system be devised for convincing men that God is the father of a few and the stepfather of the many? Is not that destructive of the sentiment of Brotherhood? With such a condition, how is it possible for men in masses to obey the new commandment 'that ye love one another'? What could more surely thrust men apart, what could more surely divide them into warring classes?

"You say that you need money to train young men and fit them 'to carry the Word to the heathen of foreign lands, and thus be instrumental in dispelling the darkness that reigns among millions of our brethren in other lands.' That is a noble purpose. But what message would your school give to these young men to take to the benighted brethren that would stand a fire of questions from an intelligent heathen? Suppose, for example, your school sends to some pagan country an intelligent young man who delivers his message; and suppose an intelligent man in the audience asks these questions:

"You come from America, where your religion has been taught for about 400 years, where every small village has one of your churches, and the great cities have scores upon scores. Do all the people attend these churches? Do your countrymen generally practise

what you preach to us? Does even a considerable minority practise it? Are your laws consistent with or contrary to the religion you preach to us? Are your cities clean morally in proportion to the number of churches they contain? Do your courts administer justice impartially between man and man, between rich and poor? Is it as easy for a poor man as for a rich one to get his rights in your courts?

"You have great and powerful millionaires. How did they get their money? Have they more influence than the poor in your churches and in your Congress, your legislatures and courts? Do they, in dealing with their employees, observe the moral law that the labourer is worthy of his hire? Do they treat their hired labourers as brothers? Do they put children to work who ought to be at play or at school?

"Do your churches protest when the militia is called out during a strike, or do they forget at such times what Jesus said about the use of the sword?

"After four centuries of teaching and preaching of your religion in your country, has crime disappeared or diminished, have you less use for gaols and fewer and fewer of your people driven into mad-houses, and have suicides decreased? Is there a larger proportion of crime among Jews and infidels than among those who profess the Christian religion?

"What answers would your missionary return to these questions? How would you answer them?

"I do not attack Christianity. The foregoing questions are not intended as criticism of the great moral code underlying Christianity, but as criticism of the men who preach but do not practise that code. You may accuse me of 'unbelief,' but that is no answer. If you have any criticism to make of me or any accusation to bring against me, answer the questions first. Give me straight answers, and I will give straight answers to any questions you may put to me. My contention is that the code of morals taught by Jesus is a code of justice, of right living and right doing; that the simple code of morals taught to the fishermen of Galilee by the Carpenter of Nazareth is all-embracing and all-sufficient for our social life.

"I shall be glad to contribute to your theological school or to any other that gets down to the bedrock of that social and moral code, accepts it in its fulness, and trains its students to teach and preach it regardless of the raiment, the bank accounts, the social standing or political position of the persons in the pews.

"Very truly yours,

(Signed) "Joseph Fels."

He received every day scores of letters offering suggestions, criticising, cursing, requesting information. The first he considered always with courteous attention. To the criticisms he replied for the most part in an amusingly optimistic vein. Those who

cursed were amply repaid in their own coin; Joseph never hesitated to tell any man in full and plain terms exactly what he thought of him. To those who asked for information he always replied in elaborate detail, and a separate packet of literature, with a copy of *Progress and Poverty*, would, as a rule, accompany his reply. His ideas and views were embodied in many short articles and letters to the Press. It was his habit never to let any occasion pass when the theory of the Single Tax could be driven home. A Housing Bill was proposed; he would urge that the present assessment on improvements simply penalised the tenant. A park was presented to some neighbourhood; he would point out the benefit it conferred on the landlords of the locality. One grows almost bewildered at the multifarious and incessant activities he undertook. He arranged, at one time, that every elector in Great Britain should receive a bundle of Single Tax literature. He attended practically every Trade Union Congress from 1909 to distribute leaflets to the members. He gave evidence before the Land Committee of the Labour Party. He went to Radical Congresses of every kind in the hope that they might be turned to good use. If a friend started a journal of any description, he clamoured to be allowed to explain his cause therein. It mattered nothing that the purpose of the paper was different from, even, on occasion, antipathetic to the Single Tax. If the purpose was different, then his

article would introduce a little variety; and if it was antipathetic, the editor could point out his errors in a leader.

Two characteristic incidents showing how he endeavoured to turn every opportunity to account may be given. In 1910 Mr. Fels persuaded Tom L. Johnson, the famous Mayor of Cleveland, and a close friend, to pay a visit to him in England. While there, Johnson noticed that a Free Trade Congress of all nations was to be held in Antwerp, and Joseph at once decided to make use of the occasion for propaganda purposes. To secure credentials from the American Free Trade League was the matter only of a cable. And a band of thirty stalwarts was soon on its way, eager to declare their enthusiasm for a Free Trade that went far beyond the ideals of most of its professed adherents at Antwerp. At first the Congress was adamant to his insistence that the Single Tax was merely the logical development of Free Trade ideas; it could not hear him. Then procedural objections were urged. No place had been set for him in the programme—were he to speak, all arrangements would be upset. The myriad official difficulties were coldly set before him. But Joseph was not thus easily daunted. A tribute was to be paid to Richard Cobden—Cobden, who, two generations ago, seeing the land-hunger of England, declared his belief in Free Trade in land, called for land valuation, and for a land tax that would

bring to the revenue of that day £20,000,000. Joseph saw his opportunity. No more enthusiastic appreciation of Cobden was paid than his, but it combined also, and skilfully, a eulogy of Henry George as the man who had logically carried out Cobden's conclusions. And no member left the Congress without ample literature upon the subject. "It was the best piece of work I have yet done," he wrote to a friend, "we came near to stampeding the Convention. I feel pretty sure that Henry George was never so near coming into his own as now—in any country. It is the struggle of the century, and the most inspiring struggle, too."

His other exploit was suggested by the Antwerp adventure. An International Conference on Unemployment was held in Paris in September, 1910, and he, with a large box of literature, freely distributed later, was in attendance. The Conference was divided into three sections—on the statistics of unemployment, on labour exchange, and on unemployment insurance. As he sat listening he found speaker after speaker talking on statistics. Presently he could stand it no longer and, jumping on a conspicuous seat, exclaimed loudly: "Mr. Chairman, to hell with statistics!" It caused not a little stir but was followed by much cheering, which showed that the audience was in sympathy with Joe's vehement protest, and ready to listen to what he had to say. He spoke at length on the three themes. In

the first, he urged that the time had passed when they need bother about the actual extent of unemployment. The age tended to choke itself in a series of "spluttering investigations" which resulted in nothing save satisfaction to the investigators. They knew that there was serious unemployment; that was sufficient to make them anxious to get ahead. He objected to Labour Exchanges and to Unemployment Insurance because they were beginning the problem at the wrong end; they assumed the inevitability of unemployment and then attempted its minimisation. He was not content with that. He assumed that it could be prevented by the adoption of the Single Tax. Then the Conference heard some bitter home-truths about satisfaction with palliatives. He ended by appealing for converts to his crusade. He wrote of this Conference to a friend: "Of course you will know what I had to say on these things. I take it we cannot do better, wherever possible, than by attending all such conferences and showing those assembled the utter futility of palliative measures, and the absolute necessity of attacking unemployment at its base. I do not think I ever before felt more bitter against a set of well-dressed, well-fed people who did not know what they were talking about, and I imparted as much bitterness to what I said as I knew how."

He accomplished something more on this journey than mere skirmishing. To another he wrote: "The

most interesting incident of my Paris trip was that I had to inaugurate the first Single Tax League in France . . . The fact that the Physiocrats before the Great Revolution enunciated what practically became the Henry George philosophy made it peculiarly interesting." Then followed a characteristic thought: "Whenever you have an odd ten minutes to spare, write Georges Darien, the secretary of the new League, an encouraging letter; perhaps Eggleston or some other of the chaps will do it too." It was this initiation of comradeship in the movement which was not the least valuable of Joseph's gifts to it.

It was to this friend, Mr. U'Ren, of Oregon, that he wrote a letter that deserves reproduction in full, because nothing shows more clearly the trend of his political thought at this time. It makes clear, too, how intensely he felt upon this subject:

"You were very good," he said, "to write me so fully and freely on your opinion of my contentions as to the open agitation of our question in all its baldness. No one I can recall could have done it better, or been more patient about it. Thank you from the very bottom of my heart. You're one who, seeing the justice of things in its right relations, gives his friend of his plenty, and opens his own reservoir of knowledge freely for his friend's guidance. I value what you write to me, and it will serve me well in the work to which I have consecrated my life—I say consecrated,

for so I consider devotion to the high and noble cause in which we find ourselves engaged. Happily, one lives in an atmosphere which is not poisoned by fear of the stake or the guillotine these days, though intolerance and ignorance and slavishness to opinion still find lodgement in the breasts of millions of people. One often thinks these are equally bad, considering the high state of civilisation to which we are supposed to have attained.

“Your letter gives one to think. I’ll keep it by me for a time—then I’ll make duplicates and submit them to a number of our colleagues. Perhaps, by and by, others will come up to the point of seeing the vision you outline; it is an alluring dream for the present. But who shall say that dreams which hold the germ of substantiality, as this one does, are impossible of materialisation, even in the short span of our own lives? In considering this thing, I have taken on a new lease of life, and hope, and assurance. And so, though I have set myself to seeing human freedom as an established fact, in one or more lands, during the next twenty years, I am much inclined to wipe out the time limit, and to declare boldly, ‘I’ll see human freedom.’

“The suggestion you outline for Pennsylvania is most alluring—Pennsylvania, my own State. It is a thing well worth the doing—no, the trying to do, even though one may not see it done. Perhaps (who knows?) I may find other men who will also see the

vision to help with their purses. There are more and more devoted souls, who are glad to give themselves, coming to the front daily, hourly. There are few men given to view this great work going on in so many countries as I am. It all makes me very humble and very thankful. I'm sure you understand."