



## CHAPTER XV

### *Later Activities*

CLOSELY CONNECTED with his zeal for education was the deep interest he took in boys' and girls' clubs. Here, too, he felt was creative work, the turning of leisure to good purpose. Of the various ways in which he gave expression to his interest there is no space to speak; but one story I am able, through the Hon. Lily Montagu, to reproduce.)

“Mr. Joseph Fels first influenced the life of the West Central Girls' Club when he appeared in the character of a fairy godfather at our Anniversary Celebration in 1910. On this occasion he was present when Miss Montagu made an appeal for building an adequate home for the many girls and women who came to London to learn English, or are orphaned and seek a home rather than the ordinary lodging house. Slips were handed to all the large audience who filled the New Theatre, but only one slip was filled in with any substantial promise. Miss Montagu and all her friends read this slip over and over again before they understood that £1,000 had been offered, and then a

little later Mr. Fels himself was able to make the meaning of the promise clear. He was not interested in mere working machines, he wanted human beings. He was very glad for Jewish working girls to have a home, but insisted that some sort of garden should be provided. It was therefore through Mr. Fels that the roof-garden was made at the Emily Harris Home, and on summer afternoons and hot evenings girls of all nationalities are reaping the advantage of his great thoughtfulness.

“After Mr. Fels had once become interested in the Club and Home, he remained in touch with the workers and members. On several occasions he invited parties of girls to visit his home and gave them delightful afternoons. His visitors always felt at home at Bickley and they always considered that their host was the youngest of the party.

“It was Mr. Fels’ pleasure to invite men and women of knowledge and culture who would interest the girls and enlarge their outlook on life, and he himself did not lose any opportunity of giving them some understanding of the great land problem. So long as the West Central Club and the Emily Harris Home exist, the name of Joseph Fels will be remembered not as that of a mere benefactor, but as that of a real and understanding friend.”

In other and more important ways did he manifest an interest in the affairs of his race. The treatment of

the Jews in Russia was a matter of intense and recurring concern, and he took a large part in efforts to alleviate their condition. This work brought him into association with Mr. Zangwill, in whom he found that combination of dreamer and worker which always made to him an irresistible appeal. Joseph was from the first interested in the Jewish Territorial movement, with hopes for his economic plans.

He was aware that a mere aggregation of families does not constitute a community, as it does not imply the presence of cohesive forces which are, in the main, of natural origin and slow growth. If, however, these factors are implicit he conceived it possible to stimulate development, and thus give that adjustment of thought and activity that would unify a group into a community. There must be present, he always believed, some common participation in an ethical, spiritual, or intellectual interest. The great difficulty in economically initiated colonies was to bring people together for extra-economic purposes.

This side of community life can never be forced. It can only be made easy of exercise in its incipient stages if some disposition is already present. If it continued permanently absent, he was aware that, however prosperous the members of the group might be, it was still merely an aggregation and not a community. The following tells the advantages of what he had in mind.

“Suppose a few hundred people obtain access to a fertile, uninhabited island and set out to colonise it. They recognise that all the sites or selections cannot possess equal advantages, that some will be wooded, some not, some high, some low, near water or otherwise, some near centres of trade, some far out, some large, some small, and so on. They inspect and make a plan of the grounds, and each family or adult person makes a selection with the full understanding that while the whole island belongs to all, the various locations must necessarily vary in desirability or become more valuable with the increase of people. So the colonists equalise their holdings something like this:

“The least desirable or perhaps the smallest lot or site in use will be taken as a basis to compute all the others by. Recognising that the occupant of the least advantageous site has left all the better or bigger locations for the others, or has had it left to him by others, while the whole is as much his as theirs, it is agreed that he shall occupy his holding free. All the others, having better locations, agree now to pay annually into the collective funds sums equal to the advantage, expressed in money, their sites have over the poorest site in use. This collective fund would represent all the various advantages in excess of the poorest lot in use.

“Now that these various inequalities are taken off, paid into the public fund, the colonists all stand prac-

tically alike in their holdings. They have paid all the excess values into the treasury. When this fund is straightway used for public purposes, roads, schools, fire protection, town hall, library, etc., in which all share alike, they have worked out triumphantly the problem of equal rights to the use of the island. As years go on and increase of population and trade increase the value of all their holdings, their public fund grows larger just in proportion as they need more improvements. So their land values being sufficient for their expenses, no other taxes are thought of. Whatever private means the colonists brought with them or earned by labour afterward are neither listed nor rated. Everyone has the worth of what he was assessed for the use of his location. This assessment is what he pays all the other co-owners for exclusive use of his apportionment."

Shortly after he made Mr. Zangwill's acquaintance Joseph became a member of the council of the "I T O", and thenceforward took an active interest in its plans. He was a frequent attendant at its council meetings, and, as Mr. Zangwill gives testimony, of much aid by reason of the shrewd practicability of his judgments. As plan after plan was considered, and had to be placed on one side, Joseph began to undertake some investigations on his own account. When he visited Diaz in 1907, one of his proposals was for a Jewish settlement in Mexico. He had inquiries made

about South America. A letter of inquiry he wrote about the latter possibility is not without its interest.

"I may not before have mentioned to you that, being a Jew, I am greatly interested in the future of my people; and for several years I have been co-operating with such men as Israel Zangwill . . . His organisation has been on the look-out for a country in which the oppressed Jews of Russia and other lands might be invited to settle, where a measure at least of autonomy might be had. Within the last month an expedition has been dispatched to investigate the Angola district on the West Coast of Africa . . .

"My interest in this matter is very great, of course, and grows as I see the constant cruelties which are inflicted upon my people, defenceless as they are under the Russian Government. Whether or not autonomy could be gained by settlement in one or other of the South American countries is a matter about which I should like to consult with you. I believe, for instance, that Paraguay has only 700,000 population. That is a country about as large as Great Britain, and I believe a settlement of people could well be carried on in that country. Of course, I have in mind the right kind of landlords, and my interest is not unmixed with my obsession about the Single Tax."

It is interesting to note that he grew the more interested in the movement as its possibilities verged more and more towards the historic birthplace of the Jews

in Palestine. It is certain that he had been gripped by the vision of a Jewish people with a cultural centre of its own. To him the Jews were essentially a race of missionaries, born to preach, by book and by example, the gospel in which he himself believed.

When this vision came to him he realised that the emotional quality of the race could not be readily employed in any land that only answered the great Jewish need by reason of its economic advantage. The issue between "any land" and that land was to settle itself as one of the by no means minor problems of the Great War when Joseph passed away. But he had looked ahead and foresaw the cause of events. And it is now particularly interesting to note in one of his letters the expression of an anxiety that Justice Louis D. Brandeis should assume the leadership of the American movement. Certainly my own increasing association with Palestine would have met with his hearty approval—would have been, indeed, the realisation of his own desire.

The Jews have always manifested a compound of spiritual idealism with practical morality, and therefore it can safely be asserted that despite every pull contrariwise, given a free hand, they will attempt, and eventually achieve, social justice in the new Zion. Therefore to them the end sought must be that the State must in its constitution set out from a basis of economic justice, that is to say, its economic philoso-

phy would be the philosophy of Henry George. There appeared to Joseph something almost of a poetic justice in the Jews thus giving to the world the example of freedom, as in an earlier day they had given birth to religion. He worked steadily to promote the end in view. Friends were written to, the audiences at his meetings almost invariably learned something of his thought, and Jewish Single Taxers would inevitably receive whatever he could procure of the literature on the subject. One of the last conversations he had was an expression of his high hopes in this regard.

For it is clear that his previous attitude was due to insufficient data. When Turkey joined the Central Powers I made inquiries as to Palestine that led to ever-increasing interest in, and relation to, that Holy Land. When, in 1921, I went there myself I found my true place respecting it, and the inspiration I got from it was, and is, deep and abiding. For from it shall come forth the Law, as has ever been the case. From it will again come one to bring God's Light to mankind. It feeds and fosters the spirit of such a one. It is the Holy Land because of the succession there of holy ones, of those who love and obey God and, walking humbly with Him, are inspired to speak from Him. I found colonists, not a few, who had come there fifty years ago, drawn by fervent devotion to this Holy Land, unmoved by any extraneous incentive. By this deep



devotion they had withstood hardships of every worst kind. Their one helper was that man of noble vision—Baron Edmond Rothschild. It was from these I felt would spring the redeeming spirituality and to these I devoted myself persistently. From among these Joseph would have found what he sought.

The Jews were not the only persecuted race in whom he felt deep interest. For injustice of any kind he had the very deepest abhorrence and that feeling, indeed, lay at the bottom of most of his activities. He took, for example, a large part in the famous McQueen case. And he got Mr. H. G. Wells to visit the man in Trenton prison and deal with the subject in his book "The Future of America."

It was clear, as Mr. Wells wrote, "There had been a serious miscarriage of justice. . . . No one pretends that McQueen is in jail on his merits, he is in jail as an example and lesson to any who propose to come between master and immigrant worker in Paterson."

Joseph took the case up, and during McQueen's imprisonment he made it his care that Mrs. McQueen should not suffer. He obtained testimony in England from labour members of Parliament, trade union leaders, and business men as to Mr. McQueen's record. Wherever he was informed that McQueen had at any time been employed he visited the place to obtain evidence. He searched the English police records. He wrote to many men of influence in the

matter, members of the Court of Pardons and the Governor of New Jersey. He offered to give Mr. McQueen employment on his release.

The Rev. A. W. Wishart, who was mainly instrumental in securing Mr. McQueen's pardon, tells how he became interested in the case, and wrote a pamphlet about it. He also gives a characteristic picture of Joseph's association with the matter. Mr. Wishart says:

"About the time of the publication of my pamphlet I received a letter from Mr. Fels saying that he had read of the case in the London papers and wanted to know what he could do to help me. As I then had invested about \$150 or \$200 of my own money in the case, which I could ill afford, and as I saw other expenses ahead of me, I wrote to Mr. Fels that some financial help would be most timely, especially if I was to carry on the case any further. He sent me . . . a cheque. Very soon afterwards he wired me he was coming to Trenton to see me, which he did. He stayed at my house all night, and we visited several judges of the Board of Pardons, who were also on the Court of Errors and Appeals Bench. Mr. Fels also went with me to Paterson. It was a bitterly cold day, and we tramped all day long, visiting business men, everywhere meeting with rebuffs and sometimes almost with insults, because it was believed by the Paterson men that McQueen was a dangerous crimi-

nal, and that we might be in better business than in trying to secure his release from the penitentiary. Mr. Fels sent my brief on the case to innumerable people, and wrote very many letters which tended to interest influential men in the case. Little by little friends sprang up on many sides. After two years of such battling we succeeded in convincing the Board of Pardons that McQueen should be released."

Another incident may be mentioned, as showing how passionately Joseph desired to see justice done to all men, regardless of their status or condition. He came in contact with a man of gipsy blood, a prisoner who had spent many years of his life in jail. Kindly treatment soon won his confidence, and little by little he told him his story. Joseph persuaded him to write it down. From the torn little bits of dirty paper, from an ill-written, ill-spelt and utterly disconnected narrative there was ultimately pieced together a condemnation of the conditions in a certain State penitentiary such as no words can describe. Horrified at the disclosures, Joseph had a fair copy of the man's narrative made and sent it to the Governor of the State concerned. He received no reply. He wrote and urged that such a revelation suggested at least the need for an inquiry. To this response was made that the Governor could take no steps in the matter. Joseph was furious at this rebuff. It was, as he said, at least worth while to have the indictment investigated;

it might happen to be true, and the Governor would have the satisfaction of knowing that he had remedied an injustice. To this request, also, he received a curt refusal. He could stand it no longer. He wrote to the Governor, demanding an immediate inquiry, at which a representative, nominated by himself, should be present; otherwise he threatened to publish the statement and the correspondence in every journal in the United States. Within a month the inquiry had been held to his satisfaction.

The Single Tax was, after all, the main object he had in view, and to that he endeavoured to subordinate everything else. He watched with the deepest concern the progress of the Fels Commission which was established in America in 1909. Once it was clear that the method was successful, he began to make similar plans for most of the countries in which he interested himself. To Canada he gave a dollar for every dollar raised by the Single Taxers in that country; to Norway, Sweden and Denmark, a krone for every krone raised by the Scandinavians. Similarly with Australia, New Zealand and Germany. Where the movement, as in France, Spain, China, seemed not sufficiently advanced to make this method advisable, he gave a direct subvention to the local or national groups concerned. In England, for the most part, his contributions were made directly through the United Committee. He realised that the hereditary political

associations of the great landowners had made the English struggle unique and that the movement would probably be successful only by the steady permeation of the Liberal and Labour members of Parliament. Toward the close of his life, he began to be convinced of the need for the erection of some central body to unite in a single organisation the varied activities in Europe. Had he lived, it is probable that he would have created a European Commission of this kind; this idea was carried into effect. The Joseph Fels Commission (which found it necessary to dissolve in its old form and reorganise) became an International body, with a central office in New York; but it was a small group of individuals rather than an organisation.

It must not be imagined that Joseph regarded his function in the movement as solely that of a creator of its endowments. He was, on the contrary, very active in the repression of any such view. The number of requests for his support must have been relatively enormous, but he constantly refused his assistance until he was given evidence of local activity. It seemed to him that his duty was rather to stimulate the Single Taxers themselves to action than to allow them to consider that any funds they deemed necessary would be at once forthcoming. If he had made any general criticism of the movement, he would have urged that many of its adherents had not shown themselves suf-

ficiently capable of disinterested self-sacrifice. A movement, he said again and again, never advances very far until it can point to its martyrs. It was for that reason that he limited his subscriptions to the same amount that any country, State, or district would itself raise. He was a stimulus to local exertion, a kind of gadfly who stung others into activity. The friend who said that his "speeches made you feel how little you had done" exactly expressed what those speeches set out to achieve.

That the Joseph Fels Commission was able to overcome the apathy it found in the Single Tax movement, there can be no doubt. Both he and his coadjutors continually made it evident that they had no sort of sympathy for passive expressions of adherence. "The greatest thing," he once said, "is to give yourself; next, to give your money." He himself fulfilled both these behests in spirit as well as in letter.

He was cosmopolitan in his spirit and all his doings. His sympathy was so big he took the world in his arms.

He visited France and Germany, and established definite working connections in both countries. It is of some special interest that in Germany he should have won the aid and friendship of William Schraeier, who as governor of Kiau-Chau had been successful in raising the entire revenue of that colony by means of the Single Tax. In England Joseph was,

at this period, mainly concerned in fighting the Insurance Act, to which he was very bitterly opposed. It seemed to him that the Act marked the initiation of a dangerously paternalistic spirit in legislation. It penalised the trade unions, by putting the benefits they could offer against those to be offered by the great insurance companies.

From every part of the world came invitation after invitation to take over the propaganda of the movement. In the summer of 1912, he paid a long visit to Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and in the winter to Canada. Everywhere he was speaking once, twice, sometimes three times daily, in theatres, churches, synagogues, clubs. He was drafting briefs of evidence for the Single Tax to lay before municipal commissions on Taxation.

About this time he was greatly cheered to learn that the Single Tax movement was making good progress in Spain, and when further invitations reached him to visit that country in order to encourage and help those of our friends who were at work there, he at once decided, in spite of the heavy strain which his tour of the United States had put upon his strength, to return to Europe.

On his arrival in England arrangements were made to attend a Spanish Land Values Conference in April, 1913, and early in that month we sailed from Southampton to Gibraltar, accompanied by Dr. Felix

Vitale of Montevideo, Mr. and Mrs. Metcalfe of the Irish Land Values League, and other friends.

A vigorous campaign in the Spanish press paved the way for a successful conference. The Ministry of Public Instruction was asked to contribute to the cause of the Ronda International Conference "for its proper splendour and efficiency", and the principal theatre "Espinel" was generously loaned for the whole term of the Conference, enabling musical and other attractions to be arranged for during the period.

An incident on our journey from Gibraltar to Ronda is worth recording. On the arrival of the train at Arriate, the centre of a somewhat scattered farming area, we found an influential group of the residents awaiting us. They had for two days received every up train in order that they might demonstrate their appreciation of the visit and show their sympathy and trust in the teaching of Henry George, and accord a welcome to those who came to forward the truth he had proclaimed. After some touching speeches of personal regard we left amid cheers and cries of "Viva Fels, Viva el Impuesto Unico!"

At Ronda a perfectly arranged reception awaited our party. A crowd of fully one thousand persons were present at the station, including representatives of the local trade unions with their handsome trade banners, and the town band of some thirty-six performers. When our train came to a halt, we were



speculating as to what public event was being celebrated; but all doubt was cleared away when the band blazoned forth the Land Song. Then we knew that the demonstration had been arranged for our benefit. We were received by the Alcande, or mayor of the city, Señor Ramón del Prado y Camara, who bade us welcome, and escorted by the procession with the band and banners, we proceeded to the Rena Victoria Hotel, which was our home during our stay.

The next day we gathered in the Teatro de Espinel under the presidency of Dr. Vitale, and for the three days of the Conference this fine building was fairly well occupied with an enthusiastic audience. The platform was filled with foreign and visiting Spanish delegates. The subjects of discussion were: (1) Means to unite the efforts of the Single Tax movement throughout the world; and (2) Means to unite the Spanish movement with the Single Tax movement in South America.

It is hardly possible to record the delegates who attended. Madrid papers gave them as from Geogist Societies in 26 Spanish provinces, or more than half. Three municipal delegates from Santander, on the Biscay coast, must be mentioned; also the President of the Regional Council of Malaga, Mr. F. Marin; several leading lawyers, notably Mr. Blas Infante, of Seville, one of the selected orators. Among the educationists perhaps the most interesting figure was

Mr. Ildefonso Yanez, of Ceuta, Spanish Morocco, who has written brilliantly on the Single Tax, and even dedicated to the Conference his latest drama "Villaurora."

Mr. Fels on rising to make his speech of greeting was received with a prolonged storm of cheers as "Petriarca venerado del Georgismo mundial."

After three delightful days of conference and friendly intercourse and pleasure, which was intensified by the cordiality with which we were received, we returned to England, feeling much encouraged with the prospects of the movement as regards its international aspect. As an evidence that the seed sown in 1913 has borne good fruit, I need only say that, by a Royal decree published in March of 1919 the Municipalities of Spain were authorised to tax the increase of value of the land under their jurisdiction. The tax ranges from 5 to 25 per cent. according to the value of the property and is levied upon the amount by which the sale price of the land exceeds the cost price.

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A letter characteristic of Joseph deserves to be quoted in full. The then Governor of Alabama had written for his views on taxation, and had expressed his own opinion in these terms: "Under the laws as they now exist in Alabama, nearly all personal prop-

erty escapes taxation. I am inclined to believe that the remedy is an income tax." To Joseph, of course, this was the rankest heresy, and he replied as follows:

"It was good to get your cordial and kindly letter of the 24th inst., and I am glad to hear directly from you of your familiarity with the economic philosophy of Henry George. I am glad to note it is your intention to appoint a voluntary commission for the purpose of revising your revenue system, it being your intention to consider carefully the question of personal property taxation.

"You tell me that under your present laws nearly all personal property escapes taxation. Why tax any personal property?"

"Now, my dear Governor, those things we want to get rid of, we tax. If the City Council of Montgomery should want to get rid of dogs, they would put a tax on dogs so heavy that the dogs would disappear without much ceremony. In building houses, we should get rid of windows if a tax were laid on windows, as is now the case in Belgium, I believe, and was, until sixty years ago, in England. There are still to be seen in England hundreds of cottages with but one window—a relic of that foolish taxation.

"So I am rather grieved that you should incline towards an income tax as any help whatever. If we should tax personal property of any kind, we make it

more difficult for people to accumulate personal property, and the bigger the tax we put on a house, whether a dwelling, a factory, or a bank building, the fewer of them will be put up, and the less money will be invested in them, simply because of this taxation.

“On the other hand, if we should untax industry and business, by placing no tax at all on produce of labour, including buildings, we shall give the greatest impetus to industry. A question then arises, of course, as to where we shall get an income for state, county, and city purposes. My answer to this is that we should find out the site-value of every piece of land in Alabama, based upon the market or fair price as between a willing buyer and a willing seller, and then place a tax upon this assessed land value. Of course, the thing might not be done all at once, but it could be done with the greatest benefit to all those who are willing to work. It would ultimately destroy the speculator in land values, who is simply a parasite upon society.”

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The early winter of 1913 Joseph spent in England. We left England on December 3rd, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Lansbury and by Alma Gluck. Little was done in America until midway in January, when the fourth Conference of the Fels Commission was held in Washington. Real advances had been made in

Texas and Colorado, and—even more significant—in Pennsylvania and New York.

The Conference had much business to transact, but Joseph took very little part in its discussions. So quiet and subdued was he that some delegates were actually unaware of his presence, until he was pointed out to them. His attitude was remarkably composed. There was about him a sense of repose, very rare in him, and this seemed dimly to be reflected over the Conference. When he did speak, it was of his eagerness to live to carry on his work; yet he urged that his hopes were now secure, and that he was certain of the confirmation of his efforts. He told his friends that the great thing was an insistence on the spirit of society. "You are to look on its institutions as an expression of its soul," he asserted, "you are to make that soul manifest in all you think, and feel, and do." Once there came a flash of the old fighting spirit when Samuel Gompers, the president of the American Federation of Labour, spoke of the strength of the protected interests in America. "At this juncture," says the official report, "Mr. Fels presented Mr. Gompers with a leather-bound copy of *Progress and Poverty*, the book costing 48 cents in England and 70 cents in the United States, an object lesson in Free Trade." But, for the rest, his friends noticed and wondered at that strange calm.

He returned to Philadelphia at the close of the

Conference. He was very occupied with business affairs, and grew more and more tired and depressed. But there seemed no premonition of serious illness.

By the tenth of February, 1914, when the business affairs that had caused him anxiety were finally completed, he was evidently far from well. He suffered much from fever, and it was very difficult, as always, to persuade him to keep his mind from business matters. By the nineteenth, it was obvious that he was in serious danger from pneumonia. He fought splendidly against the enervation caused by the fever and talked much of his plans and hopes. On the twenty-first he seemed much better. But as the night progressed it was obvious that his strength was nearly exhausted. As I look back at the parting it is impressed upon me that, eager as he was to press forward the work, he had come to feel that maybe his going might prove more helpful to the cause he had so deeply at heart; that perhaps his death would be a gift of life to the movement. Then he could face it fearlessly and gladly. Just as the first gleam of the sun heralded the day, he passed. It seemed right and splendid that he should go thus, fronting the dawn, as he had seen spiritual dawn in that for which he was struggling. It was well that he went when he did, for less than six months after came the great darkening, the World War. His passing could still be heralded the world over, renewing consciousness of the ardent

desire with which he had served his fellowmen. There was still place for the expression of their appreciation of how he gave all in this service. And he was spared the agony of seeing his fellowmen at each other's throats, killing each other for what, in God's Providence, they had no need. The wanton greed that had brought about this terrible outburst would have broken his heart. It was just what he had tried so hard to abate, to do away with altogether: to redeem them from perverse cravings and restore them to a life governed by simple, natural needs; to restore them, through contact with the soil, by opening up Mother Earth to all God's children; to provide that the land could no longer be cornered by the selfish few and withheld, with all its riches and its power for good, from the many; to insure freedom for all mankind and the opening up of opportunity for self-development, in place of the slavery and arrest of growth to which both those who have and those who have not are subject under existing conditions, with sordid privation on the one hand and sordid excess on the other. Joseph felt keen realisation of the fact that both were in sore need of that restoration which can come only through right relation to nature, and its way to the Creator, to God, the One, Father of all.