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Israel Zangwill and Zionism

The Jewish Territorial Organization owed its existence to a split in the Zionist movement that developed over the East African or Uganda project. In 1903, at the Sixth Zionist Congress, Dr. Theodor Herzl, the Viennese journalist who founded the World Zionist Organization and convened its first congress in 1897, had thrown the delegates into violent confusion by informing them of the British government's offer for a Jewish homeland on the Uasin Gishu plateau in what is today Kenya. The plateau was an area of some 6,000 square miles, virtually unpopulated, and reputedly of healthy climate. Herzl's willingness to accept Britain's proposal was denounced as a betrayal of the Zionist movement, and he was barely able to command support for an expedition to East Africa to explore the area's possibilities. Then, less than a year later, Herzl fell ill and died.

At the Seventh Zionist Congress in 1905, the East African project was rejected on the grounds that the area proposed was unsuitable. With this, the Jewish Territorial Organization (ITO) emerged at once out

of a rump minority of the delegates. ITO's objective was that of "saving the East African plateau for the Jewish people or else of obtaining other territories in response to the urgent need of Jewish emigration, which pouring from Russia alone at the rate of 100,000 a year could find no welcome anywhere." Israel Zangwill was chosen ITO's president.¹

Zangwill was famous by this time as a storyteller and novelist, although his reputation, as a persistent if undistinguished dramatist, endures today for such works as *The Melting Pot*, *The War God*, and *The Next Religion*. He had already published *The Children of the Ghetto*, *The King of Schnorrers*, *Dreamers of the Ghetto*, *Ghetto Tragedies*, and other books. It was *The Children of the Ghetto*, an epic of Jewish immigrant life in London, as dramatized and performed in English and Yiddish, that first brought him to Herzl's attention. Zangwill was himself a restless and ungainly product of that same East End ghetto, and his encounter with Herzl directed him to Zionism.²

In 1906 Joseph Fels called on Zangwill, leaving this initial impression: "I had never heard of Joseph Fels," Zangwill wrote, "until a shining-eyed little man walked into my office unannounced and unheralded, and offered me a hundred thousand dollars." Fels' offer sounded too good to be true—as Zangwill quickly discovered:

Unfortunately it is not only the propositions of Satan that have strings to them. Even angels, whose visits are so few and far between, hedge their gifts with conditions, and what Mr. Fels wanted was that the state to be brought into being should be established on a single-tax basis.

Zangwill was "sympathetically disposed" toward

Georgist principles, and even more so of course toward munificent gifts for his beloved ITO, but he could not permit Fels to put the single-tax cart before the Zionists' horse. As he wrote:

I was unable to pledge the organization to the Henry Georgeian principle, because it was impossible to foresee the circumstances and conditions under which the desired tract of territory would become attainable—if, indeed, it would become attainable at all in a world ruled by unreason and the sword.³

But Fels persisted. "It also occurs to me to suggest," he wrote to Zangwill in May 1906,

that if the *Ito* would consider the advisability of forming a community within the borders of another country—say the United States, a considerable tract of land may be found for such an experimental or starting colony, and purchased. The land I have in mind, but which I have not examined, is within comparatively easy distance from New York and Philadelphia.

Fels asked Zangwill to send him the names of his "*Ito* friends" in the United States, in order to put such a proposal to them, and on July 15 in Philadelphia (a few days after his initial visit to the Reverend Wishart in nearby Trenton on behalf of the prisoner William MacQueen), Fels had a long talk with Judge Mayer Sulzberger, the guiding spirit of the Jewish Publication Society, and with Dr. Solomon Solis-Cohen.

On Fels' return to England in early September, Zangwill warned him not to do anything for the present in the way of purchasing land for Jewish settlements in the United States, since the Galveston immigration project was just then getting under way in cooperation

with American Zionists. Headed by American Jewish philanthropy's leading statesman, Jacob H. Schiff of the banking house of Kuhn, Loeb & Company, the Galveston Committee was working with Zangwill's Jewish Territorial Organization to divert Russian Jewish immigrants west of the Mississippi River into the American hinterland. Schiff's program was not a territorial scheme like ITO's but it promised a measure of relief for Europe's wandering Jews. They were to enter the United States by Galveston, a port utterly unknown in the Pale, thereby avoiding the slums and ghettos of New York and other cities of the Atlantic seaboard. (The first contingent of Jews would, in fact, reach Galveston in mid-summer 1907.) But as Fels told Zangwill:

I had no intention whatever in that direction other than to find out where available tracts are situated in the United States. I am frank to say that I will have nothing to do with any land settlement operation or enterprise unless it includes the application of the principle of the ownership of the land by the public or an association, together with all special privileges inherent therein and belonging thereto.

It had been this dedication to the land as the means to eradicate poverty under suitable conditions of tenure and tillage, rather than his being Jewish himself, that had impelled Fels to Zangwill's side and begun his involvement with the Jewish Territorial Organization.⁴

The initial objective—land—which had brought Fels and Zangwill together in the first instance, however, was too profound to be discarded lightly, even if their ultimate objectives seemed disparate. Zangwill, the son of a Jewish refugee from Czarist tyranny, intended

only to provide a refuge where Jews oppressed in Russia and other lands might settle, a self-governing homeland somewhere with living room in abundance and natural resources sufficient for a civilization to flourish. As for Fels, his deepest sense of himself was, however submerged, inextricably intertwined with his heritage. "My interest in this matter is very great of course," he once wrote to a British friend of his Zionist activities, "and grows as I see the constant cruelties which are heaped upon my people, they being defenceless under the Russian government." Nevertheless, Fels wanted above all else to abolish poverty, and he felt that even a brave, new Zion to shelter the world's Jews could be wrongfully designed. "Of course I have in mind the right kind of landlords," he explained, "and my interest is not unmixed with my obsession in the direction of the single tax."

Zangwill, for his part, wanted ITO's Zion located wherever it could be founded (his was not exclusively a Palestinian movement), and he wanted to construct its body politic upon enduring principles of social harmony. This inevitably would require fair taxation and equitable sharing of natural resources. "Our first business was to obtain a territory," Zangwill wrote. "For Fels the first business was to single-tax it. One could not know him for a single day without discovering that to him Henry George was Moses, and 'single tax' all the law and the prophets."⁵

Inevitably, as he did with any project that enlisted his sympathies, Fels began to underwrite ITO's objectives—in order to demonstrate his premise of land reform as essential for social justice. And he proposed particular projects on his own initiative. A letter to Mr. Clement Salaman, written October 28, 1906, wove together those threads central to his frame of mind:

Since you saw me Friday afternoon, I've been thinking. What do you say as to the practical value of finding a few Jewish families used to agriculture to take up a few small holdings being developed by me at Mayland, near Althorne, Essex. It would give us the benefit of a bit of experience, and out of this perhaps would evolve a larger farm garden village of Jews mostly right here in England. . . . If the experiment with a *few* families turns out fairly successful then the larger thing could be taken up. . . .

Kindly hand this note on to Mr. Zangwill. Will you also ask him to give me as cordial a letter of introduction to Hon. Oscar S. Straus [lawyer, envoy, cabinet officer, Zionist, whose public career began when he was appointed Minister to Turkey by President Cleveland] of New York as he pleases. I must get my prisoner MacQueen pardoned.⁶

South America's possibilities also began to enlist Fels' imagination. "The more I learn about Paraguay, the more favourably that land appeals to me for your purposes," he wrote to Zangwill in the last month of 1906. But he was still "earnestly concerned," he repeated, to reap the harvests from a successful colony in England, and he let no opportunity slip by to urge this prospect on Zangwill: "Such an experiment would show right here at home that the Jew *will* take to agriculture under fair conditions."

He inquired about Paraguay's possibilities while in the United States again early in 1907. Overtures by President Rodriguez of the Railway Company of Paraguay had reached him through their mutual connection, Victor W. Branford, and he informed Zangwill that he was preparing to send Branford to Paraguay as his agent. His inquiries led him to Mr. D. R. Stevenson of a settlement of Britishers in Paraguay designated

"Colonia Cosmé," where sugar cane, maize, mandioca, yams, fruit trees, and garden crops were cultivated cooperatively. "You say that you are interested in the land question," Stevenson replied. "I presume you mean from a reform point of view? This colony has been anything but a success as an experiment in that direction. We are down to a very few in numbers, and I think would sell out if we could get a reasonable price for the place." (Stevenson also advised Fels that soap was manufactured locally from one of Paraguay's nut-bearing palms, obviously in response to the latter's inquiry, and promised to send him a sample at once.)

When Paraguay's government failed to offer attractive inducements for displaced Jews on any substantial scale, Fels had Branford cable Rodriguez in Paraguay: "Urge the government cable per consul best offer Jews expropriate land and assisted emigration to secure settlement. Paraguay must offer attractive conditions. Jews have rival offer elsewhere." Nothing consequential ensued, however, although Fels pursued his distant objective long enough to acquire extensive tracts of land there for himself. He hoped to produce vegetable, peanut, and palm oils for his soap enterprise, and he proposed to employ Jewish pioneers in the development. As Zangwill observed: "It was a scheme that would have made both of his ends meet."⁷

Zangwill was chary of Fels' enthusiasms—too much was at stake to blunder along at tangential pursuits—and his cautious interest in Paraguay illuminates his note to Fels written April 19, 1907:

But a new factor has entered into my plans—Mr. [Jacob H.] Schiff! He has just appraised me of his arrival in London & of his desire to see me. I regard his arrival at this juncture as providential & I dare not lose any

chance of winning him over to our plans. The partial breakdown of his rival scheme of Galveston may have brought him into a more amenable mood.

A disturbing suspicion had arisen among immigration authorities in the United States that some of the immigrants being directed to Galveston were going to receive part or the whole of their costs of transportation from either the Galveston Committee or the Jewish Territorial Organization, which, if true, would have prejudiced their admissibility into the country.

Zangwill was fearful of stirring up hornets' nests of nationalistic opposition, and of frittering away the energies of the Jewish people on projects insignificant for his larger purposes. He was patently skeptical of Cyprus because of the "pro-Hellenic ardor of the natives," as he said, and of Mexico, where the cry "Mexico for the Mexicans!" was already echoing. "You know my own opinion," he wrote Fels, "that a real Jewish territory can only be acquired in a land like North Africa or Mesopotamia, where there is no dominant race with patriotic or chauvinistic ideas." He was contemptuous of the projects undertaken by the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA), which administered the enormous fund set up by German-born Baron Maurice de Hirsch, industrialist and railroad builder, to settle Jews on farms in North and South America. The Jewish Colonization Association, though professing the same goals as his own ITO, Zangwill judged, "does not do its work, because it has many colonies scattered over the world instead of . . . one great territory." The significant distinction between ITO and ICA, Zangwill went on, is "one of size and concentration versus pettiness and dispersion." One had only to inspect ICA's colonies in the Argentine for proof. "But these exercise

no magnetism," Zangwill pronounced. "The bulk of the Jews go to Buenos Aires, where a number of them have opened immoral houses. The race is degenerating. It needs a centralized re-inspiration."⁸

Zangwill's preference for North Africa led Fels to an interview with "the uncrowned king of Jewry," as the playwright dubbed him, the mighty Lord Rothschild (Nathan Mayer Rothschild, 2nd bart. and 1st Lord Rothschild). Fels introduced himself in a letter to the financier as "an American Jew interested in colonization schemes," upon which, Fels informed Rothschild, as though establishing his credit, he had already spent three or four hundred thousand dollars.

Of late I have become very greatly interested in the work of the I.T.O., am anxious to help it to the best of my means, and, as a member of the Council, I signed the report recommending that Cyrenaica should be immediately investigated. I have been waiting for some time to become aware of your lordship's views of this project, as it is my desire to go over the country myself if necessary.

Rothschild agreed to see Fels on October 31, 1907. He kept Fels waiting for nearly three hours and then, upon seeing him at last, the rather toothless and deaf old man motioned Fels to a chair next to his desk. "I at once asked him whether he had considered the northern part of Africa and especially the district you favour," Fels reported to Zangwill later that same day. Rothschild's reaction infuriated Fels.

He replied that he would not listen to such a thing at all, as the Mahommedans [*sic*] were just as bitterly opposed to the Jews as the Christians, and that he had previously intimated his opinion on this subject, and that

it must have reached you. I then asked him what his own ideas on the subject were, to which he clearly replied in as impatient a tone as he knew how, that there was no hope of the Jews forming a nation, as they had none of the elements in themselves to make a success of a separate country of their own! that those Jews from Russia who had emigrated to other countries wanted to go back, or, at any rate, the great majority did; and [he] further asserted that the only hope for the Jews was to emigrate to those civilized countries where they will be least objected to and become absorbed into such countries as parts and parcels thereof, like other emigrants. I then asked his opinion of Mexico, whereupon he volunteered, "If it is a civilized country, it is as good as any other."

Exactly eight minutes after the interview commenced, Rothschild departed with the preemptory farewell, "That is all, Mr. Fels."

Concluded the soap magnate bitterly: "If it were possible for any set of Jews to be of the same stripe as his lordship, then I would not wonder at the anti-Semitic feeling of the people around them."

"You will now understand what a task I have had to gain him over from active opposition," Zangwill replied to Fels consolingly. "I am very sorry that he has behaved rudely, but that is his characteristic." Indeed, Zangwill added, Rothschild's

"It is not!" is only equivalent to another man's "Is it?" It is very strange that he should be reiterating the same old arguments against the I.T.O. after accepting the task of deciding what territory the I.T.O. should select. I scarcely know what to say as to how you should write to him, if there is any need to write at all. One does not want to turn him into an enemy again.⁹

Rothschild notwithstanding, Cyrenaica commanded Zangwill's attention because of its strategic situation on the Mediterranean coast of North Africa within a short sail of Palestine, the prospect that its ancient fertility might be restored, and certain favorable political intimations. (Cyrenaica was part of the Ottoman empire until Italy's seizure of it in the war of 1911-12. Today it is the easternmost province of the federal republic of Libya.) The Jewish Territorial Organization was preparing an on-the-spot investigation late in 1907 when Zangwill wrote Fels, who was preparing to leave for Philadelphia again:

I can throw no light upon the question of your going to America, and if you decide to go on account of your business affairs we could have a good talk beforehand so that I might know beforehand what attitude you would take towards any contingency that might arise in your absence, and how far you would be willing to help.

Fels was distracted because Mollie had taken to her bed with recurrent bouts of sickness. He delayed replying to Zangwill, though he did manage to find time to dash off a few lines to Earl Barnes in the United States reporting Whitehall's acceptance of Miss McMillan's proposals for improving physical education:

Margaret McMillan is as pleased over it as a young woman with a new baby, and Sir Robt. Monant [Permanent Secretary of the Board of Education] has honored me with an invite to come and talk to him about the scheme. I'll go, but no £5000 to inaugurate it, as Margaret seems to suspicion he may hint for. My threat of giving 'em money for the purpose while you were over

here seems to have done the trick, or helped to, and this trick wasn't as costly as it might have been.

He added a rare note about his affairs: "Business d - - d the past week, even tho' Fels-Naptha still does wash clothes."

Days later, with his wife still ill, Fels finally wrote to Zangwill from Elmwood about ITO's focus on North Africa:

I really cannot see my way to say what I would do towards making "a good contribution to the expenses of an expedition," as you suggest. You will recall the talks we have had together on the subject, and *especially my views as to the ownership of the land values by the community, settlement, or state*. My ideas are in no way changed. I may be counted on to join such an expedition if it does not *too seriously* interfere with my American obligations, and I may be counted on for my fair share of the expenses of such a venture to look over the field. When I reach Philadelphia [his December 14th sailing was drawing near], the financial situation will be carefully gone over, though, as you are doubtless aware, money matters in the U.S. are at this time most tense. Until then my hands are more or less tied.

Nevertheless Fels enclosed a contribution. Replying at once, Zangwill wrote:

Thank you very much for your cheque. . . . If the other members of the Council would do as much, we could manage for 1908. . . . Please do not fail to see Dan Guggenheim in New York . . . especially if you intend to go to Mexico, for, by his great influence in that country, he can much facilitate your voyage. You have only to tell him that you are [a] fellow-member of the [ITO] Council with him, and that your journey to Mexico

is made in the interests of the I.T.O. to ensure his sympathy. He is a very good fellow and our largest subscriber as yet. He paid the whole expenses, for example, of the investigation in Nevada.

Zangwill's postscript afforded still another glimpse of the wealthy Jews he was endeavoring to capture for ITO's schemes.

You need not have been so mad at Lord Rothschild's treatment of you. At Manchester Harry Behrens (whose brother married Lord Rothschild's daughter) told me that though he was staying in the house he could not get Rothschild to say a word about ITOism. "He never talks," he said wistfully.

Zangwill's other wealthy but untamed Zionists continued to explore separate paths, he informed Fels:

I regret to say that Guggenheim refuses to give me a donation as usual, so I hope your brother [Maurice or Sam?] or some of the other men you promised to talk to may be induced to give us a little for current expenses. I see that there is a Chicago scheme worked, I think, in connection with the Jewish Agricultural Aid Society [during the decade after 1900, the JCAS, working cooperatively with ICA, placed over three thousand Jewish families on farms in New England, New York, New Jersey, and states farther west] to make a Jewish colony in South [Baja] California, but it is on a small scale. As I do not believe that Mexico is possible politically, I am rather glad that you will spare yourself the trouble of going to Mexico. I believe rather in putting all our minds upon North Africa, and if Lord Rothschild shows no signs of seriousness then going ahead without him.

Zangwill added that Alexander Zeitlin, the young sculptor whom Mr. and Mrs. Fels were sponsoring, had stayed with him in his house for several days making "a capital head of me" as well as a sketch of Mrs. Zangwill. "I agree with you that he is very talented," Zangwill concluded, and added the hope that Fels would escape the liability suit pending against him. (This was either for deaths and damages arising out of an explosion of fumes from a cargo of Fels-Naptha Soap unloading from S. S. *Haverford* at Liverpool, or for the claims against Fels for the expenses of dry-docking S. S. *Fairhope* and repairs after she was engulfed by fire on Mobile Bay.)¹⁰

Early in 1908, combining stateside business with Zionist territorialism and his single-tax labors, Fels did go to Mexico to inspect it for himself. He embarked by train from Philadelphia to Mexico City by way of Fairhope Colony and New Orleans and San Antonio, while Mary remained behind in Philadelphia. To "Dear wife," he wrote, "Wish you could be with me in Mexico City, though you were quite right in not coming. The rides are long and the way dusty and not overly interesting so far." He requested concessions from Mexico's aging dictator, President Porfirio Diaz, but his journey proved futile. Diaz was willing enough to facilitate the immigration of Jewish industrial and commercial workers, but he opposed Fels' scheme for a special colony of agriculturists.

By early April the Fels were back in England, with ITO's forthcoming expedition to North Africa overshadowing all their other concerns—since the Jewish Territorial Organization lacked £2,000 for its great venture. "Dismiss part of the anxiety from your mind," Fels wrote to Zangwill. "I'll help you transfer it to the alleged minds of others. *Man, don't worry!*" Fels then

asked Zangwill to introduce him later that same week, on Good Friday to be exact, to a Mr. Edwards whom Fels had met recently, an Englishman, according to the soapmaker, who is "in many ways pretty close to influential people around the Sultan," and who, in his judgment, would be valuable in assisting any settlement of Jews within the Ottoman regions. Zangwill acquiesced promptly, but cautioned: "I fear you have forgotten that the train service is deranged on Friday, owing to your ancestors having crucified a radical. It will be practically like Sunday, though you would possibly succeed in arriving here, I don't think you could get home conveniently on the same day." Fels insisted: "I should see you very soon if the expedition is about sure for August and September, as, if I am to go then, I should go back to Philadelphia next month for a two weeks' stay." This projected trip would make his third voyage to America from England within six months!

ITO's directors had engaged Professor John Walter Gregory, a distinguished geologist and explorer, to survey Cyrenaica for them, and as Zangwill reported to Fels, Gregory was being

extremely nice about the expedition, willing to take only a nominal fee and to try to persuade his colleagues to do the same if we cannot collect sufficient money, and what is even nicer not kicking at the hypothetical position which makes it possible that the expedition may not go at all if the Sultan rejects the idea.

The Sultan's attitude was vital to the success of the entire scheme, if only because some leading contributors to ITO would be vexed, as Zangwill knew, if their money was expended for exploratory purposes and the Sultan chose to block any Jewish settlement.

"I saw [Jacob H.] Schiff briefly on Thursday, and Mrs. Zangwill and I are to dine with him on Sunday evening when he wants to have a long chat with me upon the Jewish problem," Zangwill wrote. "I see that he and Rothschild have just taken up eight million pounds worth of new stock for the Pennsylvanian [*sic*] Railway. If only they would take the Jewish problem as seriously as the railway we should soon get to business."¹¹

On July 5, 1908, the Jewish Territorial Organization's expedition to North Africa got underway. Hopes soared with the first reports from the explorers, despite their encounters with "troublesome" tribesmen, but then, on August 26, when Zangwill and Fels hurried to Folkestone to greet the expedition on its return to England, they learned from Professor Gregory that the vaunted land of their hopes was actually, in Zangwill's words, "a dangerous desert." Although there was abundant rainfall during the wet season, the soil of Cyrenaica was porous and incapable of retaining moisture adequate for agriculture. "I fear it would be practically impossible to rear a Jewish state in such a dry bottom," Zangwill reflected morosely to Fels the next day. "Not that there is not plenty of rain, only it cannot be stored against a bad year." Even irrigation would be unavailing because of the insatiable thirst of the soil. A "perpetual menace of drought" would hang over Zion's settlers and blight their fields.¹²

Fels and Zangwill continued their search for a haven for Israel's oppressed and uprooted. "By all means find out all you can about the Brazilian offer," Zangwill was writing to Fels the next month.

Brazil is always a standby, with its three million square miles & its fifteen million inhabitants. Of course the area in question must be tropical if it is suitable for

cotton. Still you had better find out its exact position, etc. & bring the information to the I.T.O. office on *Wednesday 9th inst. at 4:30*, when I have called an Executive Committee to consider all our problems before I sail [for the United States and a meeting of the Galveston Committee to be presided over by Jacob H. Schiff in the board rooms of Kuhn, Loeb & Co.].

The Brazil offer fell through and Mesopotamia next acquired priority for Zangwill and Fels. Neglected like Cyrenaica since ancient times, this antique land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates had been winning part of Zangwill's attention for many months, while Zionism's leaders the world over were repeatedly attracted by its possibilities for irrigation schemes and railway development. In February of 1909, Zangwill penned this advisory note to Fels:

Oscar Straus has been prodding [Jacob H.] Schiff in the matter of the Mesopotamian project, and I am having correspondence with the latter. . . . At the same time, the President of the I.C.A. (who holds the Hirsch millions) told me when I was in Paris that they too are looking for a tract there. Everything, you see, points to Mesopotamia, and I am in hopes of a combination of all forces upon a concentrated colonization.

Nothing developed favorably in Mesopotamia for the Zionists at that time either, however, nor in fact did their proposals seem likely to bear early fruit in that Mohammedan domain.¹³

Meanwhile Fels' youngest brother and his wife from Philadelphia, Sam and Jennie May, were again patching up a reconciliation with Joe and Mollie. The four of them were touring England's beautiful lake district together.

"I should very much like to see your brother and his

wife again before they sail for Philadelphia," Zangwill wrote Fels, "but whether I am able to do so or not depends entirely on whether the Censorship Committee on Plays will call me to town or not during next week." Zangwill was referring to the storm raging around his play, *The Melting Pot*. This play was commencing its performance in New York City at the new Comedy Theatre, he informed Fels, "so your brother will find it going if he breaks the journey at that town."

Three days later, in an extraordinary letter headed "Private & Confidential," Zangwill wrote to Fels:

I do not want your brother, however, to leave without having fulfilled my promise anent the jesting rhymes, so I amused myself by doing them last night. If you use them at the rate of one a week, they will last you till the end of the year, and people might look forward to each succeeding new one. You can of course please yourself as to the order. No doubt you will use the topical ones first. In the last you will find a pathetic suggestion of IToland and anti-Semitism. But remember please that this *jeu d'esprit* must remain absolutely confidential, and if you breathe a syllable to any soul outside ourselves, I shall never speak to you again.

Here are four of the 17 triplets Zangwill enclosed, including the last:

Who rubs the clothes to make them clean
 With groans and grumbles in between?
 The wretch who never yet has seen
 Fels-Naptha.

Macbeth's poor lady would not scrub,
 Nor Hamlet wail "Ay, there's the rub!"
 If there had been in Shakespeare's tub
 Fels-Naptha.

The Suffragettes who in their pride,
The pangs of hunger but deride,
Would pay the fine, if once denied
Fels-Naptha.

The fleas, from every dog cast out,
In search of homes must skip about,
Poor things! there is no spot without
Fels-Naptha.¹⁴

Fels was now prodding Zangwill to let him purchase vacant lands in Palestine for experimental colonization under ITO's auspices. In refusing Fels' request, Zangwill emphasized that "but for the present you understand that Jewish immigration into Palestine is forbidden, and . . . this restriction is likely to continue for some time." Again from Zangwill, in response to a virtually identical entreaty by Fels:

The Turks expressly refuse to sell tracts of land in Palestine to Jews. Otherwise the Zionists have lots of money to acquire a specimen tract, & I don't need yours. You could come in later, when they have shown the thing is humanly possible. As regards Mesopotamia, we are always working at that possibility.

Fels also suggested Colombia, Rhodesia, Argentina, and Nicaragua to ITO, while as late as 1912 he still showed interest in Mexico, which was deep in revolution by then. Fels also broached his idea for settling Jews adjacent to the Pilcomayo River, which formed the boundary between Argentina and the Chaco region of Bolivia and Paraguay. Zangwill viewed this prospect as impractical, although he was grateful for the suggestion. "The fact that it involves negotiations with *three* govts. is rather appalling to an elderly man," he replied. "While having land that belonged

to three govts, would complicate the political situation of *Itoland* unendurably, we should have our Jews citizens of 3 nations with their respective quarrels."

For Jews in general and Zangwill himself, their brightest accomplishment lay in the stream of refugees entering the United States as immigrants. The joint program of ITO's and the Jewish Immigrants Information Bureau, which Schiff's forces underwrote, provided immediate relief for those unfortunates whose plight was too urgent to await the formation of any Zionist state. On June 10, 1910, for example, Zangwill confided to Fels that, "The latest batch of Galveston immigrants is 237." Even so, U.S. immigration officers were asserting signs of that nativist intransigence which would eventually all but close the New World's "golden door" to the foreign-born. Only a few weeks after Zangwill's memorandum, enforcement of the financial means test at the ports of entry jeopardized the entire Galveston project. The ensuing uncertainty took time to pass before Zangwill could write to Fels reassuringly: "The Galveston crisis seems over. A carpenter with only one dollar has been admitted on appeal to Washington. So all that tragedy & trouble are retrospectively unjustified & unconstitutional." Zangwill glimpsed the inside story: "Of course Schiff has great power. His enemies cleverly attacked when he was in Alaska."

Authorities at Galveston, however, rejected an entire shipload of Jews later in the same year on charges of "poor physique." Infectious trachoma was widespread among them. On another occasion Fels and Zangwill hurried across the North Sea to Bremen to aid a batch of rejected wanderers from Russia's Pale thrust back upon Europe. Zangwill recalled that Fels

also hunted up a photographer to prove how many muscular giants the party contained, and as the emigra-

tion building—*Stadt Warsaw*—likewise contained other transmigrants, including half a hundred children, Fels had all the little ones photographed in a group—splendid population-stuff for the States they looked—and he bought up all the sweets in the establishment for them.

“But then children were always a weakness of his,” Zangwill remembered. “‘If I had a boy like yours,’ he said rebuking my parental stoicism, ‘I should want to have him by me all the time.’”¹⁵

Zangwill’s plays preoccupied him throughout 1911, particularly his troubles with the censors of *The War God*, while Fels was traveling and lecturing almost incessantly for the Georgist cause. Fels became ill for several days at one point, having extended himself beyond his endurance by overdoing “the work,” as Mollie fumed, upon returning from a conference of single-taxers in Germany. Joe wrote to reassure his wife from Far End, the Zangwills’ home just north of Brighton, where he had collapsed insisting that he could “think clearer than a week ago,” and was made to feel “much at home” by Edith and Israel Zangwill. Later that same year, in November, while Fels was in the United States, Zangwill begged him to intercede for his play there:

I would like you to go and see Oscar Straus, . . . and tell him about this play and the attacks upon it, no doubt inspired by the war-like sentiments of our press, and suggest to him that, in the event of the attack on the play succeeding, [Andrew] Carnegie ought to come in and subsidise it. . . . A curious thing is that it was he [Straus] who always insisted that I should write a peace play, and therefore it is now one of his duties as a Trustee of the Carnegie Fund to help it out in England if needs be, . . . and even if it is a success they ought

at once to arrange for its production in America under the best auspices.

Early in 1912, Zangwill's *The Next Religion* ran afoul of England's official moralists. "Possibly you have heard they won't let me play my new play at all," he advised Fels, "it so shocks the author of *Dear Old Charlie* [Charles H. E. Brockfield], who is our censor." To evade the censorship, Zangwill's supporters set up a private subscription society to present his play for members only April 18 and 19 at the Pavillion Theatre, Picadilly Circus, while appealing to public opinion. "We are getting around the laws," Zangwill gloated.

I am telling them to keep places open for you & Mrs. Fels, as there will probably be a rush at least for the first performance. I also told them the breach of the law would have your backing were you here.

Zangwill warned Fels against committing himself to a Yiddish theatre newly housed in London's East End, where Zangwill's play *The Melting Pot* had been unprofitably performed only recently:

Every effort was made for months . . . to interest the rich Jews, but it failed & must fail because their policy is to *discourage* not *encourage* Yiddish . . . & unless you are prepared to guarantee the performances too, I should not advise you to go into this matter. You will be only looking for trouble.

"Talking of getting ten Jews to give £1000 each," Zangwill continued, "we have hardly got any response to the I.T.O. appeal, a matter much more popular than Yiddish theatres. But Baron Edmond de Rothschild has gladdened me by sending me £100, though my

gratitude is more 'a lively sense of favours to come.'” The “Angola business,” which was the Jewish Territorial Organization’s latest scheme, was plaguing him fearfully, he confessed, but he remembered to thank Fels cordially for his latest contribution to ITO.¹⁶

This was the autumn of 1912, and by now Fels was drifting noticeably away from Israel Zangwill and Zionist territorialism. The Jewish Territorial Organization was never more than one of Fels’ “sideshows,” as Zangwill perceived, though it was important to him for a considerable time. But by 1912 Fels had discarded almost all else but his passion for Henry George’s single-tax panacea. “My dear monomaniac,” as H. G. Wells addressed him jocularly in 1912. “You haven’t the faintest prospect of converting R. D. Blumenfelt [editor, *London Daily Express*] to anything. He hasn’t that sort of mind. And you know I don’t think of life, in terms of Mono-tax. Such a lot of other interesting things.”

By 1912 Fels was almost constantly traveling—across the United States and Canada mainly—preaching and extravagantly spending to promote his belief that the hour had struck “to put over the single tax somewhere.” And as a result, he gave less time than before to the Jewish Territorial Organization. He also edged away from territorialism and toward Palestinian Zionism, perhaps because he was physically removed in the United States from Zangwill’s influence over him, perhaps as well because of his wife’s growing zeal for Palestine as *the* homeland for Jews.

Fels did provide about half the funds needed by Zangwill to dispatch the dependable Professor Gregory to investigate Angola on Africa’s southwestern coast when it seemed possible that Portugal’s fears of German imperialism might lead to a territorial concession

to the Jews, but even so, he was dubious, as Zangwill's regretful letter of November 15 indicated: "I am sorry you say 'No' to Angola. I do not think there is a better possibility on earth." Zangwill's next letter to Fels, ten days later, was even more illuminating:

Useless to send me newspaper articles about Palestine—I know more than all the newspaper fellows. There is in America an atmosphere of romantic lying about Palestine by Jews who won't go there, which I see you have not escaped. The coolness of your telling me that Jews won't go anywhere except to Palestine, when America has 2,000,000 and Palestine 100,000! The I.T.O., however, does not exclude Palestine from its purview, and would ask nothing better than to single-tax it! I have been agitating, too, for getting Jewish autonomy in Salonika.¹⁷

In December of 1912 Zangwill reacted sourly to a letter that Fels forwarded to him from Bolton Hall, New York City's leading single-taxer, who had written disquietingly to Fels about Zionist objectives. Heat-edly Zangwill replied: "After I have been looking seven years at an idea, a man comes and tells me another idea would be preferable. What do you expect me to say?"

Then, in April of the next year, in a letter taking Zangwill to task for advocating taxation based upon ability to pay, Fels opened a debate between himself and his friend that continued for months. "This is pure treason," Fels wrote, "if you agree (as you have said you do a number of times) with the untaxing of industry and things produced by labour, and placing taxation where it rightly belongs—upon land values and franchises and privileges arising from the control thereof."

Zangwill protested good-humoredly that his purpose

in a recent statement had been to emphasize the justice of women's suffrage. "If you think I should have preached Henry Georgism to prove that votes for women are necessary," he returned, "I should be glad to have the connection pointed out. I should also like to know whether Henry George is good for my gum boil. There is certainly an unearned increment in my cheek, but the community is welcome to it."

It became clear where Fels stood. "Is it not altogether possible that, if you secure Angola," he asked Zangwill in September 1913,

the race question may arise there just as at present in the southern part of the U.S., and would it not be running a risk of the Jews jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire? I would like to talk this over with you seriously. The suggestion really comes from Mrs. Fels, and she knows things.

Fels' stand on Angola exasperated Zangwill, who knew such arguments first-hand. Zangwill had already observed in print that Dr. Herzl's treatise favoring territorialism, *The Jewish State* (1896),

pointed out the grim law of all Jewish emigration that shirked colonization—that, following the line of least resistance, it flowed from lands of greater anti-Semitism to lands of lesser anti-Semitism, but that in so doing it soon brought up the level of anti-Semitism in the new land to the same level as in the lands left behind.

Zangwill finally took the bait Fels had been offering him. "I have read Henry George sufficiently to know that he was a man of genius with one big thought, which however he thought was bigger than it really was. Your cause suffers from the word 'land' in 'land

values' being properly supposed to mean soil only, instead of all the values created by the coming together of mankind on a soil," he lectured Fels. "Since according to the I.T.O. the main troubles of the Jews arise from having no soil on which to come together, I wonder you are not still more sympathetic to it than you have kindly shown yourself." Concluded Zangwill: "I am all for 'Equal Opportunity,' but I cannot see how the State's collating all the land values does more than relieve the poorer citizen of his taxes, which the capitalist might even utilize to drive down his wages."

Fels waded into their "scrap," as they both termed it, somewhat indignantly:

Since you criticise the quality of my interest in the I.T.O., and suggest that my sympathies are rather contracted, may I suggest that in this you are not fair to me. I must call to your mind the very first interview you and I had, in which I clearly pointed out that my interest in the I.T.O. land would be to see that the people of such a country had control of their land and the franchise value. You always treated what I said in this regard pretty lightly, and upon every occasion that opportunity offered flung your little jokes at me. Taking all in all, I think your criticism unjust, since what I have done for the I.T.O. so far was largely influenced, in the first place, by my admiration for you personally.

"I am not very much to blame if I believe in equal opportunity for all men, and not merely for the Jews!" Fels continued. The principle that no man has the right to monopolize the land was not a new principle, he declared.

It was not revealed by Henry George, the new Moses, as you call him, but was revealed by *Moses* Moses, the *old*

Moses, *your* Moses, *my* Moses, and the *Jews'* Moses. . . . You say you are for equal opportunity, but cannot see how the State, having all the land values, could do more than relieve the poorer citizens of their taxes, which the capitalist might even utilize to drive down their wages? Good Lord, how stupid Zangwill is! Don't I tell you that "land values" means the franchises of railways, tramway lines, water supply, gas and electric light, telephone, and every other public service, and that, if the powers that be took the value of these things in taxation, the power of your so-called capitalist would be shorn of its terrors, and he would be compelled to work as others work, making money by the sweat of his own brow, instead of (as now) by the sweat of other people's brows! Good Lord! Deliver us from some of our friends.

On October 30, 1913, Zangwill wrote tersely to his friend, upon whom he obviously still depended, about ITO's "momentous and strenuous" convention forthcoming. "I should like to know whether you will stand by your offer of twenty thousand pounds," he pressed Fels, "on condition the land of the colony is subject to single tax. . . . If you have any ideas on the agenda sent you, we shall of course be glad of a letter, but gladder of you," he ended plaintively.¹⁸

Joseph Fels was proud of being Jewish. "Oddly enough, in about every address I deliver," he once wrote Professor Deutsch of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College,

clear mention is made by me, with the greatest possible pride, that I am a Jew. I go out of my way to rub it in to every audience I get before, and I do this because I am proud of being a Jew, nor would I exchange that nationality for any other I know of, even though to escape the occasional side remarks of a fool, who may perhaps envy the actual status of the Jew!

Yet he held no illusions of ethnic superiority. "As the Scotchman would say, 'I hae me doots,'" he observed to Dr. Solis-Cohen of Philadelphia,

whether there is not as much prejudice among the Jews towards their own race and other races as there is on the part of other races towards the Jews. . . . My experience is that the Jews can cut each other's throats with as much beauty and despatch as Christians, Mohammedans, Chinese, or Americans!

He had little use for ministers or theologians, severely rebuking both the Jewish and the Christian ministries on one occasion or another. He once wrote to Professor Deutsch:

Thank you for your not being a minister. At the same time that makes little difference because a minister should be a teacher, and you tell me you are the latter. I find the majority of Jewish ministers and teachers extremely obtuse upon this question of equal opportunity for all men and special privilege for none. They seem to refuse to read the authority upon this question: the Bible itself.

He seized the opportunity afforded by an appeal for funds from the hapless Dean of a Christian theological school to issue a single-tax leaflet entitled "The Religion of Joseph Fels," and circulated it by the thousands. In publishing his reply to the Dean's request, Fels chose to explore "the relation between taxation and righteousness," while making unfavorable comparisons between Jesus' teaching on the one hand and Christian society on the other. The private expropriation of wealth's unearned increment represented not only original sin but the way of the Anti-Christ. His leaflet concluded:

I shall be glad to contribute to your theological school or to any other that gets down to the bedrock of that [Jesus Christ's] moral code, accepts it in its fullness, 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.

Joseph Fels was a religious Jew, nevertheless, though never a public worshipper in a ritualistic or orthodox sense. "I believe in the Fatherhood of God and therefore in the Brotherhood of Man," he wrote. "By 'Man' I mean all men," he explained. He also stated: "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." He was vainly proud of an unsolicited tribute from a Christian minister of Gloucester, Massachusetts who concluded by writing to his *Farm and Fireside* readers: "My ideal Christian is Joseph Fels, and possibly it is not an accident that, like the First Christian, he is a Jew." Lincoln Steffens agreed with him that the Jews were the Chosen People, and asked, "But what are they chosen for?" Fels responded with "The Jews?" gave a careless wave of his arm and answered, "The Jews were chosen to introduce Christianity."

Years later Mary Fels reflected grimly:

Were Zangwill a woman, there might trail through his consciousness the significance of Joe's interest in and kindness to him personally. Zangwill never even tried to understand the theory of the Single Tax, much less to help Joe's work in the least. Joe entered sympathetically into whatever interested Zangwill deeply and actively, and Joe gave help all along the line, and it never occurred to

Zangwill how many and how immeasurable were the deviations from the single-tax principle.

Moses, Christ, and Henry George propagated the gospel Joseph Fels was preaching. He ranked *Progress and Poverty* among the "Bibles of the world," and—as he *had* made clear to Zangwill on their first meeting—his interest in Zionism was primarily for the sake of the single tax, only after that for the sake of a Jewish homeland.¹⁹