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Still Agitating the Land Question

Early in 1909, Fels had promised the sum of \$25,000 a year for five years to bring the teachings of Henry George to fruition in North America. He stipulated his intention to "match every dollar" contributed by others to the maximum limit of his offer. Disheartened over Fairhope Colony, he felt that single-taxers in America, unlike Great Britain's proponents of land-values taxation, had lost much of their direction and vitality since the death of Henry George. Casting about for a way to halt this deterioration, he launched the Joseph Fels Fund and created a commission to administer it. The commission's chairman was Daniel Kiefer of Cincinnati, "the most efficient mendicant in the United States," in Fels' judgment. Cleveland's mayor Tom L. Johnson was the first treasurer. Other members were Jackson H. Ralston, a Maryland single-taxer; Lincoln Steffens, the muckraker; Frederic C. Howe, then a member of Mayor Johnson's famous Cabinet; and George A. Briggs of Elkhart, Indiana. Members of an advisory committee included George Foster Peabody, Louis F. Post, Bolton Hall, and Henry George, Jr.

The goal of Fels and his commissioners was "to put the single tax into effect somewhere in the United States within five years." As Fels wrote to Bolton Hall of New York City, he believed that "the time is ripe to spread information on land reform in general." A concentrated effort to gain prestige from substantial victories in the field would be preferable to the dissipation of the fund by broadcasting propaganda promiscuously in the usual fashion. "One demonstration will save a hundred arguments," Daniel Kiefer proclaimed in proposing to focus the Joseph Fels Fund's work on promising localities, particularly the states of Oregon, Missouri, and Rhode Island. Other plans included establishing a headquarters and press bureau, supporting the *Single Tax Review*, and arranging conventions of sympathizers to consolidate the movement. "In short, a chronicler wrote, "the commission offered itself as a central supervisory agency for the American single-tax movement."

The name of Joseph Fels was given to the organization by the commissioners, who decided that his prominence in the business world and reform circles would enhance their activities. Fels, who at first objected to the use of his name, was easily reconciled. He even in due course corrected Louis F. Post:

I'd rather the thing be called *Joseph* Fels, because there are other Fels, and my brother and business partner is not particularly sweet on my taking up the work. I would not for the world have anybody think he is saving his immortal soul by doing something *very* useful, and so we must not get those children mixed.

It was Fels' intent to leave the control and direction of the Fund to its commissioners. "He refused even to form part of the advisory committee," his wife remem-

bered. "He stood to the Fund in no relation other than that of an important contributor who sympathized with its objects, and always deeply admired the work it was able to achieve." He was of course consulted on the plans of the commission, though as often as not he would refuse to comment, so as not to fetter its members. "He simply stood to it from the outset in the relation of an interested spectator who cared profoundly for its success."

Some single-taxers criticized the policies of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission, or felt bypassed by its programs. Charges arose that it was a self-serving autocratic body which was superseding the work of the various local organizations instead of assisting them, and that Fels was trying to force his views upon U.S. single-taxers. The commissioners replied that their sole aim was to further the movement by helping to achieve the adoption of the single tax somewhere in the United States as quickly as possible.

An early criticism was that the commission had sidetracked itself from single-tax work by seeking to introduce the direct legislating machinery of the initiative and the referendum into state constitutions in order that the people might vote upon the question of taxation independently of their legislators, who were allegedly dominated by vested interests. Commission members replied that wherever there was a considerable sentiment favorable to the taxation of land values the furtherance of direct means for legislating would lead most quickly to the ends desired. They claimed that the initiative had brought about Oregon's adoption of county-option taxation in 1910, and that without it the submission of any kind of tax on land values in Oregon or Missouri in 1912 would be impossible.

During its existence, the commission underwrote

most of the expenses of campaigns in Oregon, Missouri, Rhode Island, Colorado, and California, contributed to single-tax work elsewhere, and worked for the initiative and referendum in New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado, Arkansas, Minnesota, and Ohio. It assumed responsibility for the large operating deficits of the *Single Tax Review* and *The Public*, created a press bureau called the American Economic League, which published a four-page *Joseph Fels Fund Bulletin* monthly, and it distributed impressive quantities of Georgist propaganda to newspapers and through numerous other channels. Organizers were sent out to proselytize in crucial districts. Speakers imbued with the teachings of Henry George were sent to all clubs and organizations willing to hear them. The commission published and distributed cheap editions and new translations of Henry George's works, and it sponsored several national conferences to bring single-taxers together from every part of North America for consultation and mutual encouragement. "When this Commission was organized in 1909, there was no general discussion of the single tax in the United States," a commendation began in 1912:

Apart from the sporadic work of a few public speakers and clubs, a limited distribution of literature, and occasional indirect and obscure efforts at securing favorable consideration from legislative bodies, the movement appeared to have but little life in this country. To those within it the future seemed dark; by those without, the subject was generally regarded as one of mere academic interest in so far as it was generally considered at all. This condition changed with the advent of the Commission.¹

Fels himself exhorted all who would listen to give to the fund that bore his name and to accept the prin-

ciples of Henry George. His correspondence swelled with advisories to Kiefer in Cincinnati, Post in Chicago, Johnson and Howe in Cleveland, Bolton Hall in New York City, and W. S. U'Ren, a shy Cornishman and the reform leader in Oregon. He deluged newspapers at home with letters and features as frequently and voluminously as he did journals and periodicals abroad. He was as blunt and dogmatic and salty on the platform as he could be with his pen. He once told a small audience in Philadelphia how to wipe out all the city's poverty:

If half a dozen men in this city would give fewer dinners at the Bellevue-Stratford and devote more of their time and money to trying to help people, why, there wouldn't be any poverty pretty soon. But it seems that the only way to get money from these people is to go at them with a club.

He began to reach out in all directions, permitting no one to escape whom he might convert or brow-beat to his viewpoint.

"The latter part of your letter would seem to indicate that you consider me unbiased, and yet your whole letter is taken up in an attempt to show that I know next to nothing! How can such an ignoramus as you describe be unbiased?" he demanded of breakfast foods tycoon C. W. Post following a futile effort to convert him. "What do you say to letting the papers in the United States have copies of our correspondence on the subject to date? I will cheerfully volunteer mine, and let the public decide who is right."

"I have been watching every number of *La Follette's Magazine* to find some evidence that you are a land value taxation man," he wrote to Senator La Follette, "but so far it has been hidden from me." He gave this



Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Fels, about 1910, on one of their visits to the United States

as his reason for refusing to advertise Fels-Naptha Soap in the pages of *La Follette's Magazine*. He advertised regularly in *The Public*, edited by single-taxer Louis F. Post, and *Land Values*, published by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values.

I go into all this explanation to have you understand what kind of chap I am. I am spending now in the neighborhood of a hundred thousand dollars a year towards educating all the civilized countries I know of in the economic philosophy of Henry George, and I am jealous of every penny I spend for anything else. . . . Are you not willing to read and understand Henry George?

For a Boston audience he extolled Lloyd George's 1909 budget and Great Britain's progress toward the taxation of land values, "a new beginning of life and living for the common people of England." He compared it to his own land.

But in this country the people are not merely taxed—they are skinned by that beautiful thing you call protection. I call it robbery. It is made beautifully idyllic by the stout gentleman in the White House [Taft]. It is made necessary by such poor men as Rockefeller and others equally as poor—in all but their profession of religion. We have one man here, Weyerhaeuser, who legally holds 50,000 square miles of forest land. You can do anything you want in this country by law.

In Chicago, in March 1910, to members of the City Club, he emphasized this point:

We cannot get rich under present conditions without robbing somebody. I have done it; you are doing it, and I am still doing it; but I propose to spend the damnable money to wipe out the system by which I made it. If any

of you have the courage to do the same thing, for God's sake let us cross hands.

He told the Chicagoans that the commissioners of the Joseph Fels Fund had accumulated only \$15,000 of the amount to be raised by them to match his own contribution. "So I came around last December and started to swing around the circle with them. We went to Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Detroit and Toronto. . . . Now we have come to Chicago, and really our tongues are away up in the roofs of our mouths while we are waiting for someone to put up that \$10,000 extra—and to do it quick, for I want to go home." He had been advised that there was a gentleman in Denmark, he said, who would donate the same amount if he would give them another \$15,000. "Do you think I will let that man get away from me because I don't know his name? I will simply go down to Sprague Warner's, the wholesale grocer here, and sell them an extra couple of thousand boxes of Fels-Naptha Soap and make up the amount."

In St. Louis for a speech the next night (from where he went to Columbia to address the students at Missouri State University), Fels was examined by a reporter. "Is it not a fact that the publication of your statements regarding these things brings to you an unearned increment in increased sales of your soap? What do you propose to do with this added wealth?"

"Do you mean to say you think I am telling you these things in order to sell my soap?" Fels snapped.

He was assured that this implication was not intended.

"Then I will have just that much more to help spread the single-tax reform gospel," Fels replied, and continued:

Why every man who becomes unduly rich does so at the expense of somebody else. No man has a right to special privileges which a land monopoly will bring him. Any man has a right to get rich, if he does so by his own labor, mental and physical, but only under equal opportunities to every other man.

He explained to the editor of the *St. Louis Mirror*, William Marion Reedy, how to demonstrate that the single tax would work out in actual practice. He would organize a corporation comprised of not less than 20 stockholders in 20 different cities, each to invest \$5,000 in cash. This would provide \$100,000 capital, which would be invested to speculate in vacant lands. Stockholders would receive 5 per cent cumulative dividends and no more. Any increase above this 5 per cent would be turned over to the Joseph Fels Fund to promote the single tax. Whenever the corporation bought a lot, a sign would proclaim the fact that this land was now owned by the "Land Value Speculation Company" for the purpose of milking the community of its earnings, together with such other educational propaganda as would enlighten the citizenry about the viciousness of speculation in land. Whenever a sale was made, announcements would advertise the profits as pocketed by the speculators, the unearned increments stolen from the honest businessmen and laborers of the community.

Editor Reedy was taken by the dynamic fervor of this "sawed-off Hebrew," as Fels was introducing himself to his audiences, even more than he was by the soapmaker's lavish distribution of his "saponaceous compound" profits. "All this he put out in short, sharp sentences. They crack like cartridges," Reedy wrote.

He can give any Yankee politician cards and spades and beat him blind. You should see and hear him leading in

the singing of "God Save [*sic*] the Land to the People," to the tune of "Marching Through Georgia." And when he was heckled by questioners, his wit and good humor sparkled abundantly.

In the midst of this tour, Mollie wrote to George Lansbury, "It is a happiness to be with the dear ones here, but after all our home is there. Joe is doing tremendous things here, but that is in passing, and our life and our work are there." She and her husband sailed from New York on March 23, 1910, with Tom L. Johnson accompanying them, anticipating the dinner to be presented them by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values. Johnson's defeat at the polls in Cleveland after three terms of office, together with severe daily pain from his already serious illness, Fairhope's troubles, and Joe's business problems were burdens for them all. Yet their crusade was gaining in Great Britain, as the anguish of Captain Pretyman and the Land Union and the House of Lords evidenced, and during the summer and early autumn of 1910 Fels enthusiastically carried his cause to Copenhagen, Antwerp, Bremen, Paris, and throughout the British Isles.²

Writing to his friend Earl Barnes in America, Fels elaborated his low regard for William Jennings Bryan:

He is hopeless for any radical reform worth mention, and this only because he doesn't do much thinking on his own a/c [account] and is minus the basic things. Of course folks do kick a man when he is down, and yet Bryan had many chances to make himself great even in the eyes of his enemies. [Bryan had lost three contests for the Presidency.] I can't bring myself to forgive him in his stupidity. I'm afraid he's taken his economic philosophy from subscription books, and has refused to see the light even when the flame has been stuck under his nose.

"But who is Bruce Barton?" he asked the editor of *Human Life*, whose September 12, 1910, issue carried Barton's article entitled "Joseph Fels, Robber?" "Perhaps you will give me the opportunity of knocking Bruce Barton in the eye with one or two additional arguments, which unaccountably he seems to have left out," Fels concluded, though he was not actually annoyed by Barton's article. (Barton subsequently wrote *The Man Nobody Knows*, which portrayed Jesus as a super salesman, and went on to become a Madison Avenue advertising executive.) To Dan Kiefer, chairman of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission, he wrote: "Don't use my picture on letterheads, &c. I've had quite enough of that kind of thing, and am sick of personal adulation."

Once Fels returned to the United States, he was off and running once more. "I hardly think you can imagine the progress that is being made in our direction on this side. . . ," he rhapsodized to Lansbury. "To me it is really astonishing. The late elections have gone our way in a great number of the states. I am filled with the inspiration of it all, and, of course, the grass won't grow under my feet." Three days later he wrote to Lansbury again after returning from Baltimore and Washington, "where I went to spout," as he referred to it. "I met some rather noted people at Washington, and the rich are even waking up to the importance of the land question."

In Washington he had to deny a report that he would attend the funeral of Mrs. Stella Dolores Cortez Downs in California, the former queen of the Spanish gypsies and purportedly the half-sister of "Gypsy Bill" Cortez. "I am no more going to California than I am to Jerusalem. There is nothing in that story. I don't know who started the story, nor why, nor where." Fels retorted.

I knew Dr. Thomas J. Downs, who was the husband of Mrs. Stella Cortez Downs, but my acquaintance with her was very slight. I never made any money out of advice that she or any other gypsy queen gave me. I don't mind telling you that it is not a good way to make money. It is picturesque, but not profitable.³

Fels did go westward however. His tour began on January 6, 1911, at Cleveland, where single-taxers staged a rally in the auditorium of the Chamber of Commerce. The occasion marked Tom L. Johnson's last participation in a public meeting. (He died in the spring.) The meeting was held in the very citadel of Johnson's longtime enemy, the vested interests that had fought him so bitterly over the issue of public ownership of the street railroads, in behalf of the cause dearest to his heart. Johnson's protégé, Newton D. Baker, the future mayor of the city and future Secretary of War, was among the speakers.

Enroute again with intermediate stops, Fels addressed audiences at Toledo, Detroit, Chicago, Champaign (at the University of Illinois), Milwaukee, Madison, Minneapolis, and St. Paul, often speaking to more than one gathering at each place. Crossing the border into Canada, he and Daniel Kiefer, who was accompanying him, went to Winnipeg and through to Victoria, British Columbia, with interruptions of the journey for speeches at Regina, Calgary, Edmonton (where he delighted a reporter by saying that corporation lawyers and backwoods politicians were the "only two things which won't wash"), and Vancouver.

At Vancouver Fels and Kiefer were joined by Dr. W. G. Eggleston, who was U'Ren's associate from Oregon, and entertained at a public luncheon by the mayor and some 200 sympathizers and believers in the single-tax principle. Vancouver had already done away with taxes

upon buildings and improvements, and Fels was delighted. Climbing onto a chair in order to be seen and heard more readily, he said:

I came to Vancouver as a Mohammedan would come to Mecca, or as one of my own people, a Jew, would come to the holy city. I came with this feeling, because here you have had the courage to put a measure of the economic philosophy of Henry George into practice. Your building construction for the last twelve months has amounted to \$13,000,000, and your buildings have been occupied as fast as completed. That is a record of material benefit. The record of moral benefit is even more astonishing. It means that a man who wants to work shall have that right. That alone is a privilege which you in your lusty youth cannot appreciate.

From British Columbia he went to Seattle, then on to Tacoma, Portland, San Francisco, Sacramento, southward to Pasadena, Los Angeles, and San Diego, and then eastward at last to Denver and Grand Junction, Kansas City, Chicago, and South Bend. At San Diego only a few days before an election he caused a sensation by turning the local fight over a municipal traction question into a controversy about single-tax principles. It was being urged on behalf of the traction company that a franchise must be obtained for 50 years in order to finance expansion. Fels dramatically offered to buy the company at its physical value on a franchise for 25 years, to pay the city 2 per cent of the gross receipts, and to agree that the city might at any time take over all the lines and property for municipal operation upon payment of the physical value of the property then in use. The opposition newspapers made much of his offer, coming as it did on the very eve of the election. However his own hopes pointed toward Oregon rather than

California. "At present Oregon is under a local-option taxation law, which is the nearest approach to the single tax," he told a reporter. "The state presents the opportunity most encouraging to us." Adding up his views, Fels affirmed: "I believe in free land, free trade, and free men."

"I reached home last evening after exactly eight weeks of the hardest trip I ever took," he wrote March 2 to his new acquaintance in Los Angeles, the municipal reformer Meyer Lissner, "both Daniel Kiefer and myself, and we are practically used up, and my voice is like that of a buzz-saw." But he glowed with success. "I have been a single-taxer for three years, and I would not swap these years for the past fifty-four," he told his audience in Detroit.

Three years ago everyone said: "Fels has a new fad, and he's going to run it into the ground." But to me the past three years seem in accomplishment to be thirty years. Gentlemen, the case is stronger than it ever was, and the land question in Great Britain is about to be solved. This will burst up the aristocratic basis of the old world, and as Great Britain fiddles the world dances. The influence of Great Britain is being felt in Canada, Germany, the United States, Norway, and Denmark.

The Fels returned to England April 10, 1911. They had been away for more than five months and Joseph Fels was pleased with his reception in the United States and Canada and hopeful of good results from his tour. Back in London he had, however, to cope with a belittling editorial that had appeared in the *New York Times* just before his departure from North America. Entitled "The Wicked Wealth of Mr. Fels," the editorial asserted that he was just another philanthropist, like

Andrew Carnegie at best, and ought not to carry on so strangely.

"I object to land being held out of use as it is under the laws of most countries," he replied.

This policy prevents men from helping themselves, and forces them into the miserable and humiliating position of accepting and soliciting charity. I object further to land being used by one man as a means of exacting from another part of his earnings. A tax on land values according to the principles of Henry George would bring idle land into use and enable the tax authorities to exempt buildings and improvements from the burdens that now fall on them. This system would abolish poverty by stopping that form of legal robbery for which the laws of the country are responsible. I am willing to spend money to introduce this system; I invite others to join me. It is a more reasonable task to do what one can to prevent the waste and ruin of human life and happiness than to stand by while men are broken, even if we stand with bandages and ointment to bind up their wounds.⁴

He had contributed almost £15,000 to the British United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values for the fight against the landed interests, and he was beginning to feel he was personally putting too much into it. For the first time with emphasis he broached a theme he was to reiterate as time went on and his own expenses for the cause mounted. He wanted greater assistance from other men. Failing this, as he put it breezily, he might redirect his efforts to

some place where the climate is warmer and the people less coldblooded. . . . I want to do what I can, but I want to be encouraged to do all I am willing to do. There are men with means outside the movement who believe in

it, and there are many others who should help. These must be got at.

“Do you think without our agitation we would have had the 1909 Budget?” John Paul of the Committee responded:

I don't think so, and in this I am in agreement with a great many fellows with “business” heads. I do not say that our agitation got the Budget, but I say it was one of the most powerful, if not *the* most powerful, agencies in producing the Budget. . . . [The return is one] that you are not likely to get for twenty times £15,000 you may spend in any other part of the field during the next ten years.

Fels also tried to get the leaders of the United Committee to cooperate closely with the Labour Party, while they in turn wanted him to stick to the land question alone. He made his appeals vigorously and at great length at a meeting to cope with a publishing deficit. Finally one of the mildest-mannered members walked up to him, and laying his hand on his shoulder said: “Joe Fels, you can't buy our movement. You had better keep your money and go home.” Many present were shocked by the man's bravado, though no doubt some applauded inwardly. Next morning the postman brought a check to the United Committee for £2,000 from Joseph Fels.

His generosity continued to enrage his opponents. “Is it not important that the Legislature should . . . pass a law prohibiting foreign subscriptions toward British political movements,” W. G. Fowler demanded, in attacking Fels, “and make it a severely punishable offence to either accept or have knowledge of such subscriptions without revealing them to the proper authorities?”

Yet Fels continued to give, both of his money and of his time. "I have just been away into the wilds of Norfolk . . .," he dictated exuberantly from England June 27, 1911, to C. H. Ingersoll of New York City,

where 3500 farm laborers have organized to fight for better conditions. I think this is the beginning of the agricultural movement in our direction in this country. Next week I expect to go with Mrs. Fels to Denmark and Sweden. This week I am spending most of the time along with about 100 members of the Boston Chamber of Commerce (including Lincoln Steffens and Fred Howe), who are going to try to do London in four days. I expect to have a good old time with them all the same. Things are really moving. Some chap in China [William E. Macklin], with whom both Kiefer and I are in touch, is translating Henry George's books into Chinese, and has already published *Progress & Poverty*.

"Are you giving all your money to the Fels Fund Commission or not?" he asked, touching upon his American projects, "and, if not, why not? Kiefer seems to be starving to death, and I am looking for men to rob."⁵

Fels neglected to mention that he had already been to Dresden that month during the Whitsun holidays for the annual meeting of the League of German Land Reformers (*Bund der deutschen Bodenreformer*), with which he had been connected for about a year. Loud cheers had greeted his offer of 5,000 marks at once and, as translated, his promise to double whatever sum above 45,000 marks was collected by the league during the next five years, though a corrected interpretation emerged afterward that he intended to contribute only equivalent amounts, not twice as much. (A novel feature of the year just ending, the year when the Reichstag heatedly debated increment taxation, were

the courses conducted on the principles of Henry George during the Easter holidays at classrooms of the University of Berlin for more than 300 students from all parts of the Empire.)

Fels reported encouragingly to the Germans on the work being done in other countries. Above all he extolled the Canadian city of Vancouver, where the single-tax principle was being applied in its purest form to date. In August he wrote lengthily to his German friends urging them to establish a press bureau like that of the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values. He suggested also that they stage an international congress of single-taxers, a suggestion that produced a courteous but interminable exchange on the subject of whom to invite as legitimate Georgists in case such a gathering took place. It developed that the Germans were angry because of a belligerent article in France's single-tax review which threatened that, "if Germany dares to move she will get a good hiding from Great Britain."

During July Fels went to Denmark and Sweden for three weeks. He took Mrs. Fels along, his two unmarried sisters from Philadelphia, Bertha and Rosena, and the daughter of an American school friend of his wife's. In Denmark he again spoke, advised, and spent money, this time with growing zeal. Crowds flocked to hear the peculiar little American millionaire from England tell them how to make money without working, as he enticingly advertised the theme of his talks. One could not help getting rich, he would say, if one gets hold of some land and waits until other people get such an urge for it that they will pay whatever you ask.

The smallholders of Denmark won Fels' heart, particularly at their school in Borris in Jylland (Jutland) under superintendent Jens Nielsen. He was also seized

with admiration for Dr. phil. C. N. Starcke, and sponsored a series of six-day courses over the whole country as a kind of enlarged folk high school instruction, with Professor Starcke lecturing upon the nation's entrenched injustices and the remedies of Georgism. "It was a delightful experience. I think a little good was done," Fels wrote to W. S. U'Ren.

My last speech was at the big socialist hall in Copenhagen packed to the windows with an audience of Social Democrats, and though I spoke in English and had to have every paragraph translated as delivered they came very near raising the roof. The next time I go . . . , I will take along with me a Member of Parliament belonging to the Liberal party and another Member belonging to the Labour party, who know how to preach the gospel according to Henry George. Maybe then the fellows will fill the cellars in addition to raising the roof.

Fels was also subsidizing the single-tax movement in Sweden, where Stockholm publisher Johann Hansson and his wife were Henry George's principal advocates. He lectured to Swedish audiences with the Hanssons beside him, and his performances were successes both in the lake country and in Stockholm itself. "I've no reason to regret coming to Sweden and shall hope to repeat the operation in due course," he wrote when thanking Signe Bjørner for Denmark's hospitality to him.⁶

At the Glasgow conference to promote the taxation of land values held over the weekend of September 9-12, 1911, which Fels of course attended, ex-Bailie Peter Burt, J.P. and the Lord Advocate, Mr. Alexander Ure, M.P., opened the proceedings at which about a dozen members of the House of Commons were present, including Josiah C. Wedgwood, whose close friend Fels was becoming, as well as some 700 delegates from

over 300 local rating authorities and organized bodies. Fels seconded Mr. Wedgwood's resolution to endorse the memorial on "Land and Taxation Reform" presented to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer on May 18. He observed that he had been charged with interference in British politics and debauching the electors with American capital, but, he stated, he got his capital from the same source that most people in Great Britain did, specifically from the land. Until the people awakened, Parliament would be unable to do anything. Neither would there be any help from the press, because the newspapers were directed by the counting houses. He moved the following resolution:

That this conference affirms its deep conviction that the existing deplorable condition of the people in regard to bad housing, low wages, and unemployment in town and country is directly traceable to land monopoly and is further aggravated by the present system of taxation and rating; emphatically declares its opinion that the only just and expedient method of removing these social evils is by the exemption of all improvements and all the processes of industry from the burden of rates and taxes, and the substitution of a direct tax on the value of all lands, a value which is entirely due to the presence, growth, and industry of the people.

We desire to put taxes on land values, but we cannot do so without taking taxes off something else, Fels argued in support of his resolution. It is necessary to appeal to the businessman, he added, although "he was rather a dull institution and required shaking up a bit." His motion carried with only one dissenting vote, and he then urged an international conference on the single tax. The conferees responded by singing the "Land Song."

"I find my strength here in England and elsewhere in pushing the single tax consists in not identifying myself with any regular party, clique, or set of men. I cuss 'em all, and smile at 'em all," he wrote immediately after the conference to a Georgist sympathizer in South Africa. And to another in Switzerland, he affirmed: "I think we single-taxers should keep as prominently before us as possible Henry George's practical proposal, *i.e.*, to abolish all taxation save that upon land values."

"So far as Land Value Taxers are concerned, they hold that even a costly valuation will more than justify itself; but they are not anxious to have the valuation made costly and difficult: they are in a hurry. Valuation is the open door to their proposal. The cost of valuation will soon be recovered, but we would prefer to waste as little as possible, as the money can be used to better purposes," he replied to the criticism of the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. "All that is needed is a straight valuation made by the owner, subject to revision on the basis of similar valuations, and a straight tax on that value."

Fels drove his basic arguments home on platform after platform during October. He spoke in Birmingham at the founding of a local chapter of the Vacant Land Cultivation Society, and the next day to a meeting of businessmen at the Imperial Hotel. At Rotherham, Leeds, and Manchester, he addressed the local leagues for the taxation of land values, and he lectured at the Ethical Church, Bayswater, London, on his familiar theme, "What a Rich Man Can Do." One of his listeners asked Fels if he thought he was on a higher moral platform than the man who, having the opportunity to amass a great fortune, refused to do so. Fels answered that he would be very glad to have the name and address of that man.

Making preparations to sail for the United States

again, Fels had written to Louis F. Post in settling upon the site for the annual meeting of the Joseph Fels Fund Commission to be held in Chicago November 24, 25, and 26, Mrs. Fels and I would like to have an excuse to be in Chicago on the 24th and 25th when our dear young friend Ephraim [*sic*] Zimbalist will give his violin recitals." Still humored as he had been before he sailed, Fels took time to write sharply to John Paul, the editor of *Land Values* (as he had years before to editor Gaston in Alabama to vent his indignation over laudatory publicity):

I am no damn fool to be flattered in order to be kept in good humour. I am just as devoted a follower of the right, for the sake of the right as I see it, as you are; and I resent being nursed or humoured as you have seen fit to nurse and humour me right along!

By 1911 Fels and his wife were dividing their time more or less evenly between Europe and America, steadfastly marching on in the spirit of Henry George. There was so much to do. "It seems to me that we single-taxers, in advocating our reform, do not lay sufficient stress upon the importance of getting at hard-headed businessmen, and ramming down their throats the great benefit that would accrue to them if industry and industrial improvements were exempted from taxation," Fels wrote to New Zealand's Minister of Education. "The average businessman considers the single-tax agitation as a rather cranky idea, even in these late days."

The winter of 1911 commenced gratifyingly for single-taxers in the United States with Newton D. Baker's election to the mayor's chair in Cleveland, a vindication of the ideals of the late Tom L. Johnson, and a chance to resume their pilgrimage toward the goal of Johnson's ambition of "a city set upon a hill."

The Second Annual Single Tax Conference opened in Chicago on November 24. Such conclaves had met as early as 1890 and as recently as 1907, but it had been only in 1910 in New York City that the Joseph Fels Fund Commission began to arrange annual meetings as part of its movement to put over the single tax somewhere in the United States within five years. The commission again had to face the attacks of the "irreconcilables," who argued that funds should be expended for the single tax alone and not for the initiative nor the popular referendum. Fels rejoined that the agitation ought to be such as the situation warranted, and that to confine the movement to any fixed lines of activity would be to lessen its effectiveness. He told also of his confrontation aboard the liner *Mauretania* with Tammany Hall's infamous Richard "Boss" Croker. "I embarrassed Mr. Croker," Fels related, "by asking him why he had been one of the crowd that had killed Henry George" in the harsh campaigning for New York's mayoralty in October 1897. After a moment's hesitation, Croker answered, according to Fels, "If we hadn't killed him, he would have killed us."

Fels as usual made the most of his stay in America. "I want to see Utica [N. Y.] wake up and realize the necessity for wiping out the tax on industries, &c., and putting it all on the land," he told Uticans. "If you do not you are bound to have congested population and slums." In Grand Rapids, Michigan, he made "a convincing statement of the case for land values taxation," while in Pittsburgh he was liked personally even if his doctrines were not taken seriously. He enjoyed a better reception in Boston. "I addressed the Chamber of Commerce with the largest gathering ever held of the Chamber," he reported to John Paul, "then a single-tax meeting of 200 people which included many members

of the Municipal League. Later I had a three hours' siege with 15 or 20 Harvard College professors and their friends." He also led a great meeting in Philadelphia.

"My impressions of Pittsburgh have been rather largely as of a city which spends so much time and money entertaining and glorifying its despoilers as to leave but little time and money to protect itself . . .," he told a *Pittsburgh Dispatch* interviewer. "It would give me great delight to come to Pittsburgh, and say in effect to an audience of business people about what I tried to make plain in Boston. I know of no quicker or more effective way of bringing this about than . . . with the bold claim that I know how to bring about Greater Pittsburgh, and the knowledge is not patented." The newspaper insisted in an editorial that it had always favored the premium of a lowered or abolished tax on improvements. "What it has objected to in the single-tax apostate," the *Dispatch* said, rebuffing Fels, "is the representation that it will be a cure-all and panacea for all economic ills, particularly with regard to monopolies and railroad abuses, which could go on as easily under the single tax as any other system."

Undaunted, Fels tackled Sir James P. Whitney, the Premier of Ontario, Canada, in Ottawa. As related by Fels to a reporter from the *Ottawa Evening Citizen*, it was a remarkable encounter at the Premier's dinner table. Sir James warned Fels "against using barb-wire methods" of questioning him, then volunteered his opinion that taxation of the right kind was the only means of coping with private interests harmful to the welfare of Canada.

"My dear Sir James," Fels replied, "that's the single tax."

The Premier repeated his stern warning against Fels'

methods, saying that he would not tolerate them. "And blame it, sir, you must respect my warning!"

Then Sir James began asking me some questions, and "barb-wired" me a little. He asked if I wanted to introduce the single tax into Canada and other countries, and if I was spending a fortune to do it. Upon my modestly pleading guilty, he declared that he did not believe a word of it, and that I was taking the cheapest means of courting publicity and notoriety—indeed, that in his opinion I was getting good advertizing for my soap and myself. To the latter charge I modestly pleaded guilty again. I said that if I saved a little money in not paying the newspapers there was that much more with which to advertize the single tax.

Ontario's Premier exploded furiously at what he regarded as a breach of etiquette by Fels in releasing a private conversation upon a private subject, and Fels apologized, although he insisted he had been given to understand that Sir James had merely discoursed openly upon a matter of public interest: "I want to make very specific amends in this particular instance, more especially as I have never abused a confidence placed in me during my nearly 60 years!"⁸

While in North America, Fels had worked unreservedly for the single-tax movement. He had even used his contribution to a relief fund for child victims of the strike of textile workers in Lawrence, Massachusetts as an occasion to drive his message home:

In sending this gift I wish it distinctly understood that it is not a philanthropic gift to the sufferers. It is a part payment of the debt due these children from all who are upholding existing social wrong. . . . Upholders of robbery make the false claim that there is no way by

which the worker may be assured just treatment. They claim to know no cure for poverty, and offer this voluntary ignorance as an excuse for continuing it. The excuse is not valid. . . . The amount of the enclosed cheque I have charged in my ledger against the American Woolen Company and other supporters of legalized robbery. I advance it in part payment of a debt they owe, without consulting them, because their child creditors are in distress through their reluctance to settle. I doubt whether they will recognize the obligation in spite of its manifest justice, since it is not legally enforceable. Consequently if it must be considered a charitable gift let it be fully understood that the real recipients of this charity are not poor children from Lawrence, but the stockholders of the American Woolen Company and other upholders of existing wrongs.

The element of a high protective tariff in this instance made him even more dogmatic than usual about the Georgist cure for poverty.

He worked up to the last moment in the United States before sailing to England getting out a special edition of one million copies of Henry George's *Protection or Free Trade?*⁹ which Congressman Henry George, Jr., was franking (free of postal charges) to anybody who wanted it in the United States and Canada. Even in mid-ocean, on the *Mauretania*, he could not leave the world unreformed. "I had a good meeting in the dining saloon of the ship last Saturday, which was attended by three-fourths of the first-class passengers," he wrote to a Canadian friend. "Some of these were not exactly first-class, but they have money!"⁹

Mr. and Mrs. Fels reached England once more on April 30, 1912, barely in time to ready themselves for their forthcoming extensive tour of Scandinavia. En-route to Denmark, Fels attended a meeting of French

single-taxers at the École des Hautes Études Sociales. Georges Darien translated as Fels addressed himself once more to his favorite theme, "How to Get Rich Without Working." He had mastered his fundamentals by now, and made only minor variations as particular circumstances warranted. Immense fortunes are possible only by speculation and monopoly in land, he would begin. Good land is either withheld from cultivation or put to inferior usage in such instances, and taxes are levied upon the work or industry of individuals. To set matters right, it is essential to tax land values, that is, to compel land owners to cease speculating in land value increases, and to make the most productive use of the land, relieving industry thereby, which was staggering beneath its burden of unjust taxation. Fels pointed to himself as one whom monopoly had helped to make rich. Yet he refused to be a philanthropist. Said he, "Philanthropy is but a prop to an unjust economic system." He devoted his money instead to propagating the single tax. "I shall spend it in an endeavor to make it impossible for me, or any one, to continue to gain money as I have gained mine." Fels concluded by promising the members of the *Ligue Française pour l'Impôt Unique*, as he had the Germans at Dresden, that he would match whatever sum was collected by them to further the cause.

From Paris the Fels traveled directly by train via Hamburg to Jutland. Fels lectured in Kolding, Askob, Horsens, and Aarhus, "in his brilliant, humourous way," as a newspaper reported, and then he and Mary took the steamer overnight to Copenhagen for two more lectures and a reception at Nimb's restaurant in Tivoli.

Controversies among the Danes troubled him, however. The problem asserted itself openly in rivalry between the two Georgist newspapers, *Ret* (Justice),

privately published by Sophus Berthelsen, and *Den lige Vej* (The Straight Way), issued to the members of the Henry George Society. The difficulties were personal and chronic rather than doctrinal or acute. Berthelsen appealed to Fels for aid against his competition, which forced the American to acknowledge that an unpleasant situation was undermining the cause of reform, and then Signe Bjørner, Berthelsen's uneasy supporter, wrote at once to Fels:

For the sake of justice I would ask you to remember that none of those who may be opposed to Berthelsen and his methods have tried to worry you into breaking your wise principle of leaving internal difficulties alone. . . . It would be so very easy if the quality of Mr. B's brain was just as poor as—well let us say his breeding. We could simply put him out and be done with it. But I for one consider him quite a genius, as you no doubt know. He has extraordinary energy, gifts of speech, and is a talented writer. So even though we sometimes hate the idea of being connected with him, we have to put up with his character for the sake of the work he does for that great cause we are doing our best to support. . . . We hope to have made it clear to you, as it is to us, that even if it were possible to make the society stop publishing *Den lige Vej* we could not thereby create a more satisfactory condition inside the Danish Henry George organization.¹⁰

Sweden and Norway proved to be less demanding, but these countries also, unfortunately, displayed less excitement than Denmark had over the ideas of Henry George. After speaking at Helsingborg, Sweden, on Sunday, June 16, Joseph and Mary took the train for Göteborg and Christiania (Oslo). From there Fels wrote to Mrs. Bjørner: "Both Mrs. Fels and I are having

a good time, and I am as busy as I want to be. I had a good meeting last evening at the Polytechnic Institute. The audience was principally of businessmen, engineers, and professional people." He interviewed the presiding officer of Norway's parliament, the chairman of the nation's new commission on taxation, and prominent business leaders. "We stay here until Saturday, and go on to Arvika, a small place in Sweden where a big midsummer celebration is on for Sunday and Monday. I speak there, and then on to seven other Swedish towns, winding up by arriving in Stockholm 1st July, staying until 5th, and after a day again at Copenhagen will return to London."

On their first day at Arvika, Selma Lagerlöf, the author of *The Wonderful World of Nils* and other romances for children and adults, enthusiastically commended the Boy Scouts. "When he spoke the next day," Mary wrote of her husband, "he made protest, much to her vexation, against her address, and called attention to the menace of the Scout movement, in that it fostered in the boys a military spirit."

Mary went on alone to Filipstad, while her husband and Dr. Karl Elander of Göteborg, an ardent Georgist, took an evangelical journey across the country's midlands. In Stockholm, where the Fels were reunited, Mary shared a platform on "Rights of Woman" with her husband, discoursing on woman's need for full political, economical, and sexual emancipation. Fels offered two lectures on the single-tax movement and land reform. They delayed their departure for Copenhagen and London in deference to the entreaty of their single-taxer host, Carl Lundhagen, M.P., who was also the mayor of Stockholm. "I think we left our mark in many cities and town," Fels wrote Anna Barnes. "Mollie has made quite a few Woman Suffrage 'talks,' with

which she entwines the land question in a very ingenious way. indeed."¹¹

In Great Britain again Fels, still exhilarated by the Government's formation of the Land Enquiry Committee as the first step toward evaluation, termed the committee's formation "the sudden waking up of England to the importance of my subject." His high spirits held even through an encounter with one of Britain's mightiest industrialists, Sir William Lever. "I have just been to take the chair at a meeting at Port Sunlight in the bailiwick of Lever, the Sunlight Soap man and my traditional enemy. I find him less dangerous and threatening than I thought. I may capture him for the single tax, who knows?" he wrote to Earl Barnes, concluding, "Great wonders are happening every day." He offered at this point to duplicate all sums up to £20,000 raised for campaign purposes by the United Committee for the Taxation of Land Values.

The publicity given his spectacular offer prompted an urgent appeal for financial assistance from the sculptor Jacob Epstein, who had run afoul of the Prefecture of Paris owing to the pagan theme of his tomb for Oscar Wilde. (Fels had previously helped Epstein out of the unexpected costs of transporting some earlier works to their sites and erecting them into place.) Epstein's tremendous 20-ton winged figure for Wilde's tomb was rejected by the keepers of the "cult of the dead" at Père Lachâise cemetery in Paris. It was a masculine sphinx-like masterpiece, a symbolic poet-messenger moving swiftly forward to convey a sense of rushing and relentless fate. "To fight against the prejudice of the officials of the cemetery, I must enlist the sympathy of artists, writers & all men of good will & understanding who do not wish to see the work of three years either destroyed or so mutilated as to ren-

der it worthless," Epstein wrote Fels, asking for a loan of £50 to help meet expenses. "It is true I am still indebted to you, but I am in the way of getting big work with which I will repay all." Fels came to Epstein's rescue of course—and, ultimately, so did the outbreak of war in August 1914, which permitted the whole dispute to subside and Epstein's sculpture to be slipped into its designated place.

But Fels was overextending himself financially, his £20,000 offer notwithstanding. In August 1912 he still owed Dr. Schrameier, the patient and courteous German land reformer, 41,136 marks, and this more than a year after offering at Dresden to match any sum raised above 45,000 marks; 56,136 marks had been raised and he had matched only 15,000. "I am really grieved by not getting any reply to my letters . . .," Schrameier wrote.

But at any rate I must know soon what I have to state at our general meeting at Posen. Our friends hold me responsible, and rightly so, as I have pledged my word when, on the strength of your generous offer at Dresden, our League began starting its extensive propaganda work. It would really not only be most distressing to cut this short again by want of those means we were sure to be able to rely upon, but also rather awkward under such painful circumstances to face the men who have elected us and put their confidence in us.

Fels sent the money to Schrameier finally, and his apology that accompanied the sum told much about himself:

In the first place I am a great chap to put off a thing today which can perhaps be done as well tomorrow, and once I postpone a thing in this way it continues until

the constable threatens me with the law! Again this matter of my duplicating the sums collected in some sixteen countries, with which I am now more or less intimately connected in this single-tax propaganda, is beginning to grow into quite a large affair, and threatens to give me some sleepless nights and struggling days. I have not defaulted so far, and hope that, when I do, others will come forward to take my place.

Unfortunately for Fels a pattern of default was emerging. "I am really ashamed not to have given attention to your several previous letters," he wrote to Signe Bjørner from Philadelphia in November, "but I have been overloaded with work these last several months and especially since coming to America this time, besides which there have been some other things to worry me rather seriously and whatever I could let go without actual wrong, I did let go undone." He requested Walter Coates to send a draft at once for the 4,190 krøner he owed on his Danish obligations.

"Mrs. Fels and I sailed from England the 12th of October, because I had two weeks of a speaking tour arranged in the state of Missouri before the election. We lost the election in that state and also Oregon, but there were gains elsewhere, and the whole Single-Tax movement has received a great impetus since the election," he went on to Mrs. Bjørner, enthusiastic once more. "I am expecting the conference this week in Boston of the Joseph Fels Fund to be a great meeting of single-tax people from all over the country including Canada, and there is no doubt that Henry George is coming into his own."¹²

Another pattern was also beginning to make itself clear. Whether due to excessive zeal, or advancing age, or fatigue, or perhaps a combination of these, the mas-

ter salesman was overlooking some of the rudiments of selling. Attempting to capture, for the single tax, Meyer Lissner of Los Angeles, a Progressive Republican and a supporter of Theodore Roosevelt, Fels wrote:

There would be no use discussing with me Rooseveltism or Progressivism, as you call the worship of that cult. The man Roosevelt is a first-class humbug. . . . I expect Lincoln Steffens has spent a great deal of time with you. You think he is an open book to you, and you suppose that Steffens is giving you the same kind of advice . . . that he would give other men, but let me assure you, dear Mr. Lissner, that, if Steffens advises you, he diagnosed your special case first. Steffens is a great man on diagnosis; he has even essayed to diagnose my own case, which the Lord knows is hardly worth the time and trouble to such a man as Steffens. Steffens does not blame you for being the kind of M. Lissner that you are, *as I do*. Steffens sees much deeper than I do, and yet we shall capture you by and by, because you are going to get tired of wriggling around doing next to nothing.

The next day, Fels apologized:

You see, I took it upon myself to believe I knew it all, a thing I was charging you with! Of course one must bear in mind that most people are fools at some period of their lives, and, as I am nearly three-score years of age, I may be called an old fool!

But a year later, in 1913, he badgered Lissner again, this time for opposing the home-rule taxation amendment for California and then a proposal for proportional representation.

"Your last letter is like the former one, supercilious and almost offensive," Lissner snapped back. "I see no

advantage whatever to either of us continuing the correspondence."

On the other hand, Fels had to defend himself and his fund's commissioners against some rather barbed-wire attacks from dyed-in-the-wool single-taxers. For example, as he wrote his old friend from Philadelphia, Dr. Solomon Solis-Cohen:

You ask me whether I want history to say that the Joseph Fels Fund, disregarding the intent of its founder, defeated and delayed the single tax for 50 years. I don't care a tinker's damn what history has to say about me after I am dead and gone, so long as I am willing to let the chaps who run the Fels Fund do their work their way while I haven't a better one to suggest to them; and the fact that you say just what will happen, in such positive terms as you use, does not mean that it is going to happen by a jugful! Did you ever hear of a doctor making a mistake in his diagnosis of a case? and did you ever know of a surgeon who cut a man's leg off at the wrong end? Further, have you never heard of a man whom everybody thought a fool during the early part of his life, and somewhat later acclaimed him as a prophet?

Now I had been a kind of half-ass single-tax man for, say, 20 years. I began to think about it really hard five years ago, and except for, say, two years, I was harder than four nails, and wanted either the whole of the single tax or nothing! Then I began to do a little thinking on my own account, instead of taking for granted everything I read or heard from fixed single-tax men. This forced me to the conclusion that I ought to be willing to accept a small dose to begin the treatment. . . . Before that, mind you, I had insisted on a big dose of salts every time, but of course, a pill will not cure an earthquake, and so I naturally began to tone down a little. . . .

My dear Doctor, take a little of your own medicine,

and keep cool for the sake of those things you and I hold so dear.

Perhaps his failings in individual instances should be attributed to his nearly total immersion in the British movement, where Parliament's Land Enquiry Committee was at last commencing the complicated business of determining the values of land. As he summed up the state of things, writing to George Fowlds in New Zealand:

Our question is again to the fore here, and we shall not let Lloyd George go to sleep over it again, as he did shortly after the passing of the budget in 1909-1910. The single-taxers of Great Britain propose to oppose every candidate for Parliament who is not in favor of the taxation of land values and the untaxing of everything else, whether he be Liberal, Labour, or Tory. Already the single-taxers here have knocked out several Liberal candidates by refusing to speak for them. Of course my correspondence is getting enormous, and I find it impossible to successfully cope with it—hence I continually run the risk of offending some of my best friends.¹³

Once again Fels' hopes proved excessive. Immediately after the 1912 elections, Lincoln Steffens, who was back in New York City, dropped a note to Laura, his youngest sister:

The Felses will be here tomorrow. I hear he wants to quit pouring money into the Fels Fund. I think he won't quit; I think he will go right on. The point is we lost all our fights: Oregon, California, and Missouri. But U'Ren is to fight right on. He has announced his candidacy for governor of Oregon on a radical platform; and we must see him through to defeat or,—his experiment.

Steffens was right; there was too much at stake for Fels to be disheartened. Moreover, he and Mary were ardent Wilsonians at this point, and Woodrow Wilson had just been elected President of the United States over Roosevelt the "Bull Moose" and Taft the conservative. The New Freedom, with its attacks against monopoly and its promise of immediate tariff reduction, had won. Fels had convinced himself that the single-tax movement was the vanguard of progress.

In England, however, their friend Lansbury was in trouble over his vehement support for the members of the Women's Social and Political Union. Lansbury was the archetype of a Victorian father. He believed with all his emotion that women were weaker beings needing masculine protection, although with his mind he believed that the full equal treatment of their sex was the best means to care for them. In 1912 militant females in Great Britain were manhandled roughly by the police, enduring forcible feeding to the verge of death—and Lansbury was goaded beyond restraint. He objected to his own Labour Party's policy for its inadequacy as much as to the Government's for its brutal excesses. On one occasion he screamed his contempt for Asquith until he was ordered off the floor by the Speaker of the House, and his speeches in the provinces were increasingly inflammatory. He even sought to turn their own constituents against his fellow M.P.'s. He was condemned by his party for his actions and ordered to conform in the future. Overtired and distraught, he unwisely succumbed to the pleadings of the Pankhursts and resigned his seat in the House of Commons without even consulting his backers in Poplar. He contested it as a suffragist in October 1912 and lost. The shock was severe. He turned to editorial work on the radical

new *Daily Herald* while continuing doggedly to pursue the cause of votes for women, and late in April 1913 he was arrested and sentenced to serve six months imprisonment for his near-seditious suffragism uttered in a speech at Albert Hall. He underwent a hunger-and-thirst strike until released by the embarrassed authorities a few days afterward.

In America Mr. and Mrs. Fels applauded Lansbury's stand, Mary most openly: "You are right, of course, splendidly right in the stand you are taking," she wrote to him in the midst of his battle on the hustings. Four weeks later she wrote:

Nothing can exceed the need of just economic conditions, yet woman suffrage must go before. Joe's efforts subserve the question of material subsistence, and nothing avails until *after* this is provided. Woman suffrage, however, will help in this also, will help to bring it about.

On November 28, 29, and 30, the Fels were in Boston together for the Third Annual Joseph Fels Fund Commission and Single Tax Conference, after which Fels went "a-lecturing for two weeks" southward all the way to Mobile and to Fairhope, Alabama, once more. Soon he was preparing to return to England about the middle of February 1913, and planning to go on to Paraguay. "He finds it is much better to go from England," Mary informed the Lansburys. "I shall not go with him, you know."¹⁴

Fels was planning to sail on the 22nd by the S. S. *Visari* from New York, and did not expect to reach London again until the early part of June. He was still interested in Paraguay's economic possibilities, and also in the Georgist movements in Spanish-speaking countries. "On my way back I will attend an Anglo-Spanish Single Tax Conference to be held at Ronda, in Spain,

on the 26th, 27th, and 28th of May," he advised another friend—and then had to alter his schedule on only two days' notice, owing to "an important business matter" which arose in London. He lacked time even to advise Daniel Kiefer of his altered arrangements. He reached England late on Saturday evening March 1 on the S. S. *George Washington*, and sailed again for America just four days later aboard the S. S. *Kaiser Wilhelm II*. He now proposed to remain in Philadelphia, and then to sail for Buenos Aires one month later than intended.

He went to Philadelphia because financial repudiation and bankruptcy stared him in the face. "I had overdrawn my own account by several hundred thousand dollars, and had really been unfair to my brother and partner in doing so (and, I might add too, had even risked my own standing in my firm)," he admitted to an old Philadelphia friend. His brother Sam's back was up. Sam insisted that one or the other of them must be empowered to control Fels and Company absolutely, if necessary, for the welfare of the company. Bedridden at brother Maurice's with a heavy cold, Joe balked at being pushed aside. He proposed to incorporate the firm instead, in keeping with a plan drawn up by Walter Coates in his behalf. "I am too ill to go into long discussions, and all desire to quibble about anything not absolutely necessary has left me," he scribbled to Sam.

As an earnest of this, I propose to return to England as soon as well enough, leaving you to do what seems best for the interests of each. Meanwhile I trust you will see your way to have the incorporation fixed up on the lines suggested by me, so that our signatures may be affixed before I leave.

The dispute could not be resolved, however, and Joe departed for England. He was now making plans to attend the approaching conference of single-taxers in Spain, as well as writing to persuade (or browbeat) his German friends into doing likewise, despite their contention that it would be too far away for them. He reached his London home, in Cornwall Terrace inside Regent's Park, just in time to give George Lansbury "a royal welcome." Lansbury, after his strike for women's votes, was released from prison for his health's sake under what was known as the "Cat and Mouse Act." Four weeks later Fels and his wife left London to attend the single-tax congress at Ronda in Spain.¹⁵

Fels had been exhorting and abetting the Georgist movements in Spain and Italy for more than a year. His method in the Mediterranean countries, as in France, Germany, and Scandinavia, was to subsidize the single-taxers' propaganda activities and, with money and counsel, to encourage their growth in every other way possible. The strongest movement among the southern European nations was located in Spain, *La Liga Española para el Impuesto Único* (The Spanish League for the Single Tax), headed by the genial and dedicated Alberto Albendin, a government field engineer and author. Señor Albendin found M. Darien of Paris, his French counterpart, as bellicose as Dr. Schrameier did—and also shockingly ignorant of the works of Henry George. "He is much fond of politics," Albendin observed to Fels, "and his aims would be better for governmental activities than for social reform." Darien in turn advised Fels that Italy's Nicola Fantini, a neophyte by any standard, "did not fully grasp the economic philosophy of Henry George."

Instead of sponsoring Fantini's proposed newspaper,

Fels inveigled him into taking George Cunelli, a young Greek Russian, into his home in Milan over the coming winter. "Young Cunelli has a marvellous voice," Fels wrote Fantini in offering to cover the costs of housing and feeding Cunelli,

his friends think he will ultimately be a second Caruso; but he has no money, and there is no way in which he could earn any while cultivating his voice. . . . He is a young man of good family, having spent nearly four years of his life in banishment at Siberia, on account of his being a revolutionist. . . . Mr. Darien is going to keep in as close touch with you as possible, and I am quite sure that Mr. Albendin will do the same. I trust that you will discuss the matter of the paper with both these gentlemen before you definitely decide about bringing it out. None of us wants to waste a penny of money or time, and I know your time is just as valuable in its way as my time is to me.

The Fels sailed from Southampton to Spain with Felix Vitalé, Uruguay's leading single-taxer, accompanying them. Their party was joined at Gibraltar by Mr. and Mrs. Arthur W. Metcalfe of the Irish Land Values League, and together they all crossed by ferry to Algeciras to take the train up the gorges of the Rio Guadiaro. Sympathizers hailed them enroute at Arriate with cheers of "Viva Fels!" and "Viva el Impuesto Único!"

"At Ronda we were received by a seething mass of people, the mayor, etc., a band playing, and all the rest, Mary Fels wrote excitedly. "It was as if we were royalty on some great occasion. We walked to the hotel at the head of this crowd, and were snapped by a photographer every few steps. Such a time as we had throughout the four days there!" Indeed Spain was inspiring for ardent single-taxers, because the Spanish

movement was swaying the government as well as public opinion. Baldomero Argente, the translator, biographer, and propagandist of Henry George, had fought his way into the Cortes (parliament) at an early age as a single-tax liberal, but his new position as Parliamentary Under Secretary to the Premier prevented his participation in the conference.

In Argente's absence, Dr. Vitalé was named President of the Conference, a personal compliment to his inspiration for South America's single-taxers and a recognition of his linguistic fluency, while Joseph Fels was acclaimed Honorary President. About 700 persons filled the Teatro de Espinel, where Fels was hailed with a prolonged storm of cheers as "Patriarco venerado del Georgismo mundial," the venerated patriarch of the world-wide Georgist movement.

His triumph had come at last. "The conference was about everything we anticipated, and indeed much more," Fels wrote to Signe Bjørner, whose illness had kept her home:

The theatre of the town was filled most of the three days, and the Mayor himself spent every hour possible at the conference. We had a big band at our disposal all the time, and the "Land Song" was performed scores of times. We did not have as many delegates from Spanish-speaking countries as we expected, but more than we looked for from different parts of Spain. I am quite sure we made the proper impression in that country which must grow to something definite before many years.

Leaving Ronda, the Fels took the train to Madrid, sightseeing along the way at Granada, Seville, and Cordova. But at Madrid, where Fels spoke to the local single-taxers, fewer than 100 persons came to hear him. "It was hardly fair to me under the circumstances, but a very much greater offense to the movement," he

complained to Mauricio Jalvo. "I will be very glad indeed to hear that a regularly organized working committee has been formed in Madrid, and that they are actually going to work to agitate for the single tax. I found but little evidence of any organization in Madrid." They returned to London again on the 11th of June, and Fels plunged into his British agitations once more.¹⁶

He plagued Sidney Webb to publish a series of six articles on the single tax in the *New Statesmen*, but Webb refused him gently with devious excuses. "Why couldn't I sign my single-tax articles just as well as you do your articles on socialism?" he rejoined to one of Webb's objections. "And if this signing of the articles will remedy the matter, I will guarantee to get Mrs. Fels' signature in addition to mine, so as to even up as between Webb *et al.* and Fels *et al.*"

He snarled at the circumstances that prompted Josiah C. Wedgwood's resignation from the United Committee, its support for a Liberal in a by-election over a socialist even though the Liberal candidate would not sign the Parliamentary memorial on land values. "I don't blame Wedgwood, but rather honour him; and if things keep on in their present shape, I will do a little resigning on my own account," he stated. "I don't want even the kind of socialism that you and Lansbury are fighting for," he told Fred Henderson.

What I am after is equal opportunity for all, and special privilege for none, and we can't get this unless we closely follow just what Henry George has written in his books. . . . Now I have talked and pleaded and prayed with Lansbury for years. I am quite willing to do the same amount of talking &c with you, if it will do any good, but simply will not put up a penny for anything that does not lead with fair directness towards the single tax as I understand it.

He made essentially the same point to Patrick Geddes, his city-planner friend: "Such men as you . . . are too good to be wasting a great deal of sweetness on the desert air in seeking surface improvements without making the foundation sufficient to hold the improvements!" and this was also the point of his address on "Taxation, Housing, and Town Planning" before the planning conference at Ghent in Belgium at the end of July. "I am not a politician, and am unwilling to be destroyed in the house of my friends," he told Charles Smithson.

American politics looked a bit more hopeful to him at least from a distance. "Mollie and I have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of E. M. House of Austin, Texas, while he was over here," Fels wrote to Earl Barnes.

He is the friend and advisor of most members of the American Cabinet, and indeed of Woodrow Wilson himself; and we were tremendously impressed with the man's personality. He confirmed what we had already thought *re* Wilson, and believes he will make the greatest record of any President since Lincoln's time. I agree, because House is not an extravagant man in his statements, and seems to know Wilson in and outside.

"If you have a chance to get in touch with him [House], go and mention my name," he urged Congressman Warren Worth Bailey, an old friend from Pennsylvania. "He is absolutely clear on the free-trade question, and pretty nearly so on the single tax."

About the same time, Fels scored heavily with a propaganda document on the issue of land-values taxation, "An Open Letter to an Enterprising Business Man," which he issued through the press and then reprinted for widespread distribution by the United Committee:

I notice you have recently carried out some considerable improvements on your business premises. . . . Have you taken time to reflect that such conduct on your part, instead of being regarded by the community as praiseworthy, is treated rather as a criminal act, to be punished even more severely than we punish ordinary criminal actions? It is obvious that the existing system of rating is a hindrance to trade and a menace to all industrial aspiration. The rate collector dogs the footsteps of the man who would do things for the benefit of the community. Is it not about time the rate collector was directed to look for his revenues in the value of the land which is created by the community as a whole?

To his married sister Bettie (Babette), who urged him to give up his efforts to convert North Carolina, where she lived, to the single tax, he wrote:

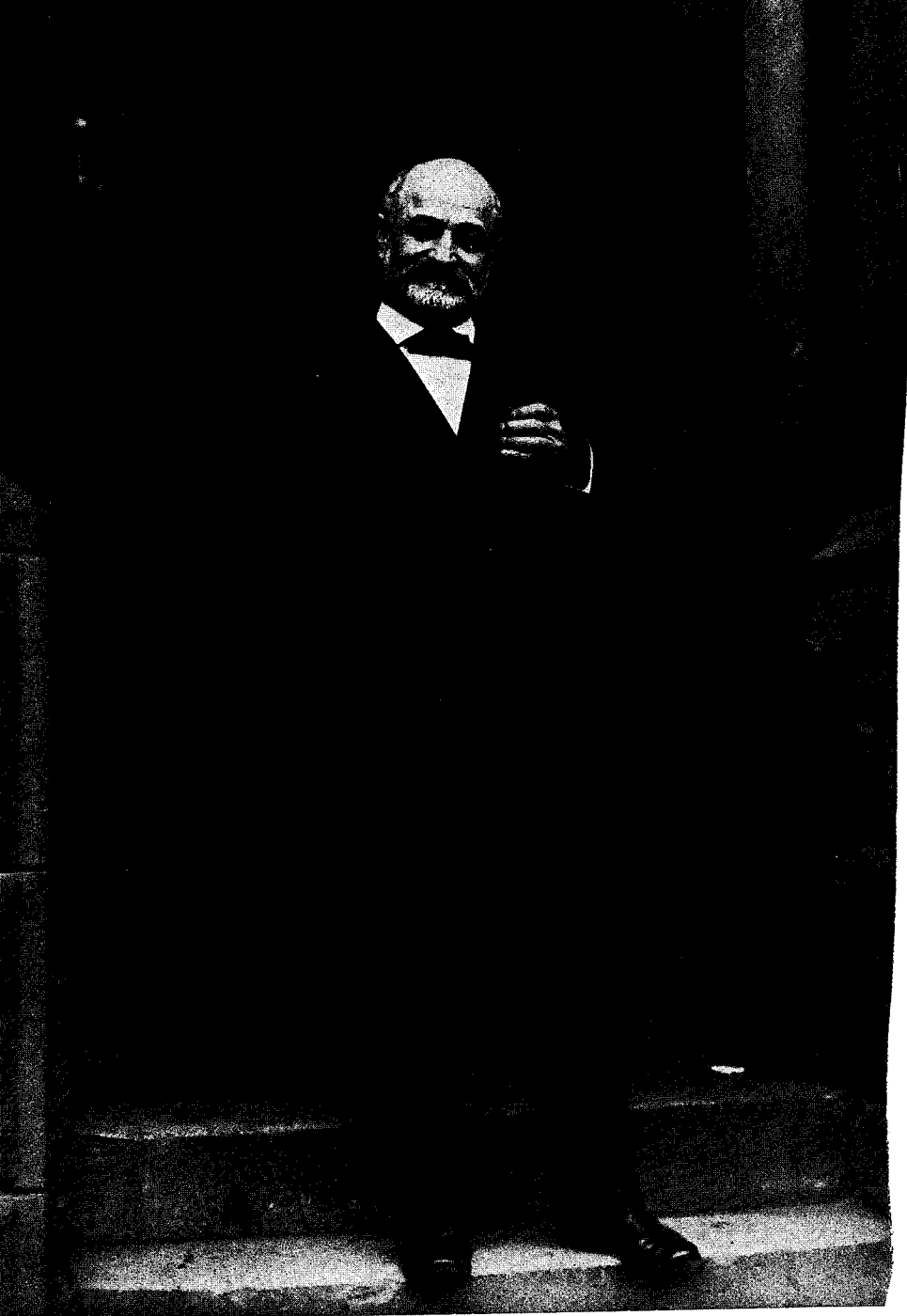
Wouldn't it be better to encourage me to go on with my "fad" (as some other of my relatives are fond of calling the work to which I have set myself)? and is it not altogether safer to humour anyone who is supposed to be crazy than to oppose him or her in a pet scheme? . . . I thought that a sister might have sense enough and heart enough to sympathize and encourage me somewhat in going on; but apparently you are on a par with my elder brother ["Burr"] who, when he came to see me over a year ago, took it upon himself to suggest that I was only trying to feather my own nest of notoriety, and to get a reputation for public propaganda, which rather tempted me to kick him down the steps. However, as he was in my house as a visitor, I merely told him what he deserved, instead of applying his desserts! ¹⁷

And so he raced along his evangelical path, pursuing the goal of a Georgist utopia where poverty could no longer exist to bedevil progress, although as time elapsed his own progress increasingly resembled a treadmill's, and one occasionally verging on insolvency

at that. In October 1913 he was protesting to Norman Angell, the pacifist, who would not admit him to a congress seeking to avoid the war that was threatening so ominously. Angell replied to Fels:

My reasons after all were very simple: if I had been organizing a conference on the single tax, you are the very first person I should have invited; but I was organizing a conference on the question of a fight against armaments, and on that only. I would not even allow the general discussion of peace and war . . . , and if in the case of one member I was to allow anything so extraneous as your own subject, the whole conference would have got out of hand.

Fels remained in correspondence with developments elsewhere, especially in Spain and Germany, mustered enthusiasm for the cultivation of vacant lands by the unemployed "as an eminently practical 'charity' inasmuch as it simply affords a poor man a plot of land upon which to grow his own food by the sweat of his own brow instead of that of other people's brows," called for the enfranchisement of women, and pondered a reply to Zangwill's £20,000 query for ITO. Only a few months before he had, by his own account, been "in such low water" with Fels and Company that he had had to beg repayment of the money owed him by Marshall Smith. He also interceded with the London County Council for Margaret McMillan as he had long before, this time successfully for the loan of a site for an elementary school in Deptford opposite her clinic. He had renewed his old friendship with Margaret McMillan when he went to Balliol College, Oxford, to address the summer students of the university extension movement. His academic audience resented his Henry Georgist message, sneering at him condescendingly, but he gathered his strength nevertheless and



Joseph Fels on the steps of Cory Hall in Cardiff, Wales,
on October 11, 1913

continued. Miss McMillan could not forget his voice. "With passionate faith, in perfect self-surrender, in quiet acceptance of all labor and loss and all suffering, with a hope that bore up the soul to fair and cloudless heights, it beat against every heart as at a heavy door." And when Joseph Fels ceased speaking at last, falling back into his lighter manner of diffidence and jocularly, there was a deep silence momentarily, then, "looking spent and very white and small he sat down," she related afterward.

The atmosphere was much more to his liking at Cardiff at the great conference and demonstration staged under the joint auspices of the United Committee and the Welsh League for the Taxation of Land Values during the week beginning Monday, October 11, 1913. At this meeting there were more than 300 delegates representing municipal corporations, borough and urban district councils, cooperative societies, trades unions, temperance societies, Liberal Party associations, and other public bodies, and Fels was in high spirits. He spoke at the morning session in Cory Hall on the opening day of the conference. A religious rally had met there the day before, and huge bannered exhortations still festooned the walls. In appealing for renewed efforts to tax land values, Fels reminded his hearers of the late Tom L. Johnson's fight against the traction monopoly. "Now you ride all over Cleveland for a bloody three cents," he shouted triumphantly. The audience was momentarily shocked by this profanity; then it roared with peals of laughter. At first Fels could not grasp what they were laughing at, nor could the others seated behind him on the platform. Then they understood. Above and to the rear of their heads there still hung a banner from the day before: "Swear not at all, neither by Heaven for it is God's throne, nor by the earth."¹⁸