

BOOK REVIEWS

A CRUSADER FOR JUSTICE

"The Life of Joseph Fels," by Mary Fels. Doubleday, Doran and Co., New York. 1940. 192 pp. \$1.50.

This well written book is a new account of the life of Joseph Fels, somewhat different from the version that appeared in 1916. It deals more with his career and ideas than with his personal life.

Joseph Fels, a Semite, was born and reared below the Mason and Dixon line, at a time when a Jew was indeed *rara avis* in that "Bible Belt." All his life he was singularly free from creed and dogma. He had little formal schooling, but wide business activity, travel and study made him a well-rounded personality. At a very early age he entered the soap business with his father, and by 1893 he had established the highly successful Fels-Naptha business.

Affluent though he was, his sympathies were ever with the poor and oppressed, the underprivileged. However, he was opposed to charity, and his very liberal financial contributions were to causes devoted to establishing justice. He ever held aloft the flaming banner of some noble cause, and particularly keen was his devotion to the Georgeist movement. He once related to Lincoln Steffens how he came to embrace this philosophy:

"I've been a Singletaxer ever since I read George's books. I've seen the cat for years. But I didn't do much till I was converted. And strange to say, I was converted by a Socialist. Singletaxers and Socialists don't agree; too often they fight. But it was Keir Hardie who converted me to the Singletax, or as I prefer to call it, Christianity. I came home on a ship with him once and noticed that he never thought of himself. We were together all the time, all those long days at sea, and we talked about England, America, politics, business—everything; and I talked and I thought of myself. But Hardie didn't talk of himself and I could see that he never thought of Keir Hardie. He was for men. . . . Well, that did for me. I saw that I was nothing and that I was doing nothing compared with a man like that. He saw and I saw, but he worked. He did things, and I saw that that made him a man, a happy man and a servant of mankind. So I decided to go to work, forget myself and get things done."

And Fels thence devoted himself to unselfish causes with such spirit that Herbert Bigelow, in a memorial address, said of him: "I speak of Joseph Fels the Christian, because I believe that if the nominal disciples of Jesus, particularly the rich ones, were to follow the example of Joseph Fels, they would all of them be better Christians."

"The Life of Joseph Fels" is the story of a noble man, utterly devoid of affectation, and determined to leave this world a better place for his having lived in it.

B. W. BURGER.

THE LEGACY OF WESTERN POLITICAL CONCEPTS

"Political Thought—The European Tradition," by J. P. Mayer, and collaborators. The Viking Press, New York. 1939. 485 pp. \$4.00.

In an Introduction to this book, R. H. Tawney says, "Man, when history first meets him, is a social animal. Political thought is the epitome of his experience of life in society." Mr. Mayer's book purports to be a review of that political thought which the Western mind has moulded and by which it has been moulded. He has attempted to bring together the factors in the European tradition so that it presents a coherent flow. Thus, although he is of the "historical" school, he shows some originality in evaluating.

Our political heritage is traced back to Greece, where democracy had its first trial, and flowered in free thought. The transmission of the Greek idea through Rome, and the transformation of both traditions through Christianity is noted. The author puts emphasis on the slavery of ancient Rome as the decisive factor in her decline and fall. He recognizes that the division of society into landed proprietors and serfs was the ruin of Rome.

During the barbarian invasions, when Roman and Germanic ideas were blending, the feudal system arose as an outcome of the Roman idea of private property in land, and the German tradition of communal ownership of land. Lordship was the basis of the Medieval State, which could hardly yet be called a State.

In his discussion of modern political thought and practice, Mr. Mayer, in collaboration with others, devotes a chapter to each nation, offering a survey of that country from the Renaissance to the present.

The chapter on Britain is by R. H. S. Crossman. He sees many contradictions in British political thought—a theoretical individualism is contrasted with an actual dependence on conventions and traditions. Britain today is blindly groping for a policy. Even the vague policy of liberalism has collapsed, and now the country stands in need of a clear-cut political philosophy. With England dominated by a landed class, as the author admits, and vainly attempting to reconcile this with democracy and freedom, it is small wonder that Britain is floundering.

The political thought of France seems to the author (E. Kohn-Bramstedt) more unified and clear-cut. Rationalism has prevailed in that country in theory and practice, and even in the oft-recurring crises, it is the dominant theme.

The job of surveying Germany's political thought is, according to Mayer, "fraught with difficulties." It is the story of a people who have ranged from tribe to empire, who have presented conflicting traditions, who have produced formidable theoreticians as well as political structures, and whose latest development of *Kultur* and the State is frightening. This chapter was written at the time of the Czecho-slovakia crisis, which in a foreboding footnote by the author, is a crisis "whose final outcome—despite the Munich agreement . . . may render this whole book an Epilogue to a culture which is passing away."

In the chapter on Italy, by C. J. S. Sprigge, Mussolini's Fascism is regarded as different from the dictatorship of his axis partner. It "ranges from the enforcement of strict obedience to the most smilingly benign indulgence." It is paternalism.

America is included in the book, as being part of the European tradition. It was the aim of the American settlers, says P. Kecsmeti, author of this chapter, to build a society free from the imperfections of Europe. But the point of departure was the European tradition, and many of the imperfections remained. The New Deal is the outcome of the American tradition, which the author views as not being revolutionary. In his conception, New Deal government is to stand between all classes and mediate for the common good.

The narrowness of the historical approach to social philosophy is seen in the author's treatment of Henry George. He misunderstands George as "the most original contributor to socialistic thought in America," and finds that he fits into the American agrarian tradition. He cannot see any larger implications in the Georgeist philosophy than as the passing product of an era.

The survey of modern countries closes with Russia. Perhaps from a historical standpoint this is the correct thing to do, as the Bolshevik dictatorship is one of the most recent large-scale undertakings in applying a political and social theory. The Russian example seems to Mr. Mayer to hold the greatest portent for the future. Either it will become terrorism or it will point the way toward a millenium. "The