

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 Czechoslovakia 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

distant future" holds the answer. Events these days are deciding things rather quickly. We may not have to wait too long for an answer to Mr. Mayer's speculations.

In the Epilogue, Mr. Mayer reiterates the principles upon which the European tradition is founded, and which has stood the test of two thousand years—principles which have often been abandoned, but which constantly recur: "Freedom of thought and doctrine; the dignity of the individual; a human responsibility to society and the State."

R. C.

SEVEN SORRY YEARS

"After Seven Years," by Raymond Moley. Harper and Brothers, New York and London. 1939. 446 pp. \$3.00.

Mr. Moley's book—a critique of the last seven years of Roosevelt—bids fair to serve as a warning to all budding patriots, students of social science, amateur economists, so-called professional economists, reformers and new-world architects, to make sure that the kite to which they wish to tie themselves as tail segments is in the hands of a competent flyer. That the great kite of the American republic has not yet crashed upon the rocks of complete bankruptcy, is a credit to the stamina of a people still endowed with a strong love of liberty, and to whom opportunities to fulfill ambitions have not yet been completely closed.

When Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected President, Georgeists were convinced that he could not be expected to do anything to bring about economic justice, for the simple reason that he did not know the causes of economic injustice. If, after all these years of New Deal, any further proof is needed that they were right, Mr. Moley's book has provided it.

The first chapter of "After Seven Years" tells of the birth of the New Deal, when Roosevelt was still Governor of New York and was mentioned for the Democratic nomination to the Presidency. Moley was interested in Roosevelt's ideas, and saw in an affiliation with him an opportunity to "satisfy my desire for a wider experience in politics and, at the same time, to help, in a small way, in the realization of old and time-tested concepts of political evolution." Moley also thought that Roosevelt was the one "who could do on a national scale what Tom Johnson had done in Cleveland." During the campaign, he had ample time to entertain doubts as to the ability of his champion to fill that role. For Roosevelt seems to have thought of nothing but success, and he left to his yeomen, the "brain trust," the lesser tasks of formulating policies and principles.

Chapter II is properly entitled "Gayly the Troubadour." For while the farm policy and other features of the planned economy of the New Deal were being thrown together by twenty-five super-minds, the Troubadour was merrily instilling the nation and the "forgotten man" with confidence. At that time Mr. Moley began to have qualms of misgivings.

In the chapter, "For Kings Cannot Err," the story of the London Conference is told. Moley relates how this "dream of world salvation" was bungled by Roosevelt. His rejection of the proposals for stabilizing the currency in foreign exchange, and his famous "bombshell"—although not understood by the delegates—wrecked that Conference.

Moley himself is no economic sage. For one thing he is a high-tariff advocate. But, having some inkling of economics, it is hard to understand why he sacrificed time, money and health to push forward to a high political office a man who was thoroughly unprepared in fundamental economics.

JOHN LUXTON.

Correspondence

COOPERATIVES AND HENRY GEORGE

EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM:

I was very pleased to see the article by Holger Lyngholm on "Cooperation and Democracy in Denmark," in your last issue. For a long time I have believed that the cooperative principle and the Georgeist philosophy are related. Toyohiko Kagawa of Japan once told me that when we have cooperatives established, the Henry George system would be followed. I believe that when we all wake up as consumers, and organize cooperatives on the Rochdale principle, we will be more keenly aware of the tax problem and more capable of tackling it.

Henry George wrote: "I am inclined to think that the result of confiscating rent in the manner I have proposed would be to cause the organization of labor, wherever large capitals were used, to assume the cooperative form, since the more equal diffusion of wealth would unite capitalist and laborer in the same person." George set the right goal in this statement, but citizens of a free democracy need full stomachs and can't wait for distant promises. Political power is based on economic power, and before we can hope to have the Georgeist reform legislated, we will have to display some economic power. I believe that consumer cooperation is the right way to gain democratic control of economic power, and through it, of political power. Through the processes of education and good business management we would have the means to accomplish the reform of shifting taxes from labor products to land values.

The Danes have set the example. Let us take up the torch.
Flushing, N. Y.

PRESTON K. SHELDON.

HISTORICAL VS. NATURAL ECONOMICS

EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM:

Robert C. Ludlow has rendered a most important service in the dissemination of economic truth by comparing Georgeism and Thomism in your March-April issue, in which he points out the contrasts between the historical and the natural approach to economics. Mr. Ludlow should expand his article into a book.

The natural approach is admirably expressed by Adam Smith, who wrote: "The produce of labor constitutes the natural recompense or wages of labor. In that original state of things which precedes both the appropriation of land and the accumulation of stock, the whole produce of labor belongs to the laborer. He has neither landlord nor master to share with him." But, as Henry George points out, Smith recognized fundamentals, only to abandon them and to recommence his inquiry from the artificial state of things in which land had been appropriated and the laborer had both landlord and master to share with him.

Thus the historical view has been permeated and vitiated from its beginning by artificiality—a fraudulent artificiality at that. The confusion of economic terms today—for instance the inclusion of land as capital—is a result of the historical approach.

Delawanna, N. J.

STEPHEN BELL.

OUR STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM

EDITORS LAND AND FREEDOM:

I compliment you on your March-April number, which was so full of valuable and thought-provoking articles. Particularly stimulating were the editorial and the letters on Free Trade.

Cordell Hull's reciprocal trade policy has created a timely opportunity for us to educate the people, not only on the tariff but on the entire taxation question. The time is ripe for such action. We will