

## JOSEPH FELS

By George Lansbury

*(The following passages extracted from Mr Lansbury's "Fifty Years of London," recently appearing in "The Star," 14th May, will be read with particular interest by those who recall the notable assistance given by Mr Fels to the land-values movement in this and many countries.)*

"Another well-known Jew, the late Joseph Fels, with his wife, did a very great deal to make me honour Jewry. Keir Hardie brought us together over the land question. I was a great admirer of Henry George then, and believed very firmly in the taxation of land values, as indeed I still do, though I think we shall gain our end by national ownership of all land.

"Joseph Fels was a friend of Henry George, and had spent big sums of money helping to spread the Single Tax gospel, but he was a practical-minded business man, and wanted to do something concrete, so in America he started the Vacant Land Cultivation Society, the object of which was to take waste land in towns and allow the unemployed to turn these wastes into vegetables, fruit and potato plots.

"This little man travelled Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark, interviewing kings, princes, premiers, cabinet ministers, bishops and the clergy, pouring out his money like water, lending it in large and small sums to Governments and local authorities, free of interest for stated periods, so that land could be bought or hired for the use of the unemployed.

"There never lived a finer or more selfless man. Simple, unassuming and absolutely catholic in his outlook on life, he helped thousands of lame dogs over stiles, assisted struggling artists of all kinds, and never asked thanks or publicity.

"Joseph Fels had a typical Jewish characteristic in his view of money. He always insisted that money must not be wasted. When the Russian Social Democrats, chased across Europe by reactionary Governments, finally landed penniless in London, it was Joseph Fels who, out of sheer love of humanity, put down the money they needed. This money was repaid by Lenin immediately the Bolsheviks secured power.

"He knew and preached the truth that labour and land were the source of all wealth. He believed in individuals and individualism, and had no faith in 'paternalism.' He was a lover of peace, and once, going round a cathedral with me, he said: 'George, do you realize that the stones are soaked and cemented with the blood of martyrs?' There was a tremor in his voice, as if he had seen the long roll of Jewish, Protestant and Catholic martyrs, sacrificed for bigotry.

"If ever it could be said of anyone, 'He loved his fellow men,' it could with absolute truth be said of Fels. His was the friendship of a brother which never failed, however much his friends might disappoint him."