

The Advocate: America's Jewish Journal, Volume 38
November 27, 1909

The Greatest Philanthropist a Jew.
(William Marion Reedy in "The Mirror.")

The one man in the world who seems to me to have the right sort of philanthropy is Joseph Fels, the Naphtha millionaire of Philadelphia and London. He is devoting his wealth to the propaganda of a philosophy that has for its end the restoration to the people of the opportunity to get along in the world. He does not aim first to educate people, or to make people pious. His idea is that if men were made truly free of poverty they would seek education and they would become, as we say, "good." Mr. Fels has established funds in England, Australia, Denmark and the United States for the propagation of the Henry George remedy for poverty.

That remedy consists in the institution of a governmental system of taxation that will tax nothing but the land values of each community. All wealth other than land value is the creation of individual effort.

Land value is the creation of community effort. As the result of community effort it should be taken to pay the expenses of conducting the community. As land values under existing systems are taken by the individuals who have been able to secure land the tax would simply transfer those land values to the public treasury from private purses.

If all such land values were taken from the people who now have them, there would be no object in holding land save for use, and all the land now privately held but unused would be released to use by the people now kept from using it.

If there were no tax upon anything but land values all labor would be free, because the results of labor would be the laborer's own. And if land were free to all who would use it, the earth would be more productive of wealth for everybody. And if everybody had his proper share of the wealth he produces, and had not to surrender part of that wealth for the right to live and work upon land held by others, there would be more time in which all could procure education, attain to culture and be good and decent and happy.

Mr. Fels' money, therefore, is given to get at the roots of poverty, disease and crime. Instead of taking care of the poor, the diseased, the vicious and the criminal, Mr. Fels' philanthropy would prevent the manufacture of the poor, the diseased, the vicious and the criminal. The Fels proposition is prevention rather than cure.

But it is impractical, says some one. Not at all. In this country we partially apply it in separating land values and improvement values in taxation. In New Zealand the idea is farther advanced. In Germany the system of taking the community value for the community is in process of inauguration, and in Great Britain the landlords are to be taxed on the values of their holdings, to the creation of which they have contributed nothing.

But, says some one, this means spoliation of the rich. It means no such thing. It does not mean the taking from anybody of anything that rightly belongs to him. It takes for all only the wealth created by all. It puts an end to the spoliation of the many by the few. It does not take from anyone any land he uses. It simply taxes away the land value that the landlord puts in his pocket without having created a penny of it. Mr. Joseph Fels would reinstate the people at large in the possession of the values they create, and leave the individual in possession of the last denarius and every drachman that he wins from the earth by his own toil.

Compared for efficacy and purpose with the gifts of Rockefeller, Carnegie, Sage and other philanthropists the gift of Fels is infinitely superior. It is designed to show the people the way by which they may come back into their own. It will pauperize nobody. It will bring about independence instead of manufacturing dependents. It will enable people to educate themselves and make themselves good, instead of being lifted into sycophantic comfort by "the scruff of their necks." Mr. Joseph Fels doesn't use his money to do this for any one class of people or in any one country. He wants nothing more than the earth for all the children of men. He is a Jew, but he wants opportunity made free for all races and creeds. For him there are no "lesser breeds without the law." His gifts are devoted to showing men how to help themselves to comfort, to education, to goodness.

The Fels funds aim at the destruction of a system, which until it shall be destroyed, will continue to produce such a crop of poverty, disease, vice and crime as not all the stupendous donation of thousands of Rockefellers, Carnegies, Sages, Kennedys and their kind will ever be able to deal with. The system must be annihilated ere its product can be stopped. Poverty, disease, vice and crime flower from the system as effect follows cause. The Rockefeller, Carnegie, Sage and Kennedy gifts only conceal the cause of the need of such gifts. The Fels philanthropy goes direct to the cause of all things these other philanthropists vainly battle with. And those other philanthropists do not strike at the cause because the cause gives them millions belonging of right to the very people to whom those philanthropists would dribble them out in charity. Of all the world's philanthropists, Joseph Fels, of Philadelphia and London, is the only one who knows what he is driving at and is driving in the only way to attain his purpose. All the others, by their efforts, are no more effective than a soap-and-sugar poultice on a wooden leg.