

INTERESTING PEOPLE

Joseph Fels

FIVE minutes after meeting Joseph Fels you know him; in an hour you have the illusion that you have always known him; and then, next, you feel the certainty that you always will know him. And the reason for this is that he is all there all the time. There isn't much of him physically. He is just about five feet tall.

"This city will be bigger some day," said a St. Louis judge who was answering a speech by Fels. "You yourself are bigger than you were when you were born, aren't you?"

"Not much," said Fels.

But this tiny body hasn't anything to do with his being. Quick, nervous, eager, glad, his horse-power, so to speak, is that of Theodore Roosevelt. He flies at his work, like an insect; he is gay about it. "It's so easy," he says.

And he has humor and wit. His wit has been sharpened by the heckling he gets while campaigning in England, but it is founded on humor, and his humor is founded on his success in making money; soap, too, but principally money; very much money.

"It is so easy," he laughs. "You get a monopoly. Then you get a lot of people to work for you, and you give them as little as you please of all they make. It's easy, as easy as stealing."

In his speech at the Chicago City Club (March 11, 1910) he said it was robbery. Addressing "the Armours" and other rich men he said:

"We can't get rich under present conditions without robbing somebody. I've done it; you are doing it now and I still am doing it. But I am proposing to spend the damnable money to wipe out the system by which I made it." And he invited all men to match him dollar for dollar in the fund he has established (to "the extent of his swag," as he put it) to "abolish poverty."

And he laughs; not maliciously, but with amusement; and some wonder.

"Isn't it strange?" he says. "They don't see that. They don't think it is robbery; they don't believe I mean what I say. And yet,

the fact that I have money gives me a certain authority, and so my statement has the sensation of news. The truth I utter is old, but it's news because a rich man says it."

And poking you in the ribs, he puts you in the crowd and laughs at you. For he knows that you also think a little more of what he says because he is a rich man. He can see it.

And that's the point about Fels. He sees. He has imagination: he sees the machinery of life as vividly as a mathematician sees a geometric figure, or an astronomer a constellation. Most men see stars. "Or bread," said Fels, helping out the expression, "or soap." Fels sees the economics of soap-making, bread-making and human exploitation.

"Most Jews do," he says. "That's why we succeed so well in business. We see it as a system, as a diagram. And that's why we hate so to work for wages. We can see that that's no way to make money. That is the way to make soap all right, and bread. But the way to make money is to get hold of land or a franchise; water, gas, transportation; or, a food monopoly; any privilege that men must have the use of, and then—then hold 'em up to get the use of it. And most men don't see it; they won't see it; they won't see it when you tell them. Well, we see it, we Jews, and—some others."

It's because Fels' friends see what Fels sees that they know him so well. And they know him so quickly, because with his quick, sharp, explosive sentences he has learned to present his point of view, his philosophy, his vivid picture of the world completely and instantly. Also his feelings about it all.

For Fels cares. He is deeply concerned about the facts he laughs at.

"I didn't use to be," he said once. "I've been a Single Taxer 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. Single Taxers and Socialists don't agree; too often they fight. But it was Kier Hardie who converted me to the Single Tax or, as I prefer to call it, Christianity. I came home on a ship

with him once and I 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 Kier Hardie. He was for men."

Fels paused, recalling those days evidently. Then he resumed:

"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," he laughed again, "that's easy too. Not so easy as making money; giving it away is harder than getting it. But by careful management I believe it can be given back without doing much harm."

And that is where Joseph Fels may achieve his distinction among rich men. He may prove to be the most successful of the givers of "tainted money." It's a business. Rockefeller has found that out; and Carnegie—they all have discovered that it is harder to redistribute than to collect money. And most of them really fail at it. Naturally. They don't know how they take money. They think they make it. Fels knows that he doesn't make it, that it is made for him. He gets it, and he knows how he gets it, and he sees that the system which makes the rich rich makes the poor poor. Seeing that, therefore, he does not attempt to alleviate the misery he helps to cause. He gives not a penny for relief, either of individuals or classes. He poured out thousands in London to put the unemployed on vacant lands held for the rise, but his mind was not on the destitute; it was on the land. He saw no use in feeding empty stomachs; he was trying to fill the vacant heads of the poor and the overcrowded heads of the rich with the sight of what men could do for themselves if they could but get access to wasted land; land that was owned but not used. And he succeeded in part.

The land is an issue in English politics now, and Fels financed the agitation which made the land tax in the Budget the question of the day. Which is what he is up to in all countries. He is giving in England \$25,000 a year; in Denmark, \$5,000; in Canada, \$5,000, and so on—altogether \$100,000 a year. And he is offering to give \$25,000 (or more) a year for 5 years (or longer) in the United States on condition that Americans who see the "land cat" will match

him dollar for dollar. The money is to go into a fund which is to be spent to finance movements which seem to be making most directly toward the cure of the causes of poverty.

"I want to make me impossible," he says. "I want to spend my fortune to make such fortunes as mine impossible. And that's a serious, worthy, happy occupation for a man of executive ability."

Once when Fels had been stating his proposition at length a listener who was impressed by the genial humor, the profound kindness and the serene wisdom of this little Jew turned to him quietly and said:

"Fels, the Jews call themselves the Chosen People; the world has acknowledged the title, and I, for example, am willing now, in your presence, to admit that they are indeed the chosen. But what are they chosen for?"

"The Jews?" said Fels, with a careless wave of his arm. "The Jews were chosen to introduce Christianity."

LINCOLN STEFFENS.

George J. Kindel

ALL through the Rocky Mountain region George J. Kindel is known as "the rate-buster." He has earned the title by twenty years of implacable fighting against unjust freight discrimination. The mention of his name to the traffic manager of any road west of the Missouri is like shaking a red rag at a bull. For Kindel has made the rate-fixers more trouble than any twenty men in the country. He has sacrificed his time, his money, and his business to carry on a single-handed fight against transportation companies for equitable rates.

Kindel is distinctively of the Western type. A big, profane, fearless man of one idea, his manners would never be popular at a pink tea. He is a born fighter. He hits like the kick of a mule, and he never quits. In his face there is something grim, something of the look of a bulldog that has been through the wars. In a recent pamphlet, showing that Denver had lost more than twenty manufactories by means of unjust transportation rates that had put them out of business, he paid his compliments to the Chamber of Commerce and referred to it as "a feeble-minded, cowardly, grafting jelly-fish" because that body has shown itself so flabby in the matter of dealing with the railroads.

To call him fearless does not quite express the quality of his courage. There is an energy and virility about it that make him unique. Committed to jail half a dozen times for con-