

How It All Began

One of the country's outstanding crusaders for economic freedom is JOSEPH S. THOMPSON of San Francisco, who tells here how, through the instrumentality of Joseph Fels, he became acquainted with *Progress and Poverty* more than thirty years ago. Something of an introduction to Mr. Thompson himself may be had in excerpts from the foreword to his recent highly successful book, *More Progress and Less Poverty*, written by his sister, the distinguished American novelist, Kathleen Norris. In this foreword Mrs. Norris writes:

"My pleasant duty here is to introduce, as the compiler of this volume, my own oldest friend—my brother. He speaks for himself as a business man, and that he is indeed. Starting work at eighteen and two years later finding himself the head of a suddenly orphaned family of six, his is the American story of early responsibility, hard work, hard times. With a capital of about one thousand dollars and with no patrons or backers, he rented a country shed for ten dollars a month and established what is today a million dollar manufacturing plant ranking among the first four of its class in the country. His firm employs hundreds of men and in its thirty years has never had a strike or failed to discount its bills . . . is one who through poverty, hard work and responsibility has become

a Fellow of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers . . . for four years a director of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce . . . an Honorary Life Member and one time President of San Francisco's greatest club; prominent in musical circles in the west, and one of his own native city's favorite toastmasters and speakers . . . a well-rounded character who loves life and people and has thoroughly enjoyed his more than sixty years of crowded living."

★ IN 1912, WHEN I was a young man looking out on a badly distorted world, I wondered what it was that prevented a smoother, human progress and a wider distribution of America's wealth.

I wish that I could remember how it was that I happened to hear of Joseph Fels—perhaps it was in the daily paper that Joseph Fels, donor of the Joseph Fels Fund, was to speak in a church in Oakland.

How it was that my brother and I crossed the ferry to San Francisco and then the ferry to Oakland, before the days of automobiles, to hear Joseph Fels, I will never know—but we did, and attending the church we found that Mr. Fels was limited to but 15 minutes, and in that 15 minutes he exhorted us four or five times to read, *Progress and Poverty*.

He may have thought his talk was wasted, but in that 15 minutes he launched a worker who has been deeply concerned with the subject ever since I bought *Progress and Poverty*. I did not finish reading it until I took it up again some 30 years later. I was so full of the idea that I did not feel it was necessary to read any further after I had absorbed the main subject.

Everything that we do, no matter how little we see of the results, is likely to be productive of long consequences.