**Age of Excess**

**By Ray Ginger (1965)**

Of the 7,700,000 farmers and farm laborers in the United States in 1880, about a million lived in the newly-opened regions west of the Mississippi and east of the Rockies – in Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas. It was there, and in the South, that the farm revolt reached its highest pitch. Farmers suffered severely at times from natural hazards – drought, grasshoppers, blizzards. Even more serious, of course, were the falling prices of their chief cash crops. Cotton sold for 16.5 cents a pound in 1869; for 4.6 cents in 1894. Wheat sold for $2.06 a bushel in l866; for 48.9 cents in 1894. Corn brought 65.7 cents a bushel in 1866; 21.4 cents in 1896.

The general price level over all goods was falling, too, through those years… but some prices did not fall. Farmers were most conscious of the burden – fixed in dollar terms and therefore growing in terms of their effort – of paying the interest and principal on their debts. Once a man signed a mortgage, he was stuck. If he borrowed $500 for five years at 10 percent in 1877, when wheat was selling for $1.08 a bushel, he was borrowing in effect about 500 bushels of wheat. But if the price of his wheat crop fell 50 percent, he had to sell 100 bushels every year to pay $50 interest, and he had to sell 1,000 bushels in 1882 to pay off his $500 principal. In short: for twice as much work, he got no more.

So farmers roared with agony and rage, because most of them were debtors. Why did they borrow? To buy land, many of them. Supposedly anybody could get 160 acres of public land without charge under the Homestead Act of 1862. Later Federal laws – including the Timber-Culture Act of 1873, Desert Land Act of 1877, and the Timber and Stone Act of 1878 – offered to eligible individuals an equal – or sometimes greater – quantity of land. But these laws did not work out quite as the land reformers and poor farmers had hoped. Much of the Federal domain up for grabs was obtained illegally by speculators and monopolists. Settlers often found it advantageous to pay a railroad or state for land that was better, or that was closer to transportation, than the available Federal land.

The total land in farms more than doubled from 1860 to 1900 – and the consequences of this fact, though often overlooked, were direct causes of the overabundance of farm products and, in turn, of the plummeting prices of these crops on the open market. But Fred A. Shannon has concluded that at most about a sixth of the new acreage was “land that came as a gift from the government.” The price of raw land was often $3 or more an acre, so that even 80 acres of unbroken land – half of what the Federal government offered gratis – would cost $240. And that size was the bare minimum for farming on the prairies, where the aridity dictated an extensive necessity for cultivation. Simultaneously, the advantages of being a big farmer were further increased by the mechanization of agriculture that was going on, as large-scale methods became most economical for the cultivation of corn – and especially of wheat.

The “cash capital costs” of settling a farm were probably even higher on the plains of western Kansas or Nebraska than they were on the prairies of eastern Kansas or Illinois. Yields per acre were lower, the chance of crop failure was greater – and a farmer was virtually forced to farm more land less intensively by using large horse-drawn machinery. The editor of the Prairie Farmer estimated in 1885 that $500 would buy “a good span of working horses, first rate farm wagon, plows, harness, seeder, etc. almost anywhere in the West,” and that the cost of the building first erected on government land was usually $250 or less. The cash cost of breaking sod through the 1880s ran from $1.50 an acre up. In 1879, a farmer spent some $200 to run two strands of Glidden barbed wire around a quarter of his property in Kansas. A well cost some $2.00 a foot, even when the average well might be 40 feet deep.

With all things considered, then, the farmer who got 160 acres of free land in Kansas, put buildings on it, bought horses and machinery, fenced his farm, drove a well for water, and hired somebody to break a mere 40 acres of sod – a job that took more than one team on the plains – incurred cash outlays of more than $1,000. In addition, he had to support his family for at least one year. So he often borrowed.

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The resulting problems and conflicts have been clarified by Allan G. Bogue, whose researches in business manuscripts have yielded far more reliable evidence than was previously available. Most commonly, the farmer who sought funds turned to a broker of land mortgages – essentially a middleman between Western farmers and Eastern – or sometimes English – investors. Such a firm was J. B. Watkins and Company, founded at Lawrence, Kansas, in 1873. The ensuing depression proved favorable to firms like Watkins, for the Western land market – still in its uphill climb of the land bubble – received the funding that was lost to other forms of investment – which in their failure had become less profitable markets to well-off people. Railroad stocks and bonds shrank in value; frequent failures of insurance companies aroused distrust; savings banks ended up in trouble. The steady decline in long-term rates of interest in the following years caused investors to look favorably to the promise of higher yields in the West, backed by the most tangible and commendable security of all – the soil.

Meanwhile, investment funds were accumulating rapidly – in the Northeast. Big fortunes were being made. Even more important to Watkins, modest competences were piling up in the hands of thrifty farmers like Joseph Cook's father, the pockets of merchants who could not profitably use all their funds in their own firms, and the coffers of lawyers and doctors and ministers. Watkins advertised his mortgages in the New York Weekly Tribune and the Springfield Republican, though from the start he relied chiefly on the Protestant religious press. To manage his branch office in New York he hired an emigrant Englishman who was a Quaker. Another friend in Ferrisburg, Vermont, handled mortgages for Watkins. With many Quaker contacts in the Northeast and Britain, he began advertising in Quaker papers in London and Glasgow. In 1878 he opened a London office, also with a friend in charge.

Watkins was only one of many mortgage companies located in the West, selling their paper chiefly in the East or abroad. By 1880, when some 40 major companies were operating in Kansas, the biggest of them was the Corbin Banking Company of New York and New Hampshire. The Hartford insurance companies put millions of dollars a year into farm mortgages in the plains states – certainly more than the $8 million to $12 million a year that the investors of Massachusetts were putting into Western Mortgages in the period around 1885. The shortage of alternative chances for potentially-lucrative investment was yet another reflection of pervasive excess capacity; by driving interest rates down and making loans readily available to farmers, it enabled many of them to venture into unsound situations, and ultimately helped set the stage for the farm revolt.

The farmers had legitimate grievances. Their efforts to control the cost of loans by setting a legal maximum rate of interest proved largely ineffective. The legal maximums themselves were high: 12 percent in Kansas; 12 percent in Nebraska, lowered to 10 percent in 1879; 10 percent in Illinois, lowered to 8 percent in 1879. But the legal maximums meant little, because the borrower usually paid several other charges when he got the loan: commission to the mortgage company; commission to the company's local agent; an examination fee; clerics fees for drawing the mortgage papers; cost of the abstract; recording fees. In 1874, these service charges could total 15 percent of the face value of the loan in Kansas, where interest was 12 percent. Loans at the time were usually made for three years, so the farmer in effect was paying 17 percent to borrow money.

If farmers got little relief from the usury laws, they did benefit from competition among the lenders. By 1878, loans at 12 percent had ceased to be the rule in Kansas, and Ira Davenport began pulling his funds out of the state and investing them in Michigan timberland and in Wall Street. By 1880, Watkins was lending money in Missouri at a straight 10 percent and absorbing the commissions. He decided the time had come to form a combination among lending agencies to maintain rates, but his efforts were met with no success. Total charges trended downward to as little as 8 percent in central Kansas by 1886 and 1887.

But that was just when the years of disastrous crops began and, in spite of the reluctance of most lenders to foreclose, more and more farmers lost their land. Of the mortgages taken in one township in central Kansas in those two years, nearly half ended in failure. A company official estimated that 9 out of 10 mortgages in the western part of the state were foreclosed. The fact that Watkins went into bankruptcy was no consolation to the farmers, who tried in vain to pay off their debts so they could keep their land.

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A farmer on the Western plains could mortgage his land if he wanted to borrow. But in many areas of the South, land was almost impossible to mortgage because, in the words of a Mississippi merchant, land would “be an encumbrance to own.” Nobody wanted it, except Negroes and some whites who could not even get a bare subsistence from any other occupation. Hence arose the crop-lien system – that is, the practice of mortgaging a crop when it was planted in order to get credit from the crossroads supply merchant for seed, for sowbelly and corn meal and molasses, for overalls and maybe a little tea or coffee. The farmer drew his pittance at the store, and paid exorbitant prices for it, and he sweated and strained through the hot summer; when he harvested his crop, he might owe more than the crop was worth. “The basest fraud on earth is agriculture,” wrote a farmer in Mississippi. “No wonder Cain killed his brother. He was a tiller of the ground.”

Merchant and planter often became the same man. If a man prospered in farming, he opened a store; if he prospered as a storekeeper, he took over land at bargain prices. But the local storekeeper did not keep all he squeezed from the farmer. He, in turn, paid high prices and high rates of interest to the factors and wholesalers who supplied him on credit. The factors and wholesalers, in turn, split what they got with manufacturers and bankers, usually in the Northeast or in Europe. In his *Origins of the New South*, C. Vann Woodward concludes: “The merchant was only a bucket on an endless chain by which the agricultural well of a tributary region was drained of its flow.”

Six decades earlier a Populist orator in Kansas, Mrs. Mary Ellen Lease, had shouted: “The great common people of this country are slaves, and monopoly is the master. The west and South are bound and prostrate before the manufacturing East.” Industrialization had occurred in the coal mines and steel mills opened in Alabama and Tennessee. Textile mills were built in Georgia and the Carolinas. Yet as late as 1900, 69 percent of the labor force of South Carolina was in agriculture, and less than 4 percent in manufacturing. At that time, fewer than one person in 25 in North Carolina lived in a town with 2,500 or more inhabitants. And these were states that had led the South in industrialization.

In industry as well as in agriculture, men in the South often worked for the benefit of men in the Northeast or in England. When an act of Congress made unrestricted the flow of cash into the Federal lands of the South, Northern capitalists poured into Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, and Mississippi. By 1888, they controlled the best stands of yellow pine and cypress in the South. When a railroad pushed into a region, Northern lumber syndicates were riding the rails before the spikes had cooled. They cut wide swaths through the South. The value of Louisiana's lumber output rose 10 times from 1880 to 1900; in the five Gulf states together, the increase was more than 5 times. And in 1900, a United States forestry expert looked back and saw probably the most rapid and reckless destruction of forests known to history. Some men did indeed get rich, but they did not live in the South anyway. By 1900, they could invest safely in Cuban sugar plantations.

State lands went the same way as Federal lands. Twelve railroads got free from Texas more than 32 million acres – their own Indiana. Florida, in 1881, sold 4 million acres to a syndicate headed by Hamilton Disston of Philadelphia, at two bits an acre; the same year Disston resold half the land to an English syndicate. Another English firm bought a big tract in the Yazoo Delta of in Mississippi; two others bought land in Texas. Most important of all the English firms in the New South was the North American Land and Timber Co., Ltd., which J. B. Watkins promoted among his English investors. The firm – and Watkins personally – bought 1.5 million acres of unsettled land along the Louisiana coast between Vermilion Bay and the Texas border. Much of it was swampland recently granted to the state by the Federal government, and the firm got it for 60 to 75 cents an acre.

Watkins hired his brother-in-law, Professor Alexander Thomson, and President Seaman A. Knapp, both of the Iowa State Agricultural College, to prove farming to be feasible on his Louisiana holdings. They opened lands for sugar and rice cultivation. By using wheat machinery on the upland prairies, they revolutionized methods of rice production; yield per man went up 10 to 20 times, and in 5 years Louisiana was the leading rice state in the country. The company started in 1882, the same year that the Southern Pacific Line linked New Orleans to San Francisco; railroad and syndicate together boomed the area. Watkins planned his own railway – with the marvelous name of Kansas City, Watkins, and Gulf – and after 1890, he built a section of it in Louisiana. He sent a railroad car filled with Louisiana products on tour of the North Central states. Midwestern settlers came to the Gulf coast; land values boomed. But Watkins had overextended his resources, and the venture did not pay off as quickly as he had hoped; it contributed to his bankruptcy in 1894.

The president of the National Cotton Planters' Association contended in 1881 that fewer than a third of the cotton plantations in the Mississippi Valley were still held by the men who had owned them in 1865, and that others were passing daily “into the hands of the commission merchants.” Behind many – if not most – commission merchants stood Northern capitalists. Behind Milton H. Smith, president of the Louisville and Nashville Railroad, stood the New York financiers Jay Gould, Thomas Fortune Ryan, Jacob Schiff, and August Belmont, who were all members of its board of directors. Behind the directors stood English investors, whose funds were ferried through the House of Rothschild, which was represented in the United States by Belmont. The rival Alabama and Chattanooga Railroad had among its investors other New York financiers, Russell Sage and Henry Clews. It had also had William D. Kelley, Congressman from Pennsylvania. Kelley was called “Pig Iron” because of his staunch service to the cause of high tariffs.

The lines of control led to New York and Boston and London and even to Lawrence, Kansas; the South was kept predominantly an agricultural section even when agriculture was simultaneously losing out. Farmers had gotten nearly 31 percent of the national income in 1859; less than 16 percent in 1889. Nearly 40 percent of the national wealth was in agriculture in 1860; only 20.5 percent in 1890.

In 1880 the average wealth per person in the states outside the South was $1,086. In the South, it was $376.

**"The Wizard of Oz: Parable on Populism"**

**by**

**Henry M. Littlefield**

On the deserts on North Africa in 1941 two tough Australian brigades went to battle singing,

 Have you heard of the wonderful wizard,

 The wonderful wizard of Oz,

 And he is a wonderful wizard,

 If ever a wizard there was.

It was a song they had brought with them from Australia and would soon spread to England. Forever afterward it reminded Winston Churchill of those "buoyant days". Churchill's nostalgia is only one symptom of the world-wide delight found in an American fairy-tale about a little girl and her odyssey in the strange land of Oz. The song he reflects upon came from a classic 1939 Hollywood production of the story, which introduced millions of people not only to the land of Oz, but to a talented young Judy Garland as well.

Ever since its publication in 1900 Lyman Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has been immensely popular, providing the basis for a profitable musical comedy, three movies and a number of plays. It is an indigenous creation, curiously warm and touching, although no one really knows why. For despite wholehearted acceptance by generations of readers, Baum's tale has been afforded neither critical acclaim, nor extended critical examination. Interested scholars, such as Russel B. Nye and Martin Gardiner, look upon The Wizard of Oz as the first in a long and delightful series of Oz stories and understandably base their appreciation for Baum's talent on the totality of his works.

The Wizard of Oz is an entity in itself, however and was not originally written with a sequel in mind. Baum informed his readers in 1901 that he had produced The Marvelous Land of Oz reluctantly and only in answer to well over a thousand letters demanding that he create another Oz tale. His original effort remains unique and to some degree separate from the books that follow. But its uniqueness does not rest alone on its peculiar and transcendent popularity.

Professor Nye finds "strain of moralism" in the Oz books, as well as "a well-developed sense of satire," and Baum stories often include searching parodies on the contradictions of human nature. The second book in the series, The Marvelous Land of Oz, is a blatant satire on feminism and the suffragette movement. In it Baum attempted to duplicate the format used so successfully in The

Wizard, yet no one has noted a similar play on contemporary movements in the latter work. Nevertheless, one does exist, and it reflects to an astonishing agree the world of political reality which surrounded Baum in 1900. In order to understand the relationship of The Wizard to turn-of-the-century America, it is necessary first to know something of Baum's background.

Born near Syracuse in 1856, Baum was brought up in a wealthy home and early became interested in the theater. He wrote some plays which enjoyed brief success and then, with his wife and two sons, journeyed to Aberdeen, South Dakota, in 1887. Aberdeen was a little prairie town and there Baum edited the local weekly until it failed in 1891.

For many years Western farmers had been in a state of loud, though unsuccessful revolt. While Baum was living in South Dakota not only was the frontier a thing of the past, but the Romantic view of benign nature had disappeared as well. The stark reality of the dry, open plain and the acceptance of man's Darwinian subservience to his environment served to crush the Romantic idealism.

Hamlin Garland's visit to Iowa and South Dakota coincided with Baum's arrival. Henry Nash observes that Garland's success as a portrayer of hardship and suffering on North-western farms was due in part to the fact that his personal experience happened to parallel the shock which the entire West received in the later 1880's from the combined effects of low prices...grasshoppers, drought, the terrible blizzards of the winter of 1886- 1887, and the juggling of freight rates..." As we shall see, Baum's prairie experience was no less deeply etched, although he did not employ

naturalism to express it.

Baum's stay in South Dakota also covered the period of the formation of the Populist party, which Professor Nye likens to a fanatic "crusade". Western farmers had for a long time sought governmental aid in the form of economic panaceas, but to no avail. The Populist movement symbolized a desperate attempt to use the power of the ballot. On 1891 Baum moved to Chicago where he was surrounded by those dynamic elements of reform which made the city so notable during the 1890's.

In Chicago Baum certainly saw the results of the frightful depression which had closed down upon the nation in 1893. Moreover, he took the part in the pivotal election of 1896, marching in "torch-light parades for William Jennings Bryan." Martin Gardiner notes besides, that he "consistently voted as a democrat... and his sympathies seem always to have been on the side of the laboring classes." No one who marched in even a few such parades could have been unaffected by Bryan's campaign. Putting all the farmers' hopes in a basket labeled "free coinage of silver,"

Bryan's platform rested mainly on the issue of adding silver to the nation's gold standard. Though he lost, he did at least bring the plight of the little man into national focus.

Between 1896 and 1899, while Baum worked and wrote in Chicago, the great depression faded away and the war with Spain thrust the United States into world prominence. Bryan maintained Midwestern control over the Democratic party, and often spoke out against American policies toward Cuba and the Philippines. By 1900 it was evident that Bryan would run again, although now imperialism and not silver seemed the issue of primary concern. In order to promote greater enthusiasm, however, Bryan felt compelled once more to sound the silver leitmotif in his

campaign. Bryan's second futile attempt at the presidency culminated in November 1900. The previous winter Baum had attempted unsuccessfully to sell a rather original volume of children's fantasy, but that April, George M. Hilt, a small Chicago publisher, finally agreed to print The Wonderful Wizard of Oz.

Baum's allegiance to the cause of the Democratic Populism must be balanced against the fact that he was not a political activist. Martin Gardiner finds through all of his writings "a theme of tolerance, with many episodes that poke fun at narrow nationalism and ethnocentricism." Nevertheless, Professor Nye quotes Baum as having a desire to write stories that would "bear the stamp or our times and depict and progressive fairies of today."

The Wizard of Oz has neither the mature religious appeal of Pilgrim's Progress, nor the philosophic depth of Candide. Baum's more thoughtful devotees see in it only a warm, cleverly written fairly tale. Yet the original Oz book conceals an unsuspected depth, and it is the purpose of this study to demonstrate that Baum's immortal American fantasy encompasses more than heretofore believed. For Baum created a children's story with a symbolic allegory implicit within its story line and characterizations. The allegory always remains in a minor key, subordinated to

the major theme and readily abandoned whenever it threatens to distort the appeal of fantasy. But through it, in the form of a subtle parable, Baum delineated a Midwesterner's vibrant and ironic portrait of this country as it entered the twentieth century.

We are introduced to both Dorothy and Kansas at the same time: "Dorothy lived in the midst of the great Kansas prairies, with Uncle Henry, who was a farmer, and

Aunt Em, who was the farmer's wife. Their house was small, for the lumber to build it had to be carried by wagon many miles. There were four wall, a floor and roof, which made one room; and this room contained a rusty-looking cooking stove, a cupboard for the dishes, a table, three of four, chairs, and three beds.

"When Dorothy stood in the doorway and looked around, she could see nothing but the great gray prairie on every side. Not a tree nor a house broke the broad sweep of flat country that reached to the edge of the sky in all directions. The sun had baked the plowed land into a gray mass, with little cracks running through it. Even the grass was not green, for the sun had burned the tops of the long blades until they were the same gray color to be seen everywhere. Once the home had been painted, but the sun had blistered the paint and the rains washed it away, and now the house

was as dull and gray as everything else.

"When Aunt Em came there to live she was a young, pretty wife. The sun and wind had changed her, too. They had taken the sparkle from her eyes and left them a sober gray; they had taken the red from her cheeks and lips, and they were gray also. She was thin and gaunt, and never smiled now. When Dorothy, who was an orphan, first came to her, Aunt Em had been so startled by the child's laughter that she would scream and press her hand upon her heart whenever Dorothy's merry voice reached her ears; and she still looked at the girl with wonder that she could find anything to laugh at.

"Uncle Henry never laughed. He worked had form morning till night and did not know what joy was. He was gray also, from his long heard to his rough boots, and he looked stern and solemn, and rarely spoke. "It was Toto that made Dorothy laugh, and saved her from growing as gray as her other surroundings . Toto was not gray; he was a little black dog, with long silky hair and small black eyes that twinkled merrily on either side of his funny, wee nose. Toto played all day long, and Dorothy played with him, and loved him dearly."

Hector St. John de Crevecoeur would not have recognized Uncle Henry's farm; it is straight out of Hamlin Garland. On it a deadly environment dominates everyone and everything except Dorothy and her pet. The setting is Old Testament and nature seems greyly impersonal and even angry. Yet it is a fearsome cyclone that lifts Dorothy and Toto in their house and deposits them "very gently- for a cyclone- in the midst of a country of marvelous beauty." We immediately sense the contrast between Oz and Kansas. Here there are "stately trees bearing rich and luscious fruits...gorgeous

flowers...and birds with...brilliant plumage" sing in the trees. In Oz "a small brook rushing and sparkling along" murmurs "in a voice very grateful to a little girl who had lived so long on the dry, gray prairies" (page 20)

Troubles intrude. Dorothy's house has come down on the wicked Witch of East, killing her. Nature, by sheer accident, can provide benefits, for indirectly the cycle has disposed of one of the two truly bad influences in the Land of Oz. Notice that evil ruled in both the East and West; after Dorothy's coming it rules in only the West.

The wicked Witch of the East had kept the little Munchkin people "in bondage for many years, making them slave for her night and day" (pp. 22-23). Just what this slavery entailed is not immediately clear, but Baum later gives us a specific example. The Tin Woodman, whom Dorothy meets on her way to the Emerald City, had been put under a spell by the Witch of the East. Once an independent and hard working human being, the Woodman found that each time he swung his axe he chopped off a different part of his body. Knowing no other trade he "worked harder than

ever," for luckily in Oz tin smiths can repair such things. Soon the Woodman was all tin (p. 59). In this way Eastern witchcraft dehumanized a simple laborer so that the faster and better he worked the more quickly he became a kind of machine. Here is a Populist view of evil Eastern influences on honest labor which could hardly be more pointed.

There is one thing seriously wrong with being made of tin; when it rains rust sets in. Tin Woodman had been standing in the same position for a year without moving before Dorothy came alone and oiled his joints. The Tin Woodman's situation has an obvious parallel in the condition of many Eastern workers after the depression of 1893. While Tin Woodman is standing still, rusted solid, he deludes himself into thinking he is no longer capable of that most human of sentiments, love. Hate does not fill the void, a constant lesson in the Oz books, and Tin Woodman feels that

only a heart sill make him sensitive again. So he accompanies Dorothy to see if the Wizard of Oz will give him a heart.

Oz itself is a magic oasis surrounded by impassable deserts, and the country is divided in a very orderly fashion. In the North and South the people are ruled by good witches, who are not quite as powerful as the wicked ones of the East and West. In the center of the land rises the magnificent Emerald City ruled by the Wizard of Oz, a successful humbug whom even the witches mistakenly feel "is more powerful than all the rest of us together"(p.24). Despite these forces, the mark of

goodness placed on Dorothy's forehead by the Witch of the North, serves as protection for Dorothy throughout her travels. Goodness and innocence prevail even over the powers of evil and delusion in Oz. Perhaps it is the basic and beautiful optimism that makes Baum's tale so characteristically American-and Midwestern.

Dorothy is Baum's Miss Everyman. She is one of us, levelheaded and human, and she has a real problem. Young readers can understand her quandary as readily as can adults. She is good, not precious, and she thinks quite naturally about others. For all of the attractions of Oz Dorothy desires only to return to the gray plains and Aunt Em and Uncle Henry. She is directed toward the Emerald City by the Good Witch of the North, since the Wizard will surely be able to solve the problem of the impassable deserts. Dorothy sets out on the Yellow Brick Road wearing the Witch of the East's magic silver shoes. Silver shoes walking on a golden road; henceforth Dorothy

becomes the innocent agent of Baum's ironic view of the Silver issue. Remember, neither Dorothy, nor the good Witch of the North, nor the Munchkins understand the power of the shoes. The allegory is abundantly clear. On the next to last page of the book Baum has Glinda, the Witch of the South, tell Dorothy, "Your Silver Shoes will carry you over the desert... If you had known their power you could have gone back to you Aunt Em the very first day you came to this country." Glinda explains, "All you have to do is knock the heels together three times and command the shoes to carry you wherever you wish to go" (p. 257) William Jennings Bryan never

outlined the advantages of the silver standard any more effectively.

Not understanding the magic of the Silver Shoes, Dorothy walks the mundane-and dangerous-Yellow Brick Road. The first person she meets is a Scarecrow. After escaping from his wooden perch, the Scarecrow displays a terrible sense of inferiority and self doubt, for he has determined that he needs real brains to replace the common straw in his head. William Allen Write wrote an article in 1896 entitled "What's the Matter With Kansas?" In it he accused Kansas farmers of ignorance, irrationality and general muddle-headedness. What's wrong with Kansas are the people, said Mr. White. Baum's character seems to have read White's angry characterization. But Baum never takes White seriously and so the Scarecrow soon emerges as innately a very shrewd and very capable character.

The Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman accompany Dorothy along the Yellow Brick Road, one seeking brains, the other a heart. They meet next the Cowardly Lion. As the King of Beasts he explains, "I learned that if I roared very loudly every living thing was frightened and got out of my way." Born a coward, he sobs, "Whenever there is danger my heart begins to beat fast." "Perhaps you have a heart disease,"suggests Tin Woodman, who always worries about hearts. But the Lion desires only courage and so he joins the party to ask for help from the Wizard (pp.65-72).

The Loin represents Bryan himself. In the election of 1896 Bryan lost the vote of Eastern labor, though he tried hard to gain their support. In Baum's story the Lion, on meeting the little group, "struck at the Tin Woodman with his sharp claws." But, to his surprise, "he could make no impression on the tin, although the Woodman fell over in the road and lay still." Baum here refers to the fact that in 1896 workers were often pressured into voting for McKinley and gold by their employers. Amazed, the Lion says, "he blunted my claws," and he adds even more appropriately, "When they scratched against the tin it made a cold shiver run down my back" (pp.67-68). The

King of Beasts is not after all very cowardly, and Bryan, although a pacifist and an anti-imperialist in a time of national expansion, is not either. The magic Silver Shoes belong to Dorothy, however. Silver's potent charm, which had come to mean so much to so many in the Midwest, could not be entrusted to a political symbol. Baum delivers Dorothy from the world of adventure and fantasy to the real world of heartbreak and desolation through the power of Silver. It represents a real force in the land of illusion, and neither the Cowardly Lion nor Bryan truly needs or understands its use.

All together now the small party moves toward the Emerald City. Coxey's Army of tramps and indigents, marching to ask President Cleveland for work in 1894, appears no more naively innocent than this group of four characters going to see a humbling Wizard, to request favors that only the little girl among them deserves.

Those who enter the Emerald City must wear glasses. Dorothy later discovers that the greenness of dresses and ribbons disappears on leaving and everything becomes bland white. Perhaps the magic of any city is thus self imposed. But the Wizard dwells here and so the Emerald City represents the national Capitol. The Wizard, a little bumbling old man, hiding behind a facade of paper mache and noise, might be any President from Grant to McKinley. He comes straight from the fairgrounds in Omaha, Nebraska, and he symbolizes the American criterion for leadership-he is able to be everything to everybody.

As each of our heroes enters the throne room to ask a favor the Wizard assumes different shapes, representing different views toward national leadership. To Dorothy, he appears as an enormous head, "bigger than the head of the biggest giant." An apt image for a naive and innocent little citizen. To the Scarecrow he appears to be a lovely gossamer fairy, a most appropriate form for an idealistic Kansas farmer. The Woodsman sees a horrible beast, as would any exploited Eastern

laborer after the trouble of the 1890's. But the Cowardly Lion, like W.J. Bryan, sees a "Ball of Fire, so fierce and glowing he could scarcely bear to gaze upon it." Baum then provides an additional analogy, for when the Lion "tried to go nearer he singed his whiskers and he crept back trembling to a spot near the door" (p. 134).

The Wizard has asked them all to kill the Witch of the West. The golden road does not go in that direction and so they must follow the sun, as have many pioneers in the past. The land they now pass through is "rougher and hillier, for there were no farms nor houses in the country of the West and the ground was untilled" (p.140). The Witch of the West uses natural forces to achieve her ends; she is Baum's version of sentient and malign nature.

Finding Dorothy and her friends in the West, the Witch sends forty wolves against them, then forty vicious crows and finally a great swarm of black bees. But it is through the power of the magic golden cap that she summons the flying monkeys. They capture the little girl and dispose of her companions. Baum makes these Winged Monkeys into an Oz substitute for the plains of the Indians. Their leader says. "Once...we were a free people, living happily in the great forest, flying from tree to tree, eating nuts and fruit, and doing just as we pleased without calling anybody

master." "This," he explains, "was many years ago, long before Oz came out of the clouds to rule over this land" (p.172). But like many Indian tribes Baum's monkey tribes are not inherently bad; their action depend wholly upon the bidding of others. Under the control of goodness and innocence, as personified by Dorothy, the monkeys are helpful and kind, although unable to take her to Kansas. Says the Monkey King, "We belong to this country alone, and cannot leave it" (p. 213). The same could be said with equal truth about the first Americans.

Dorothy presents a special problem to the Witch. Seeing the mark on Dorothy's forehead and the Silver Shoes on her feet, the Witch begins "to tremble with fear, for she knew what a powerful charm belonged to them." Then "she happened to look into the child's eyes and say how simple the soul behind them was, and that the little girl did not know of the wonderful power the Silver Shoes gave her" (p. 150). Here Baum again uses the allegory to state the blunt homily that while fondness affords a people ultimate protection against evil, ignorance of their capabilities allows evil to impose itself upon them. The Witch assumes the proportions of a kind of Western Mark Hanna of Banker Boss, who, through natural malevolence, manipulates the people and holds them prisoner by cynically taking advantage of their innate innocence.

Enslaved in the West, "Dorothy went to work meekly, with her mind made up to work as hard as she could; for she was glad the Wicked Witch had decided not to kill her" (p. 150). Many Western pioneers have held these same grim thought in less mystical terms. If the Witch of the West is a diabolical force of Darwinian of Spenserian nature, then another contravening force may be counted upon to dispose of her. Dorothy destroys the evil Witch by angrily dousing her with a bucket of warm water, that precious commodity which the drought-ridden farmers of the great plains needed so badly, and which if correctly used could create an agricultural paradise, or at least dissolve a wicked witch. Plain water brings an end to malign nature in the West.

When Dorothy and her companions return to the Emerald City they soon discover that the Wizard is really nothing more that "a little man with a bald head and a wrinkled face." Can this be the ruler of the land?

Our friends looked at him with surprise and dismay. "I thought Oz was a great head," said Dorothy... "And I though that Oz was a terrible Beast," said the Tin Woodman. "And I thought Oz was a Ball of Fire," exclaimed the Lion. "No; you are all wrong," said the little man meekly. "I have been making believe." Dorothy asks if he is truly a great Wizard. He confides, "Not a bit of it, my dear; I'm just a common man." Scarecrow adds, "You're more than that...you're a humbug" (p.184).

The Wizard's deception is of long standing in Oz and even the Witches were taken in. How was it accomplished? "It was a great mistake my ever letting you into the throne room," the Wizard complains. "Usually I will not see even my subjects, and so they believe I am something terrible" (p.185). What a wonderful lesson for youngsters of the decade when Benjamin Harrison, Grover Cleveland and William McKinley were hiding in the White House. Formerly the Wizard was a mimic, a ventriloquist and a circus balloonist. The latter trade involved going "up in a balloon on circus day, so as to draw a crowd of people together and to get them to pay to see the circus" (p.186-87). Such skills are as admirably adapted to success in late-nineteenth-century politics as they are to the humbug wizardry of Baum's story. A pointed comment on Midwestern political ideals is the fact that our little Wizard comes from western political ideals is the fact that our little Wizard comes from Omaha, Nebraska, a center of Populist agitation. "Why that isn't very far from Kansas," cries Dorothy. Nor, indeed, are any of the characters in the wonderful land of Oz.

The Wizard, of course, can provide the objects of self-delusion desired by the Tin Woodman, Scarecrow and Lion. But Dorothy's hope of going home fades when the Wizard's balloon leaves too soon. Understand this: Dorothy wishes to leave a green and fabulous land, from which all evil has disappeared, to go back to the gray desolation of Kansas prairies. Dorothy is an orphan, Aunt Em and Uncle Henry are her only family. Reality is never far from Dorothy's consciousness and in the most heartrending terms she explains her reasoning to the Witch Glenda,

"Aunt Em will surely think something dreadful has happened to me, and that will make her put on mourning; and unless the crops are better this year than they were last I am sure Uncle Henry cannot afford it."(p.254)

The Silver Shoes furnish Dorothy with a magic means of travel. But when she arrives back in Kansas she finds, "The Silver Shoes had fallen off in her flight through the air, and were lost forever in the desert" (p.259). Were the "her" to refer to America in 1900, Baum's statement could hardly be contradicted.

Current historiography tends to criticize the Populist movement for its "delusions, myths and foibles," Professor C. Vann Woodward observes recently. Yet The Wonderful Wizard of Oz has provided unknowing generations with a gentle and friendly Midwestern critique of the Populist rationale on these very same grounds. Led by naive innocense and protected by good will, the farmer, the laborer and the politician approach the mystic holder of the national power to ask for personal fulfillment. Their desires, as well as the Wizard's cleverness in answering them, are all self-delusion. Each of these characters carries within him the solution to his own problem, were he only to view himself objectively. The fearsome Wizard turns out to be nothing more than a common man, capable of shrewd but mundane answers to these self-induced needs. Like any good politician he gives the people what they want. Throughout the story Baum poses a central thought; the American desire for symbols of fulfillment is illusory. Real needs lie elsewhere.

Thus the Wizard cannot help Dorothy, for of all the characters only she has a wish that is selfless, and only she has a direct connection to honest, hopeless human beings. Dorothy supplies real fulfillment when she returns to her aunt and uncle, using the Silver Shoes, and cures some of their misery and heartache. In the way Baum tells us that the Silver crusade at least brought back Dorothy's lovely spirit to the disconsolate plains farmer. Her laughter, love and good will are no small addition to the gray land, although the magic of Silver has been lost forever as a result.

**The Farmer and the Realities**

**By Richard Hofstadter (1955)**

To what extent was the agrarian myth actually false? When it initially took form in America during the 18th century, its stereotypes did indeed correspond to many of the realities of American agricultural life. There were commercial elements in colonial agriculture almost from the earliest days, but there were also large numbers of independent yeomen who fit into the ideal the myth set up: they had remarkable self-sufficiency, and bequeathed to their children a strong inclination for craftsman-like improvisation and a tradition of household industry. For a long time, the commercial potentialities of agriculture were held in check by severe obstacles. Only the farmers very near to the rivers and the towns had adequate transportation. The small industrial population provided a very limited domestic market, and the villagers raised a large part of their own food. Outside the South, operations above the size of the family farm were cramped by the absence of a force of wage laborers. At the beginning of the 19th century – when the American population was still living largely in the forests, poised at the edge of the Appalachians, standing on the verge of the great drive across the prairies that occupied settlers for half a century – the yeoman was by no means a figment of history’s imagination.

From colonial days, there had always been before the eyes of the yeoman farmer in the settled areas alluring models of commercial success in agriculture: the tobacco, rice, and indigo planters of the South; the grain, meat, and cattle exporters of the middle colonies. In America, the spirit of emulation was exceptionally strong, and the opportunities were considerable. The farmer knew that without cash he could never rise above the hardships and squalor of pioneering and of life in a log cabin. Self-sufficiency produced savings, and these savings ultimately bought more land, herds, flocks, and better tools; they erected barns and silos and better dwellings, among other improvements. When there was spare time, the farmer often worked off the farm to add to his cash resources, at first in trapping, hunting, fishing, or lumbering, later in the maintenance of and repair of railroads. Domestic politics were persistently affected by his desire to access more efficient means of getting a cash crop to market – most commonly turnpikes and canals. The foreign policy of the early republic was determined again and again by the clamor of farmers to keep open the river outlets for American produce.

Between 1815 and 1860, the character of American agriculture was transformed. The independent yeoman almost disappeared before the relentless advance of commercial agriculture, and he remained prevalent only in exceptional or isolated areas. The rise of native industry created a home market for agriculture, while at the same time demands arose abroad – first for American cotton and then for American foodstuffs. A network of turnpikes, canals, and railroads linked the planter and the advancing Western farmer to these new markets, while the Eastern farmer, spurred by Western competition, began to cultivate more thoroughly the nearby urban outlets for his products. As the farmer moved out onto the flat, rich prairies, he found possibilities for the use of machinery that were not feasible in the forest. Before long, he was cultivating the prairies with horse-drawn mechanical reapers, steel plows, wheat and corn drills, and threshers. The cash crop converted the yeoman into a small but burgeoning entrepreneur, and the development of horse-drawn machinery made obsolete the simple, old agrarian symbol of the plow. Farmers ceased to be free of what the early agrarian writers had called the “corruptions” of trade. They were, to be sure, still “independent” – in the sense that they owned their land. They were a hardworking lot in the old tradition. But no longer did they grow or manufacture only what they needed: they concentrated on the cash crop and began to buy more of their supplies from the county store rather than produce it at home. To take full advantage of mechanization, they engrossed as much land as they could; to mechanize fully, they borrowed cash. Where they could not buy or borrow they might rent; by the 1850s, Illinois farmers who could not afford machines and large barns were hiring itinerant jobbers with machines to do their threshing. The shift from self-sufficiency to commercial farming varied in time throughout the West and cannot be dated with precision, but it was complete in Ohio by about 1830 and twenty years later in Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. Throughout this great “Northwest” – now considered the Midwest – farmers whose ancestors might have lived in isolation and self-sufficiency saw themselves surrounded by jobbers, banks, stores, middlemen, horses, and machinery; and while this process was unfinished in 1860, the demands of the Civil War certainly brought it to completion. As a prairie farmer said in 1868: “The old rule that a farmer should produce all that he required, and that the surplus represented his gains, is part of the past. Agriculture, like all other forms of business, is better for its subdivisions; each man grows that which is best suited to his soil, skill, climate and market, and with his proceeds purchases his other needs.”

The triumph of commercial agriculture not only rendered obsolete the objective conditions that had given the agrarian myth so much of its original force, but also showed that the image which was implicit in the myth was contesting the ground with another, even stronger image – the notion of opportunity, of career, of the self-made man. The same forces in American life that had made Jacksonian equalitarianism possible and had given to the equalitarian theme in the agrarian romance its most compelling appeal had also unleashed in the nation an entrepreneurial zeal probably without precedent in history, a rage for business, for profits, for opportunity, for advancement. If the yeoman family was to maintain itself in the simple terms eulogized in the myth, it had to produce consistently a type of character that was satisfied with a traditional way of life. But the Yankee farmer, continually exposed to the cult of success that was everywhere around him, became inspired by a kind of personal dynamism which called upon the individual to surpass traditions. He was not a “tradition-directed” but an “inner-directed” man. Agrarian sentiment sanctified labor in the soil and in the simple life, but the prevailing Calvinist atmosphere of rural life implied that virtue was rewarded, after all, with success and material goods.

Frequent and sensational rises in land values bred a boom psychology in the American farmer and caused him to rely for his margin of profit more on the process of appreciation than on the sale of crops. It took a strong man to resist the temptation to ride skyward on lands that might easily triple or quadruple their value in one decade and then double again in the next. It seemed ultraconservative to improve existing possessions if one could put savings or borrowings into new land. What developed in America was an agricultural society whose real attachment was not to the land but to the values. In the 1830s, Tocqueville found this to be the prevailing characteristic of American agriculture:

*“Almost all the farmers of the United States combine some trade with agriculture; most of them make agriculture itself a trade. It seldom happens that an American farmer settles permanently upon the land which he occupies; especially in the districts of the far west, he brings land into tillage in order to sell it again, and not to farm it; he builds a farmhouse on the speculation that, as the state of the country will soon be changed by the increase of population, a good price will be gotten for it. Thus the Americans carry their business-like qualities into agriculture, and their trading passions are displayed in that as they are in their other pursuits.”*

The desire for speculation and the lure of new and different lands bred in the American farmer a tremendous passion for moving – and this was found not merely, as one common view would have it, in those who failed, but also in those who succeeded. The fresh lands may have served on occasion as a safety valve for farmers who had made out badly; but for others – those who had made out well enough on a speculative basis, as well as those who were only beginning a farming “career,” – it was wholly a risk valve, an opportunity to exploit the full possibilities of the great American land bubble. In a nation whose soil is notoriously heterogeneous, mobility among farmers had serious effects upon the long-standing agricultural tradition of inattentive cultivation: farmers too often had little chance to get to know the quality of their land; they failed to plan and manure and replenish; they neglected diversification for the one-crop system and ready cash. There was among them little attachment to land or locality; instead, there developed the false euphoria of local “boosting,” encouraged by railroads, land companies, and even farmers themselves, in place of village contacts and communal spirit based upon ancestral attachments; there was professional optimism based upon hopes for a quick rise in values.

In a very real and profound sense, then, the United States failed to develop – except in some localities, chiefly in the east – a distinctively rural culture. If the late 19th-century elements of the term “rural culture” fit along the lines of the traditional, pre-capitalist definition – constituting emotional and craftsman-like dedication to the soil, tradition-directed rather than career-directed types of character, and a village community habitually attuned to familial and communal action – then the prairies and plains never had a “rural culture.” What differentiated the agricultural life of these regions from the practices widespread in European agriculture – or, for that matter, what separated it from the stereotype of the agrarian myth – was not simply that it produced for a market but also that it was so speculative, so mobile, so mechanized, so “progressive,” so thoroughly imbued with the commercial spirit.

In America, the greater availability of land and the scarcity of labor made for extensive agriculture which was wasteful of the soil, and placed a premium on machines to bring large tracts under cultivation. The farmer’s demand for expensive machinery, his expectation of higher standards of living, and his tendency to go into debt to acquire extensive acreage all created an urgent need for cash, and tempted the farmer into capitalizing more and more on his greatest single asset: the unearned appreciation in the value of his land. The managerial skill required for success under these conditions was as much businesslike as craftsman-like. The predominance in American agriculture of the isolated farmstead standing in the midst of great acreage, the frequent movements, the absence of village life – these all were forces which deprived the farmer and his family of the advantages of community, lowered the chances of association and co-operation, and encouraged that rampant, suspicious, and almost suicidal individualism for which the American farmer was long noted and which organizations like the Grange tried to combat. The characteristic product of American rural society was not a yeoman or a villager, but a harassed little country businessman who worked very hard, moved all too often, gambled with his land, and made his way alone.

The self-defeating tendency of relatively cheap land in a speculative society is perfectly illustrated in an intensive contemporary study of a Nebraska township by Arthur F. Bentley. This township was first settled around 1871. In the early days – when land prices were low – there was a prosperous period of rapid settlement, and the farmer's rate of profit was high whenever he had good crops; this encouraged him to buy and work more land than he could properly manage. The rapid appreciation of the price of land led him to try to realize his gains in advance by mortgaging. As fast as he could increase his loan he would do so, using the funds either to pay temporary losses or for further investment and speculation. “It is true,” Bentley observed, “the farmer may often have suffered from excessive interest and grasping creditors; but it was less frequently the avarice of the leader that got him into trouble than the fact that he was too sanguine and too prone to believe that he could safely go into debt, on the assumption that crops and prices in the, future would equal those in the present.” At any rate, the typical farmer soon found himself in such a vulnerable position that one bad crop year or a brief temporary cessation of increase in land values, such as that of 1890, would put him on the verge of failure. Those farmers who came in early and took government land, who managed their land with some skill and got clear of heavy debt, made out well; those who came later, took railroad land, and made the usual errors of management were in straits. By 1892, when Bentley made his study, he concluded that a would-be purchaser who did not have enough capital to buy his farm outright and to hold it over subsequent periods of hard times “had almost better throw his money away than invest it in farming operations in Nebraska at the current prices of land and under the present agricultural conditions, unless he be possessed of unusual energy and ability.”

In pointing to the farmer's commercial role I am not trying to deny the difficulties of his position or the reality and seriousness of his grievances – the appreciation of debts through deflation, the high cost of credit, inequitable tax burdens, discriminatory railroad rates, unreasonable elevator and storage charges. Populism can best be understood, however, not as a product of the frontier inheritance, but as another episode in the well-established tradition of American entrepreneurial radicalism, which goes back at least to the Jacksonian era. It was an effort on the part of a few important segments of a highly heterogeneous capitalistic agriculture to restore profits in the face of much exploitation and under unfavorable market and price conditions. It arose as a part of a transitional stage in the history of American agriculture, in which the commercial farmer was beginning to cast off habits of thought and action created almost as much by the persistence of the agrarian myth as by the realities of his position. He had long since taken from business society its acquisitive goals and its speculative temper, but he was still practicing the competitive individualism sectors of industry and finance had outgrown. He had not yet learned much from business about its marketing devices, strategies of combination, or skills of self-defense and self-advancement through pressure politics. His dual identity itself was not yet resolved. He entered the 20th century still affected by his yeoman inheritance but with a growing awareness of the businesslike character of his future.