CHAPTER VII

THE FARMER'S PROTEST

The strongest factor in the economic life of the United States in 1878 was, as it had always been, the farm and the farmer. (1) In numbers the farmer far outstripped any one of the four classes into which the census divided the country's wealth producers. The census of 1880

1) Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City (A History of American Life X) 1-2

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tells us that out of a population of some fifty million people (50,155,099,) we had 17,393,099 in "gainful and reputable occupations." 7,670,493 of these were in agriculture. (1) It was almost exactly twice as many as were at that time in manufacturing and mining and over four times as many as in trade and transportation. (2)

In 1879 the value of what these farmers sold, consumed, and had on hand, was estimated to be around two and a quarter billion. (3) It was on their production that the greatest manufacturing units of the country were then based. They furnished the wheat, the corn, the rye for our biggest industry, that of grist and flour making.

In 1880 the flour and grist mill industry led all other industries in the United States with a total value of $505,185,712, meat packing and slaughtering coming second with a value of product of $303,562,413.

This milling industry was the outcome of the efforts of a few mills in and near Minneapolis, Minnesota, to make a better grade of flour with less waste of grain than they

1) Compendium of the Tenth Census, Part II. Page 1345

2) Compendium of the Tenth Census, Part II. Page 1343
   All occupations in 1880 were 17,392,099
   Agriculture - 7,670,493
   Professional and Personal Services - 4,074,238
   Trade and Transportation - 1,810,256
   Manufacturing, Mechanical and Mining industries - 3,837,112

3) Compendium of Tenth Census, Part I. Page 685. (2,213,402,564)

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had been doing by the old-fashioned way of grinding between an upper and nether millstone. The first step had been a middlings purifier, that is a machine which would remove the thick coat between the bran covering of the wheat kernel and the stock centers. (1) A Frenchman in Minneapolis named Edmond L. La Croix had built the first middlings purifier in 1870 and a fellow workman had secured a patent and formed a company in 1878 which gathered together all of the other patents which had been taken for the process.

The real revolution in milling came along soon after the general acceptance of the middlings purifier. This was breaking the grain by rollers. The inventor of the process and the machine for carrying it out was the son of a Welshman who had brought his family to Neenah, Wisconsin in 1854. John Stevens was fifteen then. He went to work in a flour mill and as youth all over the country was doing from the first took an intelligent and critical interest in what was going on about him. Later he was able to buy an interest in the mill, become its manager. He had seen a fellow miller use smooth instead of rough or picked face stones, saw that he got a larger percentage of "good flour." He began experimenting, keeping his results to himself until

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1) Nevins, Allan. The Emergence of Modern America (A History of American Life, VIII) 38-39
Folwell, W. W. A History of Minnesota (St. Paul, 1924-1930) III, 68-69

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finally in 1880 he came out with a machine in which a roller of corrugated chilled iron broke the grain. Attached to it he had a valuable device for feeding in the wheat. With this machine Stevens was able to get five hundred barrels of flour where his competitors got two hundred barrels at best. Moreover, he was able to get ninety percent good flour and only ten percent of the cheap flour, instead of twenty and eighty percent respectively as was the rule! (1)

According to Chas. A. Pillsbury, one of the greatest millers of the day, "The old process aimed to get as much flour as possible at one grinding; the new seeks to get as little as possible at the first two or three breakings. The old millstones were set so close together that the weight of the upper stone rested almost wholly upon the grain. The first rollers in the new process are set so far apart that the kernel is simply split for the liberation of the germ and crease. The old process sought to avoid middlings as far as possible, because they entailed the loss of flour. The new process seeks to reproduce as much middlings as possible, because out of the middlings comes the high grade 'patent' flour." (2)

The largest milling center in the United States by 1880 was Minneapolis, Minnesota. Eighteen years before when its first flour was sent out it was

1) Encyclopaedia Americana II. Page 387
2) Depew, Chauncey, M/ One Hundred Years of American Commerce (N.Y.1895) 270 Article by Chas. A. Pillsbury.

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branded "Muskingum Mills, Troy, Ohio - "The Genuine." Nobody had ever heard of ~~flour made by~~ Minnesota flour. The millers feared it would be turned back if they put an honest label on it. It was not long, however, before the new flour ~~from the Muskingum Mills~~ was so in demand that its name was changed ~~to Minnesota flour~~. The stencil with which the first flour made in Minnesota was branded was cut by James J. Hill out of the oil paper he used in his manifold book as a bill clerk on the levee. (1)

Another new industry built on a product of the farm was glucose. It had started in the '70's, developed rapidly, until in 1881 there were nineteen factories in the States of New York, Ohio, Illinois, Michigan, Iowa and Missouri. Together they consumed about thirty five thousand bushels of corn per day and between eleven and twelve million per year. Their estimated capital was $2,000,000 and they employed two thousand one hundred persons. By 1884 it was estimated that the yearly manufacture and sale of glucose amounted to about ten pounds per capita, its chief uses being in the manufacture of table syrups, strained honey, confectionery, and the cheaper grades of sugar, as well as food for bees, and in the manufacture of condensed milk and

1) Pyle, Joseph Gilpin. The Life of James J. Hill. Vol. I. Page 42 (1917)

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mucilage. (1)

The industry kept growing and in July or August of 1897 the Glucose Trust under the name of the Glucose Sugar Refining Company was formed, including all plants in the country but one and with a capital of over $40,000,000. Later it became the subject of a report by the United States Industrial Commission. According to the testimony of H. O. Havemeyer of the Sugar Trust before the Industrial Commission, "the syrup made from glucose has virtually knocked out the consumption of refined molasses in this country." (2)

A considerable item in the new wealth the farm was creating was to be credited to the increase in rapid transportation. Thanks to the railroads the South was growing small fruits and fresh vegetables for the North. In 1879 Mississippi sold $10,000 worth of strawberries to Chicago. She had begun to sell peas and beans, that is, the early fruit and early vegetable had appeared in the market in the North. Other parts of the South quickly got into the game providing a link between the two sections, a link in nationalization. (3)

The economic value of the farmer had been forced upon the Nation at the outset of our period by the part his products had played in finally breaking the back of the longest and

1) Annual Cyclopaedia for 1884 (1885)

2) Industrial Commission. Vol. XIII Page 934

3) Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City (A History of American Life) 3, 412

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cruelest depression the country had ever experienced, that started by the Panic of 1873. It had dragged its length for over five years. Even in 1879 an observer of world commerce wrote -

"Since 1872 the whole commercial world has been languishing under some depressing influence which has affected production and trade with a progressive paralysis from which I yet see no hopeful signs of recovery." (1)

The farmers' surplus and a European famine had been the strongest factors in restoring prosperity. "It is to the abundance of agricultural production as compared with our home consumption and the largely increased and highly profitable markets abroad which we have enjoyed in recent years that we are mainly indebted to our present prosperity as a people," President Hayes told Congress in his message of December 1, 1879. (2)

The country generally believed with him and agreed that what was needed was more farmers raising more produce and as we have seen the Federal and State governments, railroad land agents, steamship companies, manufacturers, emigrants already naturalized had united in one of the loudest and most seductive calls to the land the country had ever heard.

1) The Annual Cyclopaedia for 1879. Page 163
Nevins, Allan. Emergence of Modern America (A History of American Life) Chaps. XIII-XIV

2) Messages and Papers of the Presidents. Hayes, Rutherford B. Vol. VII. Page 578

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This drive to people unsettled land, particularly the states West of the Mississippi, resulted in the first decade of our period in an increase in the number of farms in the United States from 4,008,907 to 4,564,641. (1) The farms were larger by some three acres - 133.7 acres in 1880, 136.5 in 1890 - and more important there had been a four percent increase in improved land. The contribution of the farmer to national wealth increased by some $4,000,000,000. The farmer was not satisfied, however. He felt that he was not getting his share of the wealth he was creating, that too large a percentage was going to the agencies which had been built up to serve him - the railroads, markets, the industries based on his raw products. All of this new economic machinery bewildered and antagonised him. Basically it was contrary to his philosophy.

By inheritance, association, conviction, the farmer was deeply individualistic. He wanted to do for himself; he believed that the most satisfactory material results, as well as the finest individual development, came from self-reliance.

1) Abstract of the Twelfth Census. Page 217

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Now he saw himself more and more dependent upon an economic order which was yielding to collectivism. He was not without collective sense, collective practices. His church had been a community as well as a religious center; his schools were collective enterprises; so were his organizations to take care of the poor, the old. He had always acknowledged these responsibilities but when he came to business he would run it to suit himself. That was becoming more and more impossible.

The cycle of growing, harvesting and distributing his crop had been in his own hands. He understood its problems - bad years, inefficient labor, wayward sons - and had learned how to deal with them. If the life was hard it was regular, its difficulties could be met because expected, understood.

Once he had hauled his produce to town where in the open market he traded it in, and came home with the fruit of his labor in calico, sugar, seeds, new plows, harnesses. It was an intimate, personal process which gave a sense of adequacy and control. But all this was over. His market was made elsewhere and with its making he had nothing to do. His prices rose and fell according to the operations of those he considered gamblers. By what right did James Keene and his associates attempt a corner in wheat in Chicago in this year, 1880? It failed with great loss to the manipulators. But why

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should they be allowed to juggle what he had produced? Where the farmer did / come in when Armour & Company in the same year cornered his pork, controlled the supply for months, winding up in the Fall with huge profits? (1)

He mistrusted the railroads. In periods of rate wars they carried his produce at loss to themselves, but when they had come to an agreement, gone into a pool, it was frequently at a loss to him. The instability of rates made forcasts unreliable - destroyed his careful planning. He was coming to look on the railroad as his enemy, not as his friend as he had expected it to be in the days when the government was aiding it by great grants of land - for his benefit he was told. Particularly did he fear the stady consolidations of the railroads into systems by which one man or group of men controlled the transportation and trade of a great area of country, the process of consolidation by which telegraph companies were rapidly coming under one management, closely allied to the railroads, disturbed him, but not more than the industrial pools and the threatned industrial trusts for handling necessaries of his life/ He saw with anxiety that distrusted the tariff. this process of consolidation was beginning to touch his small neighborhood craft shops on which he had deperded. The grist mill was being put out of business by the great milling centers.

1) Annual Cyclopaedia for 1880. Page 126

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The number of carpenter shops, of cooper shops, of blacksmith shops and wheelwrights decreased under his eyes yet he surmised that the number of people employed and the amount of work done by the smaller number of units was greater. He was right about it.

The census of 1880 (1) declares that while in the ten previous years there had been practically no gain in the number of manufacturing establishments in the country, there were now 10.7 hands where there had been eight and an average capital of $10,992.00 in contrast to one of $8,400.00. The number of cooper shops had fallen off some twenty two percent, but the men employed had increased eleven percent. There was something parallel going on in certain hand trades with which the farmer had been familiar all his life. The individual carpenters and their little working shops were disappearing. One door sash and blind factory did the work of many men. Sometimes this meant taking the particular industry from the community with the consequent putting of men out of work, destruction of investments. Again it meant a factory with a skilled craftsman feeding a machine.

He feared this movement not because he did not frequently get from it better and cheaper service but because he saw in it a concentration in fewer and fewer hands

1) Compendium of Census of 1880. Vol. II. Page 926

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of the growing wealth of his community and he feared power in wealth as he feared it in government.

The restlessness of men under these changes disturbed those farmers who rested their economic case on staying by an enterprise, seeing it through. The ease with which their neighbors sold out, moved west or south, went into new deals and new places, gave up the land for the factory, the country for the town, kept the conservative, the stick-to-ative, troubled. (1) Something was wrong when a whole countryside was abandoned as sometimes happened, towns left to fall apart.

The waste involved in the breaking up of his traditional ways, the change, the instability of men, disturbed the thoughtful. They had been reared to what Horace Bushnell calls, "A closely guided habit of economy. Harnessed all together in the producing process, young and old, male and female, from the boy that rode the plow horse to the grand mother knitting under her spectacles, they had no conception of squandering lightly what they had all been at work, thread by thread, grain by grain, to produce." (2)

But squandering was a part of the newer methods of production. All about him he saw railroads hastily laid and abandoned - "streaks of rust" - soon to be obliterated leaving only a ridge in the land. He saw abandoned canals, ———

1) On the trend to the city see Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City (A History of American Life) Chapter III

2) Bushnell, Horace. Work and Play - A Library of the World's Best Literature. Page 2921

Digital Image, 2011. The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

abandoned farms and factory buildings, even abandoned towns. Who paid for this waste? It went into prices, into taxes. He paid for it. Would not calculation, consideration for the men and women upon whose efforts the success of these undertakings must depend have prevented the waste?

His chief grievance was his difficulty in getting at reasonable rates - the money to carry on his business. He must borrow ~~know~~ in the spring to put in his crop, but he claimed the money cost him more than it cost other wealth producers, more than it cost the railroad, the industries for short term credit. If he had not been heavily ~~keenly~~ mortgaged the cost of money while he was making his cotton or corn or wheat crop would have been less of a burden, but in certain states he was heavily mortgaged and paying high interest. By 1890 the majority of Kansas farmers, 64.4 percent, were mortgaged up to 38 percent of their value and they owners were sweating under interest rates averaging 8.1 percent. Not remarkable that a large increase in tenant farmers was reported. No other state was quite so deep in debt, but there were several where the situation was threatening, Minnesota with 46.4 percent of her farmers carrying mortgages at 8.2 percent - Iowa with 53.8 at 7.3 percent.

Vermont and Massachusetts and New Jersey farmers carried almost as many mortgages as the Western states named but their interest was lower - under six percent. (1)

1) New York Evening Post. Sept. 6,1893. Editorial digest of Report on Farm Mortgages made by Eleventh Census (1890)

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The New York Evening Post found the bottom of the Western perdicament to be in the case with which they had at the start obtained credit, but having exhausted this collaterial a bad year or years brought disaster. It was "a credit system which enabled farmers to borrow heavily where tradesmen in like circumstances could not. Such borrowers take the chances; many succeed in paying off debts and accumulating money; a few fail and complain loudly of the small amount of the circulating medium per capita." (1)

Gradually the farmer was concluding that he must regain control of the essential factors in his problem; take things into his hands and to do this he must employ the principle that railroads and industries were using to such good effect. There must be a national consolidation of farmers.

The makings of a national union existed at the opening of our period. There was the Grange (2) dating from 1867 once popular and powerful but beginning to be replaced by 1878 in many sections of the South, West and North by more radical pubnacious organizations, known as Alliances. The parent of these associations originated in Lampasas County, Texas, in 1875. At The first ~~the~~ object of the association was purely local, its purpose being to protect the farmers of that section against the depredations of horse and cattle thieves. Similar alliances later started in other parts of the state to handle local problems. These groups finally united and were chartered in 1881 under the name of the Texas Farmers' State Alliance. It

1) Nevins, Allan. The Emergence of Modern America. (A History of American Life) Pages 169-173. 176-177. 371-372

2) Ydem.

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spread rapidly over the state and in 1887 united with the Farmers' Union of Louisiana in the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union of America and into this new union soon came alliances which had been forming in ten or more other states of the South and Southwest where the need of self help was strongly felt. (1)

In these states the farmers' plight was worse than in the North and West, that is there was less chance of their achieving the farmer's ambition of owning unencumbered land because of the cropper system and the particularly hard credit condition. (2) Crop failures left them more hopelessly tied by debts they could never hope to clear up. In the West the mortgage holder foreclosed; the farmer had an opportunity to move on bankrupt but free to seek another chance. The Southern cropper usually found himself compelled to work for his landlord for life.

In 1889 the National Farmers' Alliance and Cooperative Union of America was joined by the Agricultural Wheel now six years old. According to one of its "lecturers," as the organizers of the farmers' alliances were called, it "first saw the light of day in February, 1882, at Mr. Bee's school house, about ten miles West of Des Arc in Prairie County, Arkansas. It was originated with nine members headed by W. W. Tedford, a farmer and school teacher and was intended merely as a debating society.

1) Buck, Solon J. The Granger Movement (Howard Historical Studies, XIX) 302-304

2) Schlesinger, A. M. The Rise of the City (A History of American Life) Pages 6-7, 17-18

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The debates having taken an economic turn, the opposition to monopoly and corruption in politics soon became a cardinal principle with the infant organization.

"In March, 1882, there were three clubs in Prairie County, with about two hundred members, and it was decided to incorporate under the State laws. A meeting of the three societies was called and a platform and declaration of principles adopted. Suggestions for a name were called for and as the members were mainly farmers they wished to adopt a name

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suggestive of the agricultural calling. Several names were mentioned, among which were 'The Plow', 'The Wagon', 'The Reaper', and several others, all of which were objected to until finally, 'The Wheel' was suggested and accepted as the name of the order." (1)

The Wheel had increased in size and speed, was a national body when it was merged with state alliances under the name of Farmers' and Laborers' Union of America.

The Constitution of this merger was general and theoretical with no more specific demand than "equal rights for all and special favors to none," no more direct pledge than to "suppress personal, local, sectional and national prejudices, all unhealthy rivalry and all selfish ambitions" - in which pledge no doubt it was expressing its opinion as to what had to date made the cooperative efforts of the Alliances no more successful than they had been.

As for its laws they were "reason and equity", its cardinal doctrines inspire purity of thought and life; its intention is on earth peace and good will to man." (2)

The economic condition forcing ~~and holding~~ them to combine was ~~but~~ expressed in the large body of songs they were already singing. A favorite known as "The Song of the Populists" was sung to the tune of "The Bonnie Blue Flag."

1) Ashby, N. B. Riddle of the Sphinx. Pages 439-440

2) Idem. Pages 441-442

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"My husband came from town last night
As sad as man could be,
His wagon empty, cotton gone,
And not a dime had he.

Huzzah - Huzzah
'Tis queer I do declare:
We make the clothes for all the world,
But few we have to wear.

The State Alliances all accepted at the beginning cooperation as the one practical method of escaping the middle man to whom they charged with taking an unnecessary fair

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percentage of their profits, ~~and with increasing the prices of their products.~~ To escape him the Texas Alliance first tried the Contract Store. A trade committee of trusted members in each county contracted with a chosen merchant to sell at a discount to members of the Alliance on condition that they bought only from him. (1)

Naturally enough local wars were at once started on the Contract Store by those merchants of a community who had built up a group of farmer's customers largely by direct barter coupled with credit and cash advances while they were waiting for the harvest. The merchants felt it a violation of an established relation, a repudiation of an ~~unsettled~~ written contract. The farmer was not palying fair. Their only weapon was price cutting. As they argued, A farmer who would break a relation of long standing for the lower price of a Contract Store would desert that store if he could buy cheaper elsewhere. Too often it turned out that way.

After a year's trial the Contract Store was given up by the Texas Alliance and the State Exchange was tried. Here was a device which eliminated all middlemen, replacing them by the agents of the Alliance. These agents were to lay in at wholesale all kinds of supplies and to sell them at cost to the members. The growers were to

1) Wiest, Ed. Agricultural Organization in the United States Pages 464-467

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turn over to cotton yards, established by the Exchange, their entire cotton crop and sale days were fixed when city buyers were invited to be present. But the buyers did not like the new attempt at cooperation any better than the merchants had the Contract Store. So few of them came on Sale Days that at the end of the season large stores of cotton were on hand.

The failure of the cotton's sales days was less discouraging because by this time the State Exchange had a new idea - selling cotton direct to the mills.

This notion had originated with the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Texas Alliance, C. W. Macune, a reflective, self-educated man who as a farm laborer had seen enough of conditions in various West and Middle West States to convince him that the farmers' only hope for stability and for profitable operation lay in cooperation. Macune now went to New England, talked over direct sale with mill owners in Fall River and Boston and came back convinced that his plan was sound, but if it was to succeed it must be done on a large scale. He proposed an organization called the Farmers' Alliance Exchange of Texas with a capital of $500,000.00 to be paid in installments. With this money the buildings and equipment necessary for the enterprise were to be provided together with supplies sufficient to carry the farmer

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until his crop was ready to be sold. The cotton merchants who had been accustomed to advancing money to cotton growers, taking mortgages on the crop, did not abandon business because of the proposed Farmers' Exchange. As a fact they made so many contracts with their old customers that the proposed Exchange was crippled from the start.

The first installment of the $500,000.00 amounted to but $56,000.00 in cash and $40,000.00 in notes. It was not enough to finance the plan and although Macune did his best to rally the farmers and to convince the banks that the future of the Farmers' Alliance Exchange of Texas was a safe security he was unable to secure the loans he needed. Before the year was up the undertaking went to pieces. (1)

Like the Contract Store and the State Exchange with its cotton sales days, the Farmers' Exchange failed because it lacked proper preparation. It went into operation before it had a sound financial foundation, before a sufficient number of farmers were ready to see it through. "The farmer," said W. S. Morgan, of the Wheel, "will have to be educated to cooperation before the movement can be successful."

The cooperative efforts of the other state alliances were very like those of Texas and when they failed it usually was for the same reasons. "The Macune Business System," as the Exchange was called, spread until in 1890. it had been organized in eighteen states; not all were as short-lived as the parent

1) Wiest, Ed. Agricultural Organization in the United States Pages 466-477

2) Morgan, W. Scott. History of the Wheel and Alliance, and the Impending Revolution. St. Louis, the author (1891)

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"21. Mr Grant y education & experience admirably suggest her "fitness" in the history y co-operation in the Grange — he writes (2) (see A for footnote)
In his community in the Farmers Texas alliance he declares "the great need of the order to be proper literature in the education y the masses" (3) also "means to help lecturers in the field to instruct the members" (4)

(3) Idem p 97
(4) " p. 204

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until his crop was ready to be sold. The cotton merchants who had been accustomed to advancing money to cotton growers, taking mortgages on the crop, did not abandon business because of the proposed Farmers' Exchange. As a fact they made so many contracts with their old customers that the proposed Exchange was crippled from the start.

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Like the Contract Store and the State Exchange with its cotton sales days, the Farmers' Exchange failed because it lacked proper preparation. It went into operation before it had a sound financial foundation, before a sufficient number of farmers were intellectually ready to see it through. In the opinion of W. S. Morgan, of the Wheel the farmers must be educated to co-operation before the movement could succeed. "It was want of education and experience," which brought about the "failures" in the history of co-operation in the Grange...." (2) In his comments on the Texas alliance he declared the great need of the order to be proper literature for the education of the masses. (3) Also "means to keep lecturers in the field to instruct the members". (4)

1) Wiest, Ed. Agricultural Organization in the United States Pages 466-477
2) Morgan, W. Scott. History of the Wheel and Alliance, and the Impending Revolution. Page 246. Published by the author, St. Louis, 1891.
3) Idem. Page 97
4) Idem Page 204

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exchange that in Georgia operating successfully until 1893. (1)

The Northern Alliance was started by Milton George the editor of an aggressive farm paper, the Western Ruralist, its Number I local organized in Cook County, Arkansas in April 1880. By October the movement had so spread that it was possible to hold a convention in Chicago to which five hundred representatives came from various local alliances, farmers' clubs, and granges. (2)

The gathering drafted a constitution declaring that its object was to unite the farmers of the United States for their protection against "class legislation and the encroachments of concentrated capital, and the grasp of monopoly; to provide against being imposed upon by swindlers and swindling advertisements in the public prints and to oppose in the respective political parties, the election of any candidate to office, State or national who is not thoroughly in sympathy with the farmer's interest." (3)

This Alliance was much more active politically than the Southern one. In 1889 representatives of both the Northern and Southern Alliance met for the purpose of uniting but did not succeed. There were a number of reasons. The Southern Alliance was secret and wanted to remain so, the Northern was ~~non-secret~~ public. The Southern Alliance wanted a complete merger, the other a federation. There was also a difference of opinion as to the extent of political activity which was wise and according to Buck some sectional feeling also prevented whole hearted cooperation.

1) Hicks, John D. The Populist Revolt. Page 137-140

2) Ashby, N. B. The Riddle of the Sphinx (1890) Page 407

3) Idem. Page 407-410

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The Northern Alliance was particularly aggressive in Minnesota. In April, 1890, the United States Supreme Court decided that state railroad commissions and state legislatures had no right to fix the rates on the railroads of the states. The decision came while the Executive Committee of the Minnesota Alliance was in session. It meant "the subjection of the people and the states to the unlimited control of the railroad corporations of this country," declared the Committee and a resolution was passed to the effect that the Alliance would "appeal from this second Dred Scott decision to the people of the nation.. with a request that they unite with us in an effort to so amend the Constitution as to abolish this new slavery." (1)

With each year the Alliances became more convinced that if they were to improve conditions of the farmer it must be through a new political party. The farmer was not ———

1) Drew, Frank M. The Farmers' Movement. Political Science Quarterly. Vol. VI Page 300

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exchange that in Georgia operating successfully until 1893. (1) 173-1

The farmer, however, was beginning to look to what seemed to him a more direct way of improving his condition and that through a new political party. He was not without experience in direct political action. In the '70's he had backed the Greenback Labor Party hoping to stand off the resumption of specie payment, keep his paper money. At the same time he had attacked the problem of railroad rates through the Granger Movement. But neither had satisfied him. (2)

By 1890 the Southern Alliance had developed the following program which it proposed to demand from the existing parties:-

"First - We demand the abolition of National banks; we demand that the Government shall establish sub-treasuries or depositories in the several states which shall loan money direct to the people at a low rate of interest not to exceed two percent per annum, on non-perishable farm products and also upon real estate with proper limitations upon the quantity of land and amount of money. We demand that the amount of the circulating medium be speedily increased to not less than $50.00 per capita.

"Second - We demand that Congress shall pass such laws as shall effectually prevent the dealing in futures on all agricultural and mechanical productions, preserving a stringent system of procedure in trials such as should secure the prompt conviction and imposition of such penalties as shall secure the most perfect compliance with the law.

"Third - We condemn the Silver Bill recently passed

1) Hicks, John D. The Populist Revolt. Page 137

1)#) Turner, F. J. The Frontier in American History. Page 218
Nevins, Allan. The Emergence of Modern America. See Granger Movement - Greenback Labor Party.

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pelletier Library.

by Congress and demand in lieu thereof the free and unlimited coinage of silver.

"Fourth - We demand the passage of the laws prohibiting alien ownership of land and that Congress take prompt action to devise some plan to obtain all lands now owned by aliens and foreign syndicates, and that all lands now held by railroads and other corporations in excess of such as is actually used and needed by them be reclaimed by the Government and held for actual settlers only.

"Fifth - Believing in the doctrine of 'equal rights to all and special privileges to none', we demand that our national legislation shall be so framed in the future as not to build up one industry at the expense of another; and we further demand a removal of the existing heavy tariff tax from the necessities of life, that the poor of our land must have; we further demand a just and equitable system of graduated tax on incomes; we believe that the money of the country shall be kept as much as possible in the hands of the people and hence we demand that all national and state revenues shall be limited to the necessary expenses of the government economically and honestly administered.

"Sixth - We demand the most rigid, honest and just State and National governmental control and supervision of the means of public communication and transportation, and if this control and supervision does not remove the abuse now existing, we demand the Government ownership of such means of communication and transportation.

"Seventh - We demand that Congress of the United States submit an amendment to the Constitution providing for the election of United States Senators by direct vote of the people of each State."

These demands were agreed to in the main by all other farmers' organizations including the Grange - the Northern Alliance - the Colored Alliance and the Patrons of Husbandry. (1)

It was the Sub-treasury scheme which aroused the loudest opposition. With this scheme operating the farmer

1) Drew, Frank M. Political Science Quarterly. See Table Volume VI. Page 295

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when his produce was harvested would place it in storage where it would be perfectly safe and he would secure four-fifths of its value to supply his pressing necessity for money at one percent per annum. He would negotiate and sell his warehouse or elevator certificates whenever the current prices suited him, receiving from the person to whom he sold, only the difference between the price agreed upon and the amount already paid by the Sub-treasurer. (1)

The press was contemptuous of the proposed Sub-treasury. The St. Paul Pioneer Press called it a "transcendent absurdity." It was as practical a project to level the Rocky Mountain Range and spread the material all over the Mississippi Valley. (2) "The Farmers' Alliance does not want money, it wants due bills, it wants pawn tickets," said the Philadelphia North American. (3) The New York Commercial Advertiser did not know which scheme was the madder, the Sub-treasury or government ownership of railroads. (4)

The Alliance stung by the ridicule of press and of the leaders of the major parties agreed to support only those

1) Morgan, W. Sept (1) History of the Wheel, Pages 180-181 (2) (3) Morgan was a member of the Monetary Committee which devised the Sub-treasury scheme.

2) Public Opinion, Vol. IX, Page 408

3) Public Opinion, Vol. X , Page 218

4) Public Opinion, Vol. IX, Page 408

(3) Farmers' Alliance and the Impending Rebellion (4) Published at the Author St Louis 1891

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who would back its platform and soon it was in the thick of what it called "a battle for human rights" - a movement which was rapidly to crystallize into a People's Party swallowing the Alliance, its demands and its leaders.

The center of the agitation, the Political whirlwind of the movement, was Kansas. The Alliance was first organized there in 1888 and soon had practically absorbed the Grange which up to that time had been the State's favorite farmer's organization. The Kansas Alliance at first resisted the effort to turn it into a political party, but it was soon swept off its feet. One of the historians of the upheaval, Elizabeth Barr, declares that what struck Kansas in 1890 was not a political campaign but a religious revival. (1)

Without question the leader in Kansas was Mary E. Lease. Mrs. Lease born in Ireland, educated in New York, went to Kansas when she was nineteen. In 1885 she was admitted to the bar there and in 1890 became a member of the Farmers' Alliance Lecture Bureau and was more in demand than any other speaker. She made more than one hundred sixty speeches during the summer and fall of 1890 to immense audiences. The press did all it could to drive her off the field by ridicule and slander but nothing could stop her.

1) Barr, Elizabeth N. The Populist Uprising, in Connelley, Standard History of Kansas and Kansans. Vol. II. Page 1148

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"What you farmers need to do is to raise less corn and more HELL." The following is typical of her fiery speeches:-

"We wiped out slavery and by our tariff laws and national banks began a system of white wage slavery worse than the first. Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street and for Wall Street. 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. Money rules and our Vice-president is a London banker.....The parties lie to us and political speakers mislead us.....The main question is the money question.....The common people are robbed to enrich their masters.....We want money, land and transportation. We want the abolition of the National Banks and we want the power to make loans direct from the Government. We want the accursed foreclosure system wiped out. Land equal to a tract thirty miles wide and ninety miles long has been foreclosed and bought in by loan companies of Kansas in a year.... We will not pay our debts to the loan-shark companies until the Government pays its debt to us. The people are at bay, let the blood-hounds of money who have dogged us thus far beware." (1)

The result of the Kansas whirlwhind was the election of five Alliance Congressmen and one United States Senator - William A. Peffer. (2)

Each of the farm states soon had its leader. The most picturesque after Mary Lease in Kansas was Ignatius Donnelley of Minnesota. Donnelley was a talented, oratorical, witty, hospitable and most popular Irishman who early in the '50's had gone to Minnesota from Philadelphia where he was born to found a city - the city of Nininger. The panic of '57 killed his town and he turned farmer. When the question of extension

1) Barr, Elizabeth N. The Populist Uprising, Vol. II. Pages 1150-1157

2) Annual Cyclopaedia for 1890. Page 472

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of slavery arose he fought it bitterly ~~against it~~, supported the Republicans until he became disgusted with the spoils system. He seems not to have been above taking a part in one phase of the system, however, that of securing land grants for Minnesota Western Railroads. He finally became so involved that his constitutents refused to continue him in Congress.

Later Donnelley joined one after another of the revolting farmer groups - the Grangers, the Greenbackers, and in 1884 the Farmers' Alliance which he left later for the Populist Party. ~~It was he who wrote the preamble to the Omaha platform of~~ In 1892 he and ran for Governor of Minnesota on the Populist ticket but was defeated. Not the least of Donnelley's ~~attractions~~ endowment was his ability as a writer; the work which was most characteristic, most in accord with the spirit of his activities and of the time was called, "Caesar's Column, a Story of the Twentieth Century," a lurid example of the Bellamy school. (1)

While Mary Lease was firing Kansas and Donnelley Minnesota the lecturers of the Alliances were carrying on effective campaigns far and wide. In Nebraska a People's Independent Party made up of the State Grange, the Alliance and the Knights of Labor, so stirred the state that it elected a majority in the state

1) Dictionary of American Biography. See Donnelley
Forbes, Allyn B. The Literary Quest for Utopia. Page 184

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Senate and half the lower House. In Florida, Georgia and North and South Carolina the Alliance controlled the Democratic party and elected several of its own members. Minnesota elected an Alliance Congressman and South Dakota a United States Senator. / the Reverend/ J. H. Kyle to join Kansas' Peffer. It was a rich harvest and put hearts into all protesting groups of the country. Not since 1856 had there been so real a chance to form a new liberal party. Their grievances were genuine if their manner of statement was exaggerated and violent often to the point of absurdity. It was a fact that the machinery of the economic order favored industry - finance - the railroads - at the expense of agriculture.

The government alone had it in its power to restore a just balance therefore farmers must control the government. It could only be done by a Third Party. That conclusion was so defined and wide-spread that when a call was sent out to the leading farmers' alliances, including the Colored Alliance the Federal and Confederate soldiers and the Knights of Labor, asking that they send delegates to a conference to be held in Cincinnati in 1891. One thousand four hundred delegates appeared. (1)

This body organized the People's Party of the United States and in the next year, 1892, held a convention in Omaha to select its presidential candidate. The convention

1) Haynes, F. E. Third Party Movements. Page 246-247

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showed unexpected sobriety and judgment in its first choice - Judge Walter Gresham a Republican who had been an outspoken liberal since the day in 1854 when he was run out of the Whig Party because of his active opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Bill. For a year he joined the Know Nothings, as the American Party was called, but found a place with the Republicans when they organized in 1856.

Gresham raised his own company when the War came and served with honor for four years, coming out breveted as Major General for gallantry.

After the war he had made himself particularly acceptable to the farmers by his active opposition to the spoils system as well as by his decisions as a Circuit Judge of the Seventh Judicial District, particularly his removal from the receivership of the Wabash Railroad of a man who was believed to be a representative of Jay Gould. This order as well as his opposition to the protective tariff led the convention to select him as their first moninee for the Presidency. Gresham considered it but decided the platform was too unsound economically as well as too extravagant in expression for him to support.

The second choice of the Convention was General James B. Weaver, a lawyer of Iowa who like Judge Gresham had served in the Civil War and had been breveted for gallantry on the field. Weaver had been an early prohibitionist leader

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of the prohibitionists but in 1877 had gone with the Greenback Party and served as its representative in Congress for some ten years. He had been its Presidential candidate in 1880. His swerve to populism was natural - the new movement included most Greenbackers.

The platform on which the populists swept the country included the usual demands quoted above preceded by the declaration that the interests of rural and civic labor were the same, their enemies identical and the union of the labor forces in the United States cemented by the convention should be perpetual. (1)

The extent to which the Populists scared the Republicans and Democrats, despite the nomination of Weaver who was highly regarded by the leader of both the older parties can be seen from some of the statements included in the platforms of these parties. (2) Thus, the Democrats declared: "We hold to the use of both gold and silver without discriminating against either metal or charge for mintage.....We insist upon this policy as especially necessary for the protection of the farmers and laboring classes." Again, "we pledge ourselves to continue this policy (of reclaiming the public domain 'from corporations and syndicates, alien and domestic') until every acre of land so unlawfully held shall be reclaimed and restored to the people." The Republicans on the other hand declared: "The American people, from tradition and interest,

1) Haynes, F. E. Third Party Movements, 261-3
Stanwood, Edward. A History of the Presidency (Boston 1898 508-513

2) Stanwood, Edward. A History of the Presidency. Pages 495,496, 500-501

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favor bimetallism and the Republican party demands the use of both gold and silver as standard money." Further we reaffirm our opposition.../to all combinations of capital organized in trust or otherwise, to control arbitrarily the condition of trade among our citizens." The Republicans also favored cession of the arid lands to the respective states and territories and their reclamation and sale to settlers. To draw labor votes, they added: "We favor the enactment of more stringent laws and regulations for the restriction of criminal, pauper and contract immigration, as well as federal and state legislation to protect employees in dangerous occupations.

But the ties between the two old parties and the revolting farmers and laborers were broken. The campaign was made to the tune of the old song, "Goodbye my lover good-bye" - the chorus running -

"Bye, party, bye lo; bye party, bye lo,
"Goodbye, my party, good bye." (1)

The result of the campaign in '92 - not all the populists had prophesized - was surprisingly good. For the first time since 1860 a third party had secured electoral votes - twenty two out of three hundred ninety four. They elected five United State Senators, ten Congressmen, fifty state officials and one thousand five hundred country officials and members of the State Legislature.*

Hicks, John D. The Populist Revolt. Page 169

* Haynes F. E. Third Party Movements p 281

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Small wonder then that Weaver was happy over the results, and that he wrote: "Unaided by money our grand young party has made an enviable record and achieved surprising success at the polls. We are but little behind the Republican party in the number of States carried...we will doubtless hold the balance of power in the Senate of the United States, have doubled the number of our adherents in the house of representatives, secured control of a number of state governments, hold the balance of power in a majority of the States in the Union and have succeeded in arousing a spirit of political independence among the people of the Northwest which cannot be disregarded in the future." (1)

1) Haynes, F. E. Third Party Movements. Page 270
Quoting Weekly Iowa State Register. Nov. 18, 1892

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