

Grange Appeal

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“The work we are going about is this, to dig up Georges Hill and the waste grounds thereabouts, and to sow corn, and to eat our bread together by the sweat of our brows.

“And the first reason is this, that we may work in righteousness, and lay the Foundation of making the Earth a Common Treasury for All, both Rich and Poor, that everyone That is born in the Land may be fed by the Earth his Mother that brought him forth, according to the Reason that rules in the Creation.”

—Gerrard Winstanley, the Digger

“The True Levellers Standard Advanced,” Apr. 26, 1649

Brothers of the plow, The power is with you;
The world in expectation waits For action prompt and true,
Oppression stalks abroad, Monopolies abound;
Their giant hands already clutch The tillers of the ground.

(Chorus)

Awake, then, awake! the great world must be fed,
And heaven gives the power to the hand that holds the bread.

—Geo. F Root,

“The Hand That Holds The Bread”,
Grange Melodies (Philadelphia, 1905)

I.

One summer day in Colorado, the poet Reed Bye drove me around to look at a few of the still-standing Grange Halls of Boulder County. Plain wood-frame structures, simple in an almost Amish or Shaker manner (American zen), almost barn-like, these rural outposts of farm culture have been overtaken by the County’s insane rate of “Development”. The farms that once surrounded the Grange Halls have been sold and subdivided—the Denver gentry have built huge “trophy homes”—strip malls—defense and biotechnological labs, New Age supermarkets etc., etc. The few horses and bewildered cows that still stand around in the shrinking “open spaces” appear to be waiting for the End. A thick but slightly luminous atmosphere of nostalgia hangs over the lonely Halls baking in sunlight.

Ever since 1950s childhood family Sunday afternoon excursions, I’ve been noticing Grange Halls in little American towns and admiring them. The bigger Halls sometimes resemble charming Victorian churches—“carpenter gothic”—or firehouses. In one town near where I live in upstate New York, the Grange Hall, slightly ornate but touched by decay, has been saved by artists.

So far, I’ve been unable to discover any nice coffee-table books devoted to this rich cross-section of American working-class vernacular public architecture. Not even the Grange itself seems to have published a study of its own disappearing heritage. At first, I wasn’t even certain that the Grange still existed. But five years ago, when I moved

to the Hudson Valley, I began to see signs that the organization was not entirely moribund. At the Ulster County Fair, I met some exceedingly pleasant old ladies selling spiral-bound cookery books compiled by local Grangers.

At one point, I thought about doing a book on Grange Hall architecture but soon realized how huge a job it would be. Between 1868 and 1933 New York State alone spawned 1,531 Granges. (See L.L. Allen, *History of NY State Granges*, 1934). I'm no photographer, and I don't own a car. I'd need a grant just to record the Granges in my own immediate area, never mind the State or the whole country.

Old photo archives do exist, as I learned when I tracked down some Grange historians and corresponded with them. But in the meantime, I'd discovered other even more fascinating aspects of Grange history. In its heyday, it was one of the most progressive forces in the Populist movement, not just a club for lonely farmers in those long-dead days before cars and TVs atomized American social life. Once upon a time, the Grangers were fire breathing agrarian radicals. Moreover, it turned out that the Grange was a secret society with secret rituals.

Why hadn't I ever heard about any of this before?!

II

Of course, the Grange wasn't the first manifestation of American agrarian radicalism. In Colonial times, for example, rural New York experienced a number of "Anti-Rent" uprisings against the feudal-manorial "Patroon System" introduced by the Dutch but preserved and even extended under the British. Even after the Revolution, farmers were still subjected to feudal leases and rents and treated as a rural proletariat by manor-lords like the Rensselaers and Livingstons. In 1845, the long-simmering situation exploded in an Anti-Rent War. Farmers disguised as "Calico Indians" tarred and feathered some sheriffs. A few people got shot. English and Irish Chartists, German Communists, and Manhattan radicals supported the rebels. But the movement was co-opted by the usual clever politicians who rode to power on radical slogans, then delivered only tepid reform. Private property was saved from the extremists, who had really dreamed of abolishing rent. Like Punk squatters in Amsterdam or Manhattan who win legal control of their squats, the Anti-Rent farmers were transformed suddenly into landlords.

Looked at from a "Jeffersonian" point of view, America seems founded on agrarian principles as a revolutionary—democratic nation of free yeoman-farmers. In fact, however, the 1789 Constitution acted as a counter-revolution and put an end to any immediate hope of extending the Jeffersonian franchise to slaves, Indians, or women. (The Bill of Rights represents the last-minute "tepid reforms" of Jefferson himself, who like many of the Founding Fathers was a slave-owner and land speculator.)

Back-country farmer uprisings like Shays Rebellion and the Whiskey Rebellion were crushed by Washington, the new "King George". The American ruling class would consist of slave-owners, merchants, financiers, lawyers, manufacturers, and politicians all male, all white. When "freedom" is defined in terms of property, then those with more property have more freedom. Most Americans were small farmers, and this remained the case throughout the 19th and even into the 20th century. But already by the end of the 18th century, the Jeffersonian yeomen had lost control of the American future.

This loss, however, went largely unnoticed. Because of the existence of the frontier (itself a creation of land-speculators and Indian-killers), the farmer could always leave rents and oppression behind and find forty acres and a mule somewhere over the horizon. By the time of the Civil War, however, the frontier was already beginning to vanish. Slavery was abolished largely because it no longer suited an emergent Capitalist economy based on money rather than land as the true measure of wealth. Labor had to be "free," that is, regulated by wages and rents. After the War, in the new age of Gilded Robber Barons, two classes emerged as the prime victims of this supposed freedom: the urban proletariat, and the small farmers.

Railroads "opened up" America's rural hinterlands, true, but railroads also acted as the tentacles of predatory Capitalism. Financiers and monopolists controlled the farm economy at nearly every point of supply, demand, and transportation. Farmers didn't work for wages and they might even own property, but in effect they were exploited just like factory workers in the city. "Money Interests" ruled reality itself, or so it seemed.

The Civil War had put an end to many of the old antebellum Reform movements, but the post-War era created a whole spectrum of new ones. "Populism" was in the air—a hard-to-define grassroots radicalism, both urban and

rural, that began to give birth to new organizations and take up new causes. In 1866, a Bureau of Agriculture clerk (and Freemason) in Washington DC, named Oliver Hudson Kelley, was appointed to make a tour of the devastated South and reported back not only to his office but also to a small circle of friends, all minor government clerks with farming backgrounds. They agonized over the plight of the American farmer and decided to take action. They founded a fraternal order, the Patrons of Husbandry (i.e., agriculture), which became known as the Grange (an archaic word for barn).

The “Seven Founders” of the Grange were all white men, but Kelley’s niece, Miss Carrie Hall, convinced him to include women in the new organization, even as officers, and for this she is recognized as “equal to the Founders” of the order. Aside from “Father” Kelley himself, a tireless idealistic and charismatic figure, two founders exercised great influence on the order’s forms and functions: William Saunders, a prominent landscape gardener originally from Scotland, and Francis Marion McDowell, the only non-bureaucrat, a fruit farmer from Steuben County, NY. Three Celts!—and their inspiring ideas for the order breathe a glorious and eccentric air of Celtic imagination and poetry. They propose nothing less than a Masonic-style mystic and secret society, complete with ritual, regalia, and seven degrees of initiation—all based on the symbolism of farming.

In 1868, the first Grange of the infant order, Number One of Fredonia, NY, was founded in Chautauqua County (where another great Populist organization, the educational Chautauqua movement, also originated.) (I wonder if the Marx Brothers knew this when they chose the name “Fredonia” for the fictional setting of their great anti-war comedy “Duck Soup”.)

After a slow start, the new organization began to experience almost unbelievable success. Within eight years some 24 thousand charters had been granted and membership was pushing a million. The Grange had hit on a magical formula: economic self-organization, cooperation, and mutual aid; no involvement in legislative electoral politics but militancy on social and economic issues; plenty of picnics, outings, celebrations, socializing, and shared fun; and a really impressive but simple ritual—based on the Eleusinian Mysteries.

III

Patrons, on your weary way.
Is there darkness and delay?
Have you trouble, constant strife
To attain the higher life?
Seek Pomona’s signet ring,
Talismanic words ‘twill bring,
Words that conquer far and near;
Always hope and persevere.

— Jas. L. Orr, “Hope and Persevere” (initiation hymn for the 5th Degree) Grange Melodies

Between say 1840 and 1914, at a rough but reasonable guess, one out of every three Americans belonged to a fraternal organization—Masons, Oddfellows, Elks, Woodsmen, Rosicrucians, Good Templars, Druids, Daughters of Isis, etc.—or at least to some cultural society such as the Athenaeum or Chautauqua. With hindsight, we can speak of a society falling away from organized religions but needing a secular substitute for the sociality or conviviality of the churches. After all, we reason, without telephones, TVs and automobiles, humans needed to come together physically to reproduce social life. (We moderns appear to have evolved beyond this crude physicality and require only the image of the social.) As technology came to mediate and even determine all aspects of the social, those fraternal and cultural organizations collapsed or disappeared.

This reductionist view sees only a negativity (social isolation) and its negation in association. It tells us very little about the consciousness and motivation of the fraters and sorors of these organizations, nor of the positive and creative aspects of their thought and activity. Nineteenth century America possessed a great seriousness about raising its consciousness and reforming its institutions. It still dreamed of itself as a new world wherein the poisoned human relations of the past could be cured and transformed. The more radical of the fraternal organizations should really be considered as elements of the historical movement of the Social.

Thus the Grange cannot be seen merely as a refuge from isolation; nor can it be understood solely in economic terms, as some historians seem to imply. Certainly these motives existed, but were enriched and even informed by philosophical ideals which themselves were enacted or “performed” as social acts, festivals, and rituals. The Masonic-inspired rituals of organizations like the Grange or the Knights of Labor can’t be dismissed as epiphenomenal frippery or mere fraternal icing on the cake of ideology. These rites were experienced as an integral aspect of a praxis that included conviviality and cooperation—indeed, as the essence or very meaning of such praxis.

IV.

Some curious weeds I might mention
That lend to the landscape no charm;
To one let me call your attention,
Keep politics off your farm.
Tho’ weeds will with politics mingle,
Potatoes with politics fail;
Devote your whole mind to your business,
And make ev’ry effort avail.

(Chorus)

Keep politics off your farm (off your farm),
Your crops they will certainly harm (will harm);
If you would successfully labor,
Keep politics off your farm.

— C. E. Pollock, “Keep Politics Off Your Farm,” Grange Melodies

How radical was the Grange?

As an organization, the Patrons of Husbandry formally eschewed politics and religion—but the political implications of its tenets were obvious, and most Grangers followed them to logical conclusions. Populism in general cannot be called “revolutionary” since it proposed neither overthrow of State nor abolition of Capital. Perhaps Populism should be compared with the Social Democratic movement of Europe rather than with communism and anarchism.

Nevertheless, Populism’s enemies certainly saw it as socialistic, and in newspaper cartoons of the period, the Grangers are depicted running wild in tandem with anarchists and other undesirables. I don’t know if any anarchists supported or joined the Grange, but I’ve also never seen any anarchist denunciations of the Grange. Some anarchists and libertarian socialists have sometimes practiced some sort of “united front” politics with other radical forces. The Populist moment seems to’ve been so uplifting, inspired, and urgent, so optimistic (even naive) in its anticipation of universal reform, that it no doubt attracted and absorbed energies from both left and right. (Some especially ungenerous historians go so far as to interpret Populism as a “prelude to fascism”; in my view, the racist and authoritarian aspects of later Populism constitute a contamination rather than an essence.)

In effect, the most anarchistic aspect of the Grange manifests precisely in its avoidance of legislative politics and organized religion. In this, it seems to harmonize somewhat with the Transcendentalist/Individualist wing of American anarchism Thoreau, Emerson, Josiah Warren, S. Pearl Andrews; and the very idea of an agricultural cult is quite reminiscent of Fourier and his disciples at Brook Farm. (The word “Association” appears rather often in Grange literature; it was a Fourierist key-term, introduced to American radicals by A. Brisbane and the utopian socialists a generation before the Grange appeared.)

The Grange can certainly be seen as part of the great 19th/20th century movement of Cooperation, whereby the real producers of value (e.g. farmers and workers) can eliminate parasitic Capitalists and middlemen by organizing voluntarily, as producers and/or consumers, and pooling their energies and resources. After a few rocky starts, and even disasters, the Grange settled on the English “Rochedale System” and experienced real success with many cooperative ventures in grain merchandizing, purchase of farm equipment, etc. Of course, like all cooperative ventures in competition with Capitalism, such voluntary associations can always be undersold and ruined by “combinations”

or even simply by rival companies with more capital. Given the chance, co-ops nearly always succeed— at least at first. In the “war to the knife” of the Free Market, however, co-ops always seem to lose in the end.

Given its premises, the Grange logically supported State control and regulation of economic activity— i.e. socialism. On one level, Populism can be seen as the culmination of the 19th century’s struggle between the people and the corporations. Although most State legislatures are supposed to have the power to grant or refuse or revoke corporate charters, in practice, the corporations have literally bought and paid for very dubious legislation such as the amazing legal miracle (one might even call it “Mystery”) of the “fictitious person,” the corporate body with more rights—but far fewer liabilities —than mere flesh-and-blood humans. This process was well under way by the gilded post-Civil War era—trusts, monopolies, the “Octopus,” the railroads (very nearly the biggest bubble since tulipomania), ravenous bankers and financiers: these were the powers arrayed above the heads of American farmers and workers.

In the end, as we know, the corporations won. But the Grange, at least, gave them a run for their money. The story of the “Granger Laws,” the many attempts to regulate the railroads, the ultimate defeat (if all else failed, the railroads simply declared bankruptcy and vanished)—all this is too complex to detain us here. I only want to emphasize the style of the Grange, which might justly be called agrarian-social militancy. Little by little, Grangers were drawn into the ferment of Populist politics.

If only the Grange had adhered strictly to its original non-political forms of organization—economic self-management, voluntary association, etc.—it might have been spared the fate of collapsing along with the Populist political movement. Every radical “third force” in American history that falls for the lure of party politics ends the same way. Genuinely radical possibilities are buried under the rubric (and rubble) of “practical goals” (i.e. tepid reforms), economic organization abandoned for third-party futilitarianism, cooptation, and eventual suppression.

For the Grange, a collapse had begun as early as 1874, and by 1880, the number of active Granges had shrunk from about 20,000 to 4,000. Cooperative failures and electoral failures can be blamed even more than organizational problems such as too-rapid expansion, infighting, etc. When the Grange began to achieve results with the Rochdale System, the collapse was contained and the order survived. But its heady days of rebelliousness receded into a lost Past.

Of course, the independent American farm itself was doomed. Agribusiness depends for its triumph on the elimination of competition, just like any other industry. The Great Depression marks a low point for the family farm. At present, less than 1% of the national population is said to be engaged in farming, and I suppose most of them are wage-slaves. From the rural district where I live, the “Farm Lobby” looks like a tool of the multinationals. In today’s local paper (Dec. 12, 2002), another family owned apple farm has declared bankruptcy.

In 1874, its year of greatest power, the Grange held a Convention in St. Louis and proclaimed a “Declaration of Purposes.” Among other planks, this document endorsed the motto: “In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity.” By odd coincidence, this also happens to have been the motto of Stephen Pearl Andrews.

S. Pearl Andrews (1812–1886) embraced every Reform cause of the 19th century: Abolitionism, Free Love, Women’s Rights, phrenology. Individualist Anarchism, Spiritualism, you name it. With Josiah Warren, he founded the marvelous and amorous commune Modern Times in Brentwood, Long Island. Also, he edited a newspaper for Victoria Woodhull (aka “Mrs. Satan”), known as a spirit-medium, stock broker, Free Lover, and first woman to run for President of the U.S. Andrews believed himself a synthesis of Fourier, Swedenborg, and Bakunin. He created his own science, Universology, his own political system, Pantarchy, his own church, even his own language. (See my biography of Andrews in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 250, 2nd series; Gale Group, 2002.)

Andrews’s version of the motto: “In things proven, Unity; in whatsoever can be doubted, Free Diversity; in things not touching upon others’ rights, Liberty; in all other things, Charity.”

Perhaps an anarchist strain can, after all, be detected in the radical heritage of the Grange.

V.

The gas-lighted hall with its pleasures,
He dreams of, and longs to be there;
And heedless of trouble and labor,
He hitherward seems to repair.
“How stupid a life in the country,
The city has many a charm!”
My boy, from your reverie waken,
‘Tis better to stay on the farm.

— J.H. Tenney, “Tis Better To Stay On The Farm,” Grange Melodies

None of the issues that once agitated the Grange have ever been resolved not one. They’ve simply changed their outward forms.

Some of them were mitigated or at least held in check during the 20th century; for example, although the US preached Free Market Capitalism, it still practiced Protectionism—because it had to. The inherent contradictions of American agriculture (like many other problems) were suppressed by Keynesian government spending, the New Deal, post-WW II prosperity, etc.

With the triumph of Global Capital and Neo-liberalism at the end of the 20th century, however, the old problems and contradictions were suddenly once again revealed and even exacerbated. To speak of the agricultural crisis is to speak of an ecological-environmental crisis that threatens all life, not merely vegetables or cows. To mention only one new form of an old problem: the Grange campaigned against unfair patent laws that bestowed upon patent-holding monopolies the oppressive “right” to set unfair prices on farm machinery and other socially-necessary resources. Nowadays the issue reappears as “intellectual” copyright, with agribusiness megacorporations like Monsanto buying up the “rights” to natural plant DNA, eradicating biodiversity, fixing prices and standards, patenting GM crops and “Terminator Seeds,” fertilizers and pesticides, etc., etc. The old time Grangers had already diagnosed the essential principle: knowledge is a social good, not a commodity. But their struggle failed, and we’ve inherited all the original muck plus a century of vile accretions.

We face many issues that are variations on the old causes of the Grange: the struggles over privatization of land, water, and air; the Green movement and the ecological struggle; the battle against genetic prometheanism and “frankenfoods”: the anti-Globalist movement with its call for local autonomy and economic justice; the uprisings against Neo-liberalism (the new mask of old-time Mammon-Capitalism) in Mexico, Argentina, etc.; the growing movement to disempower the bloated multinationals...

GATT, World Bank, IMF and other “global” treaties and institutions have to some extent superseded the old nation-states as the primary powers behind the new oppression. Governments now sometimes appear to exist only to provide “corporate welfare” and to wage little wars on behalf of Big Oil. Governments begin to seem necessary only as security cops in the Universal Mall of the global marketplace. In short, a “New World Order—but the same old Octopus of Trusts and Monopolies.

All the planks in the old Grange platform could simply be repainted and spruced up with trendy vocabulary to serve as groundwork for a new agrarian radical movement. For instance, to speak locally, the utter devastation facing our independent apple farmers owes much of its genesis to — Free — global economics. Not only is the US “Apple Lobby” controlled by NW Pacific area agribusiness, but even the megafarms are being mined by Chinese juice-concentrate dumped on the World market in vast cheap quantities. Any 19th century Granger could’ve analyzed this situation in two minutes.

On a very small scale some positive actions are being taken to create a real alternative to the utter demise of agriculture. Again, no need to go into detail, but mention should be made of the organic farm movement (already in danger of competition from agribusiness, which has scented a “market niche”). CSAs are sprouting up all over our region. and even a few genuine food co-ops do a lively trade in local and organic produce. “Seed Savers” and other movements have appeared to protect biodiversity and popularize tasty old strains and varieties. Herbalism offers a source of income for gardeners and wildcrafters. Permaculture and other sustainability systems gradually gain

recognition. Guerrilla gardens spring up even in urban wastelands. The question remains: does all this amount to real resistance?

In Europe, yes. In Europe there are heroes and martyrs like Rene Riessel and Jose Bove serving hard time for attacks on McDonald's and GM crops. Europe even has a "Slow Food" movement. In India, yes. In India there exist whole mass movements organized around some of these issues.

In America the answer is not so clear. In America, the activists are mostly Earth First! -type militants and Wilderness defenders. By contrast, the new forms of agriculture sometimes seem like hobbies for well-meaning (and well-off) do-gooders rather than radical praxis for agrarian rebels. Where is the modern Grange that could provide both an ancient tradition of militancy along with a real appreciation of the contemporary Green position—in today's terms and vocabulary? A movement to embrace all independent farmers and gardeners as part of a larger movement for a "sacred Earth" and economic justice? Or is this just an idle dream?

VI

Scholars of Pre-history used to speak of the "Neolithic Agricultural Revolution." Nowadays, the term "revolution" is not much used, since in fact the "appearance- of agriculture stretched over a few thousand years: moreover, it wasn't really agriculture. but horticulture, gardening.

Historians also used to assume that agriculture represented "progress" in relation to the million-year human economy of hunting/gathering. In the 1960s however, anthropologist Marshall Sahlins turned this notion upside down when he demonstrated (in *Stone Age Economics*) that hunter/gatherers were the "original leisure society," working on average three or four hours a day and enjoying an average 200-odd different food items. Primitive agriculturists, by contrast, worked (really worked) some 12 to 14 hours a day and got by on twenty or so foodstuffs. Hunters spent vast amounts of time napping, dancing, making love or getting high. "Advanced Civilization" doesn't appear magically with the new ag-tech. Gardeners are self-sufficient, no more; Sumer and Egypt are still 10,000 years away.

The reason for agriculture suddenly becomes very mysterious. Why give up the good life of hunting for the brow-sweating labor of farming? The "Neolithic Revolution" begins to look like a fall from grace, from Golden Age or Eden into the curse of Cain, of work and war. Sahlins himself never said this, but many of his readers believed it, since it chimed nicely with '60s radicalism and "zero-work- rebelliousness.

In subsequent years however, I came to reconsider this critique of agriculture in light of the work and writings of botano-historians like N. Vavilov and Carl O. Sauer, and archaeologists like Marija Gimbutas. Sahlins and his school still seem relevant, but a more nuanced picture emerges.

Nomadic hunter/gatherers usually move in an annual round within a given territory, returning to the same camps at the same seasons. Men hunted, women gathered, more or less. Seeds of favored plants would fall around the campsite into disturbed soil enriched by garbage and feces. Next year when the band returned, they found their favorite plants waiting for them, as if the plants had followed them, loved them as much as they loved the plants. The first gardens appeared in an intense erotic aura, realized in the universal figure of the Earth Goddess and her many avatars. As gardening thus took on more and more meaning, women came to play a greater role in the tribe.

The first gardenstuffs or "cultivars" were all luxuries, not necessities. In the old world, in South Central Asia, the first cultivars seem to have been barley (for beer), grapes (for wine), and hemp (for intoxication). In the New World, the earliest cultivar was tobacco. Gardening may involve hard work, but its origin was in love, its end in sheer pleasure. No wonder it proved popular and began to spread, most likely through "Women's Mysteries" and shamanic secret societies.

Neolithic gardening/hunting humans organized themselves into small villages of "free peasants." They preserved and maintained the old rights and customs of the hunters: rough egalitarianism (no "classes"), no leaders (only elders and specialists), a "Gift Economy" and a shamanistic spirituality (with a new emphasis on earth goddess mysteries and the calendrical cycle). Eventually they managed to produce a surplus, largely of stored grain, which became their common wealth. The village temple served as a center for redistribution. Everyone received a fair share. more or less. In Mesopotamia, the villagers even began to experiment with small-scale irrigation.

Then around the middle of the 4th Millennium, something suddenly went drastically wrong with this harmonious polity. Was it the discovery of metallurgy and new weapons technology? A revolt of the warriors or of bad shamans against ancient egalitarian folkways?—or even a revolt of men against women? In any case, it happened with the swiftness of revolution (or coup d'état): the sudden emergence of the State.

The essential act of the State was to seize control of the surplus on behalf of an elite who (from then on) would concern themselves not with work but war, the new form of war, source of booty and slaves. The rest of the tribe were reduced to the status of peons. The earliest dynasties of Sumer and Egypt indulged in paroxysms of cruelty, hecatombs of human sacrifice, self-glorifying architecture, and a new Temple ideology of war gods and divine kings. Land was no longer a “commons” but was divided into property, most of it belonging to Temple and palace. Few humans now farmed for themselves and their community: most farmed for the Man, the ruler and owner. Naturally resentment and rebellion ensued, and memory-traces of the turmoil linger in old myths. Civilization—and its discontents—arose from the violent appropriation of the agricultural surplus.

From this “Fall” many other miseries also arose—at least for the majority of humans. The usurping minority recreated for itself all the old leisure and freedom of the hunters—in fact, they spent their leisure hunting, they monopolized hunting, the “sport of kings”, and punished all poachers. Stealing the king’s game must be one of the very oldest forms of radical resistance. Many others soon followed. Charles Fourier, the 19th century French “Utopian Socialist”, believed that Civilization was based on agriculture. and that Civilization was a tragic mistake. He was, of course, defining agriculture as alienated labor. Humans should have progressed directly from horticulture to Utopia (or “Harmony” as Fourier called it); and the husbandry of the utopian future would consist of complex horticulture practiced by voluntary associations of community-dwelling “gastrosophists” (gourmet philosophers) devoted to pleasure and luxury for all, not for a tyrannical few. Fourier’s odd and poetic notions found many enthusiastic followers in America. and he was also considered a seminal figure in the Cooperative movement.

Agrarian radicalism might be seen as a deeply conservative concept based on shared culture-memories (perhaps unconscious) of the Neolithic polity of free peasant horticulturalists. The image of the Neolithic certainly survives in folktales and myths, from Hesiod’s Hyperborea to the “Big Rock Candy Mountain.” The free peasant village form seems to be so natural that it re-appears spontaneously wherever and whenever it can. William Morris and other socialists admired the European Middle Ages not for their feudalism, but for their craft guilds and peasant communes. The ancient Russian Mir or free peasant commune inspired many radical thinkers—Kropotkin, Herzen, the Narodniks, the Mystical Anarchists, Gustav Landauer, and even Marx (otherwise a fierce Russophobe).

In the 19th century during the Imperialist era, radical agrarian ideas spread to colonies where the economy still depended on peasant labor. These ideas invariably resonated with ancient folkways and local myths of resistance and freedom. In Mexico, for example, agrarian radicalism melded with indigenous and mestizo culture in very interesting ways. The anarchist Magon Brothers (who ironically operated as the “Mexican Liberal Party”) popularized the slogan *Tierra y Libertad*—almost a three-word definition of agrarian radicalism. Zapata took the message to the people; and in 1994, the whole tradition (now with a strong Mayan input) re-emerged in Chiapas as the EZLN. The Zapatistas were the honorable first to declare war on Global Capital and Neo-liberalism—either desperate fools or prophetic heroes.

Looking at the “long duration” of the history of agriculture, the Grange seems to fit with many of the themes outlined above, and even to offer a “proof-text” for some of them. The impulse to re-discover a “sacred” dimension in farming, with the inevitable re-appearance of the Goddess, strikes a chord of recognition that vibrates back to the Neolithic. Nineteenth century American farmers were not peasants in any strict sense of the term, and cherished no specific image of a “commons”, no specific tradition of non-authoritarian self-management such as the Mir. But the rank injustice they experienced, plus the exuberance of their imagination, conspired to awaken in them archaic forms of mythic desire—for autonomy, conviviality, mystery, and pleasure—for the return of the Goddess.

VII.

1. You may talk of all the nobles of the earth,
Of the kings who hold the nations in their thrall,

Yet in this we all agree, if we only look and see.
That the farmer is the man that feeds us all.
2. There's the President...
3. There are Governors and legislators...
4. There are speculators...
5. Then the preacher...lawyer...doctor...
Tailor...smith...
6. Now the Patrons true are coming to fight...
7. From the rising to the setting of the sun,
Great monopolies are surely doomed to fall;
Then onward in the fight, and we'll battle for the right,
While the farmer is the man that feeds us all.

—Knowles Shaw, "The Farmer Feeds Us All," Grange Melodies

The title of this essay has a double meaning. First, I wanted to try to describe the appeal of the Grange, its colorful history of radicalism and mysticism. I find that very few educated Americans have even heard of the Grange, much less its significance. I hope I've managed at least a brief sketch of the inspiring importance of this history for contemporary Green theory and praxis.

However, since the Grange still exists, I also intended an appeal to the Grange. With all due humility and deference as an outsider, I'd like to point out that some movement very much like the Grange will undoubtedly emerge to offer some coherence to the struggles of the new agriculture, in all its myriad forms, against the antibiosis and oppression of the megacorporations. True, the appropriation of the Surplus has reached the point where five or six behemoths own and control 90% of the world's food. But the 6,000 year resistance is still not ended, and cannot end until the last grain of wheat is dead.

If a Grange-like movement is thus demanded by history (assuming we haven't already reached the End of History, as the Globalists proclaim), then perhaps it could be...the Grange.

Two different worlds would have to unite to create a new and militant Grange—but those two worlds have a great deal in common. The same forces are crushing peasants in India and the last few family farms in America. The Zapatistas and the urban gardeners of New York's Lower East Side are ultimately on the same side as the independent farmers—the side of life, of biophilia, the love of life.

Well, it's a nice thought. If Populism is going to be reborn in America, then the question of politics arises, and this is not a political essay. Instead, it merely wants to establish the general principle that the radical Green agenda has deep roots; it has ancestors, precursors, patron saints. It has tradition, "that-which-is-handed-down." Old principles can be creatively adapted and applied to new situations.

Terms like "Gaia Hypothesis" and "biophilia" are not sentimental or poetic devices, nor political slogans. They might perhaps be called scientific mysteries. (In fact, both terms were coined by scientists.) That the Earth is alive and in love with life may be "true but unprovable," like certain axioms in mathematics. Precisely here mysteries can become Mysteries. Hermeticism is perhaps a science of the unprovable. and it is based on the axiom that the Earth is not only alive, but in some sense sacred. Long before modern neo-pagans began worshipping Nature, the cult of the goddess was already reborn, as it always will be but this time in the hearts of hard working Temperance/Protestant American farm families. A strange moment in radical history, to be sure: this birth of Green Spirituality.

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Editors' note: A longer version of this essay, including a substantial section of original research concerning the secret rites of the grange will be published in Peter Lamborn Wilson's next book (which will be available from our bookstore when it comes out).

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