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The Mind of a Farm Leader

RICHARD S. KIRKENDALL

IN CHOOSING a secretary of agriculture in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt "settled on none of the heads of the farm organizations but on the one acknowledged intellectual among all those who had a right to be considered."¹ The observation of a perceptive insider in the Roosevelt camp, Rexford Guy Tugwell, this statement suggests that the mind of Henry A. Wallace deserves serious attention. His basic assumptions as well as his activities merit examination.

Wallace was a traditionalist as well as a modernizer. Before he became a cabinet officer fifty years ago, he played a major role in the development of hybrid corn, now a major feature of our highly productive agriculture. As secretary, he enlarged substantially the role of the federal government in the lives of farmers, and a large role for government is a characteristic of our modern food and fiber system. But ideas about better breeds of corn and new activities in Washington did not monopolize his attention; his mind was influenced as well by the American agrarian tradition that ran back to Thomas Jefferson and beyond—a tradition that exalted the family farm and insisted upon the fundamental importance of farming and rural life. Influenced by that tradition, Wallace feared the total in-

1. Rexford Guy Tugwell, *The Democratic Roosevelt: A Biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt* (Garden City, NY, 1957), 267.

dustrialization and urbanization of the United States and advocated changes in policy and other areas that would build a rich rural civilization and hold a large population on the land.

This theme regarding the point of view that Wallace brought to the USDA is suggested by an analysis of his writings in *Wallaces' Farmer* during his years as editor.² Those years began in 1921 when President Harding appointed Henry C. Wallace secretary of agriculture and lasted until President Roosevelt moved H. A. from Des Moines to Washington. As editor, he controlled the editorial policies of the magazine, a journal with a subscription list of over 100,000 by the mid-twenties and great prestige in the corn belt.³ The position enabled him to play a leading part in the farm politics of the 1920s and early 1930s.

To the tradition that Wallace expressed, the family farm was an institution and concept of central importance.⁴ The agrarians contrasted it with peasant types and defined it as a farm owned by a family, large enough to serve its economic needs, but small enough for the family to supply most of the required management and labor. Such a farm, according to the tradition, developed great and essential qualities in people. Wallace recognized that family farming was not the only variety existing in the United States. He wrote often of the rising importance of an alternative, large-scale corporate farming, and believed that its growth in importance was virtually inevitable. But he much preferred family farms and battled for changes that

2. For another essay based on this source see Don S. Kirschner, "Henry A. Wallace as Farm Editor," *American Quarterly* 17 (Summer 1965), 187-202. This essay is part of an on-going effort to test a set of hypotheses about Wallace's intellectual development that I outlined in "Commentary on the Thought of Henry A. Wallace," *Agricultural History* 41 (April 1967), 139-142. For their help on this new essay, I am grateful to the Graduate School, Iowa State University, for a grant; to the students in "Farming and Rural Life in American Thought and Imagination" for stimulating discussion of the major themes; and to Glenda Riley for penetrating comments on an early draft.

3. *Wallaces' Farmer*, 11 March 1921, 31 March 1922, 24 December 1926. All further references, unless otherwise noted, are to that magazine or its successor, *Wallaces' Farmer and Iowa Homestead*.

4. A. Whitney Griswold, *Farming and Democracy* (New York, 1948); Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge, 1950); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1955).

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would preserve them, arguing, for example, that "the fight for agricultural equality . . . centers around the problem of maintaining the family-sized farm while at the same time getting some of the centralized bargaining advantages which business enjoys through the corporate form of organization."⁵ Here, he advocated a new government activity for a conservative purpose.

Committed to the survival of the family farm, Wallace was somewhat ambivalent in his attitudes toward major features of modernization. "As farming becomes more scientific and more a matter of machinery and power," he predicted "there will be an increasing tendency to substitute corporation farming for family farming."⁶ He had great enthusiasm for plant and animal breeding, wrote frequently of the latest developments, and encouraged farmers to experiment and benefit from the experiments of others. Yet, he had less enthusiasm for some of the new agricultural machinery, including the tractor. He did not press farmers to substitute tractors for horses, and he predicted that horses would remain important in the corn belt. "It is now becoming apparent that so far as farm work is concerned, horses are almost as necessary as they ever were," he wrote in 1923. "We shall always need horses on most farms," he insisted again in 1926. And after the Great Depression hit and oats and corn furnished "cheaper power than gasoline," he noted, with apparent satisfaction, that "for the first time in half a generation, the horse situation shows unusual strength."⁷

It seems clear that concern about the consequences of mechanization for the structure of agriculture made Wallace reluctant to champion every change in farming methods. There was, he observed, a "force working on the side of large farms, which involves the use of the tractor, the four-row corn cultivator, the two-row picker, the grain combine, and perhaps even the corn combine."⁸ At the same time, he recognized that the new technology was a fact of life with obvious benefits and hoped that it could be made to benefit the family farm. The

5. 13 July 1928.

6. 7 January 1927.

7. 18 May 1923, 5 February 1926, 16 April 1932.

8. 31 October 1931.

challenge was to make new technology serve an old institution.

Traditionally, agrarians had found values of basic importance to the nation in farming and rural life, and Wallace agreed. This theory has been labelled "agricultural fundamentalism" and defined as "a widespread, deep-seated persistent conviction that agriculture is par excellence the fundamental industry, and that farmers are, in a peculiar sense and degree, of basic importance in society."⁹ The fundamentalists regarded agriculture and rural life as basic to American welfare in at least three ways: economically, politically, and socially.¹⁰ Summarizing the agrarian tradition in the language of the time, President Theodore Roosevelt and his Country Life Commission contended early in the century:

Upon the development of this distinctively rural civilization rests ultimately our ability, by methods of farming requiring the highest intelligence, to continue to feed and clothe the hungry nations; to supply the city with fresh blood, clean bodies, and clear brains that can endure the terrific strain of modern life; and to preserve a race of men in the open country that, in the future as in the past, will be the stay and strength of the nation in time of war, and its guiding and controlling spirit in time of peace.¹¹

Wallace's grandfather, "Uncle Henry," the first editor of the magazine, had served on this commission.

Like his grandfather's, the mind of the third Henry Wallace contained the various strains of agricultural fundamentalism. He wrote occasionally of the political importance of farm people, suggesting, for example, that "the fact that until recent years the majority of our people lived in the open country has had not a little to do with the character of the government

9. Joseph S. Davis, "Agricultural Fundamentalism," in O. B. Jesness, ed., *Readings in Agricultural Policy* (Philadelphia, 1949), 5.

10. Gilbert C. Fite, "The Historic Development of Agricultural Fundamentalism in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Farm Economics* 44 (December 1962), 1203-1211.

11. Wayne D. Rasmussen, ed., *Agriculture in the United States: A Documentary History* (New York, 1975), 1863-1864, 1870. In formulating the theme of this essay, I have benefitted greatly from William L. Bowers, *The Country Life Movement in America, 1900-1920* (Port Washington, NY, 1974) and David B. Danbom, *The Resisted Revolution: Urban America and the Industrialization of Agriculture, 1900-1930* (Ames, Iowa, 1979).

which has made this the greatest nation on earth."¹² Jefferson had emphasized this theme in the fundamentalist's creed; he stressed the peculiar ability of family farming to produce the personality type needed for the successful functioning of a democratic system.

Wallace wrote more often about the social importance of farm men and women, stressing the city's dependence on them for growth and success. Farming, he remarked early in his term as editor, "is the source from which comes all that is strongest and most virile in our civilization." The future of American cities, he predicted a short time later, depended on "the quality of the blood sent them from the farms" for the "native born of the cities" were "not producing enough children to maintain themselves."¹³ In arguments reminiscent of the Country Life Commission, he stressed the city's dependence on the countryside for leaders as well as numbers of people and rested his argument on assumptions about the superiority of the rural environment.

Like other agrarians of his time, Wallace gave considerable attention to the economic dimensions of agricultural fundamentalism.¹⁴ There were two: They exalted rural people as both producers and consumers, portraying them as producing the food upon which human life depended and supplying an essential market for the goods produced by urban people.

The farm editor did not totally reject ideas about the importance of non-rural purchasing power. In fact, he made much of the weakening of the European market for farm products as a source of the farmers' economic difficulties during the 1920s and 1930s. World War I, he argued, had produced a change of large importance in the economic relations between Europe and the United States. "The immediate cause of the trouble," he explained, "is the post-war reversal in credit balances."¹⁵ Before the war, the United States had been a debtor nation and paid for the money obtained from Europe largely by exports of agricultural goods; but during the war, the nation had become a

12. 6 January 1922.

13. 14 April 1922, 9 May 1924.

14. Clifford B. Anderson, "The Metamorphosis of Agrarian Idealism in the 1920s and 1930s," *Agricultural History* 35 (October 1961), 182-188.

15. 13 May 1927.

creditor, and after the war, it had raised its tariff walls against European goods. Now, Europeans could afford only low-priced American farm products. "It is now downright painful for Europe to buy goods from us," he informed his readers.¹⁶

Yet, Wallace found weaknesses in the urban purchasing power thesis. He often criticized the high-wage philosophy that organized labor and some business leaders preached during the twenties. He maintained that wages in many areas, such as railroads, were too high; they raised unfairly the farmers' costs of living and doing business and generated unemployment. Farm sales, he argued, depended on high levels of employment in the cities, not high wages. "When a man gets a raise of wages, he does not ordinarily dash out to the nearest butcher shop and stage an orgy among the beefsteaks," Wallace exclaimed. ". . . he continues to eat about what he did before the raise."¹⁷ He also argued that though urban workers prospered during the twenties, their prosperity did not spread out to the countryside. He had sympathized with city workers before the war, he suggested, but he could not do so in the twenties "for the laboring man can buy with his wages about 20 percent more of the good things of life than before the war, whereas the farmer . . . can buy only about 80 percent as much. . . ." ¹⁸

In his discussions of the great importance of purchasing power, Wallace emphasized rural purchasing power. "Increased buying power on the part of farmers would bring half of our moribund industries to life over night," he predicted. "If Iowa farmers get a return comparable to the railroad returns, prosperity will rapidly return to our towns and cities."¹⁹ He tried to persuade eastern business and labor people to recognize the great importance of rural purchasing power and applauded those who did. He advised folks in the midwestern towns and cities that they could not prosper if depression gripped the farmers, criticized those who did not recognize this, and informed his readers about urban midwesterners who did see their economic dependence on farmers. "More and more small town

16. 9 April 1926.

17. 10 December 1926.

18. 30 October 1925.

19. 6 November 1925, 18 June 1926.

business men and bankers are coming to see that their interests lie; not with the large cities and not with the big men of the industrial sections, but with the farmers of their own territory," he reported in 1928.²⁰

And when the Great Depression came, Wallace explained that depressed conditions in rural America during the 1920s had made nationwide trouble inevitable. "For nearly ten years," he wrote in 1931, "farm folks have been telling city people that depression was a disease that might spread from the farm sections to the cities." The unemployed were "victims of their own ignorance and of ignorant urban-minded leadership."²¹

The editor also made much of the farmer's chief product: food. Here, he engaged in prophecy and dire warnings. While noting that American farmers now produced more food than other Americans needed, he warned of food shortages in the future if the farm population became very small and the urban population grew much larger. This would be a time of troubles for the nation with high food prices, hunger, class conflict, revolution, and war. "We have had murmurings for many years about the high cost of food in the United States, but we have not had the really savage cry which is likely to find utterance in ever increasing volume sometime along about the year 1960," he warned. "Laborers are not conservative like farmers," he advised, "and they are in a position to cause trouble that farmers can not." Taking aim at the national leadership of the twenties, he argued: "If there are great disturbances in our cities during the period extending from 1940 to 1960, they will trace fundamentally to the injustices suffered by western and southern farmers during the fifteen years following the World War." It seemed likely that "statesmen and historians" in the 1960s would "marvel at the blind folly of the way in which the agricultural situation was handled. . . ."²²

To the Iowa farm leader, it appeared that government had special responsibilities to rural people, but it was equally obvious that the leaders of the 1920s and early 1930s did not fully accept those responsibilities. In fact, the people to whom society

20. 10 August 1928.

21. 22 August 1931.

22. 23 March 1923, 13 May 1927.

owed so much were victims of discrimination in the American scheme of things. ". . . big business and labor," he suggested, "have a working arrangement between them to make all the money they can get out of the consumers and especially out of the farmers." He maintained that "American farmers, in spite of their superior efficiency, are not living so very much better than the European peasants, whereas the laboring men in our cities have a tremendous advantage over the European laborers in the purchasing power of their wages." He admitted that the farmers of the time enjoyed more of the good things of life than their grandparents of the seventies and eighties had, perhaps 50 percent more, but he insisted that the people of the towns were "enjoying three times as much."²³

Persuaded that the farmer suffered from discrimination, Wallace joined in the battle for equality for agriculture. Born and raised an Iowa Republican and aiming his arguments frequently at Republican leaders and voters, he often employed rhetoric used by his party in an earlier struggle: "The population of a great democratic nation can not indefinitely remain 'half slave and half free,' as is the case in the United States today with city labor getting twice the pre-war wages and the farmer getting little more than enough to pay his interest and taxes." Employing Republican rhetoric, he appealed to a small "d" democratic principle, the principle of equality. "The fight of the farmer," Wallace explained, "is to get as great a return in human satisfaction for the same outlay of energy and intelligence as is obtained by the people living in the towns."²⁴

Convinced that "man-made laws" were responsible for inequality, the editor frequently discussed the advantages and privileges that business and labor enjoyed. Both seemed much better organized than farmers were and were thus much more powerful. Taking advantage of the corporate form, giants like United States Steel could regulate production in ways that guaranteed profit. That steel corporation, Wallace reported in 1921, "is maintaining prices and wages by operating at about 40 percent of plant capacity." Rather than propose that such firms should be forced to change their ways, he urged farmers to imi-

23. 2 May 1924, 2 April 1926, 2 October 1925.

24. 30 May 1924, 2 October 1925.

tate corporate practices and cut back on production themselves when demand for their products fell. "Most common-sense people who are familiar with developments in the world of union labor and big corporate business are willing to grant that the farmer has the right to organize to control his output," the editor observed. "We all know that if the United States Steel Corporation were handling the corn and hog business . . . , the corn acreage would either be cut to fit the size of the present hog crop or else the hog crop would be increased to fit the present size of the corn crop and the surplus dumped abroad."²⁵

Wallace campaigned for production control throughout his years as editor, coming finally to the conclusion that the federal government must act effectively to get farmers to cut and regulate their output. In this campaign, he advocated change in farming: He urged farmers to copy industrial practices; he called upon the federal government to intervene crucially in the production process. He was a modernizer. But he did not embrace modernization for its own sake.

Industry's ability to regulate production depended upon the government-supplied opportunity to incorporate, but the system of privilege did not stop there, and Wallace offered advice as to what should be done about other special privileges from government to business and labor. He supplied lists of the privileges that government gave to non-farm groups, including the Federal Reserve Act, the Adamson Act, the Cummins-Esch Act, immigration restriction, and the protective tariff. He lashed back at critics of proposals for government aid to the farmer, arguing that they were pleas for equal treatment. He suggested that the nation could either do away with all forms of privilege or give farm people their share: ". . . there are two ways in which federal action may help to put the purchasing power of the farm on an equality with other groups. It may be done by giving agriculture the equivalent of the privileges enjoyed by other groups; it may be done by wiping out all privileges."²⁶

To Wallace, no form of government privilege seemed more important than the protective tariff. Even though the protective

25. 16 October 1925, 12 January 1923, 11 March 1927.

26. 4 June 1926.

system of the 1920s and early 1930s contained provisions seemingly designed for the benefit of farmers, it failed to serve them effectively and harmed their efforts to sell their products outside the United States. On the other hand, protection permitted American manufacturers to charge high prices for their products in the American market. Throughout much of the 1920s, Wallace participated in the campaign for the McNary-Haugen plan that aimed to make the tariff work for the farmers as it did for manufacturers. The plan proposed a two-price system for farming similar to the two-price system that existed in protected and corporate manufacturing: McNary-Haugen would permit the farmers to sell their goods at one price in the American market and dump the surplus abroad at a lower price. "Until the protective system is remodelled to include the farmer, or until the protective system is itself abolished, the agitation for making the tariff effective on farm products will continue," Wallace editorialized. "'Protection for all or none,' is . . . a good motto for the farmer."²⁷ After the failure of the battle for McNary-Haugen and the passage of the Hawley-Smoot Tariff, which raised the wall of protection to a new high, the farm editor became more interested in destroying or at least lowering the wall.

At the same time that he battled for government action on behalf of the farmers, Wallace defended them against charges that they were inefficient and suggestions that they could solve their economic problems by becoming more efficient. He maintained that their efficiency levels compared favorably with those of other groups in the American economy and farmers elsewhere and insisted that they needed more than campaigns for greater efficiency. He did believe that individuals could strengthen themselves by improving farming methods. "There is no escape from the doctrine that for the individual, the only plan is to produce as efficiently as possible and to try to keep out of the marginal class that is wiped out in hard times," he advised. Thus, *Wallaces' Farmer* devoted many pages to efforts to make its readers better farmers. But, since farmers already produced more than could be sold at a price that would bring them a profit, increased efficiency did not impress him as the solution to their problems as a group. "We . . . hold to our two major

27. 11 December 1925, 19 February 1926.

aims," Wallace explained, "to make the readers of *Wallaces' Farmer* efficient enough to survive in the bitter struggle now going on; to bring about mass action of farmers as a class that will put agriculture on a level with other occupations."²⁸ Farmers needed schemes like the McNary-Haugen plan, the Voluntary Domestic Allotment Plan, and expansion of the supplies of money and credit that would raise farm prices.

Convinced that farm prices must be raised, the future secretary of agriculture reserved his harshest criticism for those who opposed so effectively the proposals for farm relief. He placed much of the blame on eastern business people and bankers. He frequently singled out Herbert Hoover, the powerful secretary of commerce in the Harding-Coolidge administrations, for special condemnation.

These powerful people—Hoover and other leaders in the national administration, eastern industrialists and financiers, the leaders in other big cities including the Midwest's Chicago—backed a dangerous set of policies. "Two conceptions of civilization here in the United States are fighting for recognition," Wallace believed. "The one which seems to be championed by Hoover looks forward to the most rapid possible growth in the commercial and industrial centers and takes an interest in agriculture chiefly in so far as it conduces to the honor, glory, and profit of commerce."²⁹ The Iowan found the evidence for his interpretation in the high value that his adversaries placed on the sale of manufactured goods outside the United States and the low value placed on the sale of American agricultural products in foreign markets. These people did all that they could to push American factory goods into other places but discouraged the export of farm products. Viewing farm prices as an important part of the manufacturer's costs, Hoover and others like him, as Wallace saw them, favored low food prices and wished to purchase farm products wherever they were cheap. These people would solve the American farm problem—the problem of too much production—by driving most rural people out of agriculture and into the cities, leaving in the rural areas only a small number of farmers: those who

28. 23 April 1926.

29. 6 March 1925.

were highly efficient and could afford to sell at low prices or those willing to live at a peasant standard of living. In short, Hoover and others would make the United States almost totally urban and industrial. "The great industrial system is running away with us," Wallace wrote. "Soon we shall have four or five people living in the city to every one person living on the land."³⁰

To drive home the dangers he saw in the policies he opposed, Wallace made use of historical analogies. Ancient Rome, he suggested, had destroyed itself by adopting a cheap food policy that sacrificed the interest of Italian farmers for the benefit of the urban masses. Nineteenth-century England had chosen such a policy—had chosen to become essentially an industrial nation—and now suffered heavy unemployment, class conflict, a small degraded rural population, and other ills. "We seem to be following blindly in the footsteps of England," he warned. "The population of our larger cities is growing by leaps and bounds while the population of corn belt farms is continually becoming smaller." Seeking to teach the "lessons of history" and avoid further repetition of the mistakes of the past, he advised that it was "time for the people of the United States to stop and ask themselves just how far they want to travel along this path."³¹

A component of Wallace's thinking, as in that of other disciples of Jefferson was strong dislike for big cities. "Our cities are headed toward a state of society that is ugly and as spiritually unsatisfying as a Ford factory," Wallace predicted.³² He felt uncomfortable in big cities; he deplored their congestion. "Recently I was in New York City for the first time in fourteen years," he reported in 1926:

It was interesting but at times a feeling of nausea came over me as I went milling thru the subway stations with thousands of other people. . . . A great city has in it a terrible fascinating power but there is also much to suggest the triumph of machinery over life. . . . I can't help but feel there is much to Spengler's conten-

30. 13 May 1927.

31. 21 August 1925.

32. 3 October 1924.

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tion that when the great city triumphs at the expense of the countryside civilization is gradually growing towards its close.³³

Involved in Wallace's views was a theory of human nature that made much out of environmental conditions and influences. "Man . . . for thousands of years lived on the land. When he tries to convert himself into a creature who inhabits plains and hills of brick and concrete something in him suffers," Wallace argued. "We take this man, lock him in a city, force him to breathe air tainted by thousands of his fellows, hosts of motor cars, myriads of smoke-belching chimneys; we assault his ears with the racket of the street car, the auto, the newsboy; we insult his eyes with billboards and electric signs; we throw him into contact with a thousand new forces; and we get . . . a creature whose vitality is so low that his blood habitually dies out in three generations."³⁴ The meaning of the message was obvious: The conception of civilization championed by Hoover must not triumph; it was not compatible with human nature; nature places limits on modernization.

In contrast with those whom he regarded as enemies of the farmer (and the nation), Wallace favored a large rural population and was alarmed by the rate of migration from farm to city as well as proposals to accelerate it. He did believe that some rural people should move out, hoped that only the least effective, least efficient farmers would do so, but recognized that many good farmers were being forced or drawn off the land and that many intelligent and educated young people were leaving the farms. Perhaps because he knew the corn belt so well and knew so little about the cotton South, he assumed that most people now on the land could and should stay there. To cite one illustration of his frequently expressed views of population distribution, he suggested in the mid-twenties that while the present ratio of 2.5 urban people for each person on the farm might not be "dangerous," if the ratio increased to three to one, the United States would have "a civilization no longer firmly rooted in the soil" and would "almost certainly lose vigor centuries

33. 5 November 1926. The Spengler to whom he referred was the German philosopher whose theory of history challenged the optimists of the day.

34. 7 September 1928, 6 June 1924.

before it would if agriculture and commerce were developed on a more even basis."³⁵

The rural population could and would remain large, however, only if certain changes were made: Farming had to become profitable; rural people, who were unwilling to return to peasant or pioneer conditions, had to be able to improve their homes, obtain better health services, afford features of modern life like the automobile, the telephone, the radio, education, and movies, and obtain more leisure time; isolation must cease to be a feature of rural life; rural institutions like the church, the school, the cooperative, and the community club must be bolstered.

Concerned with much more than the economics of agriculture, Wallace insisted that rural life must be strengthened socially as well as economically if large numbers of people were to be persuaded to stay in farming. "Fundamentally the one thing that *Wallaces' Farmer* stands for," he maintained, "is the building of a fine rural civilization." The nation needed to create, he insisted, a strong and distinctive rural civilization that could "hold its own alongside the civilization of the great city" and "against the attractions of city tinsel."³⁶ The struggle for a rural civilization was part of a battle of gigantic significance in his eyes. "There are two great forces struggling in the nation," he maintained. "One is a force that tends to make America a nation of industrial cities relying on foreign farms for part of its food products; the other is the force that tends to keep the United States a well-balanced nation with a full share of income and opportunity for the people on the farms."³⁷

Balance was a key word. Wallace did, of course, accept factories and cities, just as Jefferson had come to do. But the Iowan, like the Virginian, wanted them to be balanced by a large, healthy rural civilization capable of exerting a substantial influence on the nation as a whole. The nation would lose too much if, in pursuit of the new, it lost the influence of the countryside.

35. 28 November 1924.

36. 19 February 1926, 1 April 1927, 16 January 1925.

37. 7 September 1928.

For Wallace, the election of FDR seemed to open up opportunities to achieve old values through the use of new methods. Early in 1932, the farm editor issued a plea for "a modern Thomas Jefferson" to emerge and provide leadership. On election eve, he foresaw "a new golden era of farming in the corn belt, and the realization of the dreams that led the pioneers across the Mississippi in 1832." After the election, the Iowan assured his readers that under Roosevelt, agriculture would come first. Many farmers had grown "bitterly reconciled to continual defeat, to the gradual degeneration of rural communities, to the migration of farm boys and girls to the cities, to the draining of wealth and man power from the country to the town." Now, there seemed to be "an opportunity for a reversal of these tendencies." Soon, Wallace left for Washington to work "under a chief who is definitely progressive; entirely sympathetic toward agriculture, and completely determined to use every means at his command to restore farm buying power." The secretary-designate hoped that when he returned to Iowa "prices would be higher, mortgages smaller and taxes lower."³⁸

When Henry A. Wallace became secretary of agriculture in 1933, he was an advocate of change or modernization in farming and rural life, but he was also a champion of tradition, and the changes he favored were essentially means to traditional ends. Like many agrarians before him, he wanted the nation to have a large number of family farmers and a vigorous rural way of life. He did not want the United States to become essentially an urban industrial nation with a small farm population merely serving cities and factories at low prices and having no say in the conduct of affairs. The proposals for government action and other changes that he favored were mainly ways of guaranteeing that the United States would not move in directions that seemed undesirable from an agrarian point of view. Since 1932, the nation has implemented his most prominent suggestions on means but has paid less attention to his most ambitious goals, so that we now have large-scale government involvement in agriculture but only a small rural population. While he was repelled by England in the 1920s where, according to his calculations, there were four urban people for each person on the farm, the

38. 25 June 1932, 12 November 1932, 26 November 1932, 4 March 1933.

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ratio of non-farm to farm people in the United States today is greater than thirty to one! Modernization has overwhelmed tradition. Why and how that has happened, the desirability of it, and Wallace's own rôles in the transformation must be put off for later discussions.³⁹

39. On the triumph of modernization in American agriculture see John L. Shover, *First Majority—Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* (DeKalb, IL, 1976) and Gilbert C. Fite, *American Farmers: The New Minority* (Bloomington, IN, 1981).

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