

## **Chapter 1**

### **America at the End of the Frontier**

Uncivilized wilderness is alive and kicking in Oz even if Frederick Jackson Turner was right when he said that the American frontier had closed, the wilderness civilized, populated, and plowed. The inner geography of Baum's mind had to conjure a spacious place of wilderness

*Rebecca Loncraine*

From the end of Kali Yuga, from the year 1899 onwards, a certain faculty of etheric sight unfolds in mankind, and this will have developed in a number of people between 1930 and 1940. There will then be two possibilities. Mankind may sink more deeply still into the morass of materialism; everything may be flooded by materialism. This awakening of etheric sight may be ignored, just as the Christ Event was ignored. But if men do not experience this awakening, they will be submerged in materialism.

*Rudolf Steiner*

The settlement of the North American colonies had loosened blood ties, tradition and religious dogma and creed. New conditions were established in the New World that heralded undreamt new possibilities. The ideal of Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood that could not take root in Europe through the French Revolution, was transplanted on American soil through the newly found conditions that saw the forming of a cosmopolitan culture, in which many immigrants sought refuge from economic restrictions, political and religious persecution.

Benjamin Franklin foresaw the birth of idea of America and what it meant to be an American. The American Revolution, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and the adoption of a federal government were all departures from the past of the Old World. Here was a nation based on law and enshrining the central role of the individual, over and against the rule of kings or popes. It was a new, federal and decentralized model, built on three independent branches of government.

The government of the People, "by the People's" ultimate goal was the upholding of individual freedoms. And individual freedom is the precondition of the 'pursuit of happiness' meant in the sense of the individual seeking to realize his full potential. Individual freedom goes hand in hand with the effort to reach the full reality of the Self and the spiritual dimension of existence. Only an individual who truly knows herself can be said to be free in the ultimate meaning of the word; only such an individual can render freedom a reality for his fellow human beings, because she will not seek to aggrandize her privileges at the expense of others. And here is

born a paradox. A new social compact that affirms the individual, can also affirm and magnify his anti-social tendencies; the pursuit of self-gratification and aggrandizing, the pursuit of happiness in an egotistical way. And this possibility clearly showed from the early days, and all the more so in the expansion to the West.

Other forces were also at play that gave America its own unique stamp. The newcomers were both immigrants and settlers. They did not just face the limitations of the loss of the old and familiar; they also encountered a situation of spaciousness, a land that presented seemingly unlimited possibilities. This posed the obvious problem of the meeting with the Native culture that had so much to offer to the depleted outlook of the Age of Reason from which the European settlers hailed. This missed meeting of cultures is a tragedy that weighs in the background of the settlement of the East. It only accelerated with the expansion toward Mid-West and West.

The spaciousness of the land offered the newcomers opportunity to experiment with new ways of being, to discover new realities and transform themselves. Thus, leaving traditions and shackles of dogma behind came with the possibility of a further opening of the mind and discovery of the Self.

The reality of the frontier was also one that engaged the collaborative spirit. Nothing was really possible without social cooperation. That had already been the case with the original colonies. De Tocqueville had noted the burgeoning life of civic associations and its importance for the future of America. Granted this level of reciprocal engagement took more practical forms in the expansion of the frontier.

The newly gained freedom of the settlers had another consequence; it freed the imagination. It made of America what David Spangler calls an 'imaginal nation.' "This quality of being an imagination, that is, a nation that draws its being out of the imagination, out of vision, out of thought and out of spirit rather than out of the physical land, out of the past, out of blood, out of lineage—this was an important shift and at the same time, it is a challenging shift and it's one we are still grappling with."<sup>1</sup>

The freed imagination is what can give birth to the new, the unexpected; it can give birth to a whole which is more than the sum of its constituents. The American Revolution or the Constitutional Convention were just examples of this.

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<sup>1</sup> David Spangler, *An American Path: A One-Week Exploratory Forum*, June 3-10, 2017, transcribed and edited by Annabel Chiarelli, 60.

## **Trials of the Nineteenth Century**

America had basically further severed itself from Europe through the Civil War. The greatest danger in the conflict lay in the formation of two weakened nations, subjected to the financial powers of Europe, and de facto economically subordinated to the British Empire. Lincoln managed the feat of preserving the unity of the country, while averting the danger of its indebtedness and economic enslavement to the British Empire.<sup>2</sup>

The President also reconnected the nation to the founding, universal impulse of the Declaration of Independence. True, he died before being able to complete his planned, restored national edifice. Slavery disappeared, but was replaced by economic subjugation of the ex-slaves in the South and segregation at one level or another throughout the country. The national banking system, though a Wild West of sorts, was not yet dominated by a single interest group, but was highly unstable.

Two forces looked at each other as mirror images. On one hand the external frontier was practically closed as the nation had reached its present borders, "from sea to shining sea" by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. On the other hand the American soul was restless on the inner frontier. This was the time of spiritualism and religious revivals on the East Coast and Frank Baum's birth occurred at the center of it. The creation of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* bathed in this spiritual atmosphere.

Spiritualism saw its birth in the spring of 1848 through the Fox sisters. The movement spread from Rochester to Syracuse, close to Frank Baum's birthplace. It became both popular and controversial. In 1875 this yearning would take a more definite direction through the forming of the Theosophical Society in New York City. It was officially formed in November 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, and others. The Society, which owed its origins to a true Rosicrucian impulse, wanted to study and penetrate occultism very broadly. In time this took the direction of Eastern religions and esotericism, so much so that the headquarters moved from New York to Adyar, India.

The need to explore what it means to be human beyond dogmas and traditions also led to the women's emancipation movement and its landmark convention at Seneca Falls in the fateful year 1848. Though an external, political movement it reflected of the deeper yearning of recovering and liberating one's full humanity. Matilda Gage, Frank Baum's mother-in-law was both an engaged feminist and an earnest Theosophist. Susan B. Anthony was deeply inspired by her native Quakerism. Likewise, Elizabeth Cody Stanton wanted more than simple political rights, as she expressed it in her seminal "Solitude of Self."

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<sup>2</sup> This is treated in depth in *Abraham Lincoln: A Spiritual Scientific Portrait*.

Over and against the turning of the frontier to the inner life, stood the temptation of continued territorial expansion. After the Spanish-American War the US stood on the brink of becoming a world power and empire. It acquired its first overseas territories of Hawai'i, Puerto Rico, Guam and Philippines from 1898 to 1901. The temptation of Empire called the nation south and west.

At the turning of the century America was poised between a needed change of orientation from the outer to the inner plane. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* offered this reminder. The story shows the five friends roaming through vastness of spaces from the East to the West, a clear reminder of American geography. However, what is important in this wandering are the soul trials that the companions meet.

### **A Story for America**

The Wizard of Oz was written in 1899 and published in 1900. It was the fruit of inspiration of a writer who was then a Theosophist and who had grown up homeschooled under the inspiration of the Grimm's and other fairy tales.

Frank Baum, was born the seventh of nine children—many dead in childhood—on May 15, 1856 in Chittenango, close to Syracuse, in the New York Finger Lakes region. The shy child, who was homeschooled, spent much time reading fairy tales and playing with imaginary playmates. Among his favorite authors were the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, Charles Perrault and Andrew Lang. Other sources were Dickens, Shakespeare, Swift, Thoreau, Emerson, Hawthorne, Twain and Lewis Carroll.

In speaking later about his favorite storytellers Baum reminisced: “[they] deserve undying fame for having rescued so many beautiful stories from threatened oblivion, for it has been impossible for modern authors to equal the charming imagery of those ancient tales.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, though enamored of European fairy tales he somehow intuited that it would be possible to write a story of a more American mold. The *Wizard of Oz* was conceived around October of 1899 and published in September of 1900 at the turning point of the time of the end of Kali Yuga and the beginning of the Age of Light. This is an important turning point in human history, a time in which humanity started to develop new faculties of soul, the first beginnings of a new clairvoyance.

Later on Baum called his Wizard of Oz his “most truthful tale.” And further: “The winged fairies of Grimm and Andersen have brought more happiness to childish hearts than all other human creations... Yet the old-time fairy

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<sup>3</sup> From *The Annotated Wizard of Oz*, Michael Patrick Hearn editor, 138.

tale, having served for generations, may now be classed as 'historical'... for the time has come for a series of new 'wonder tales.'"<sup>4</sup>

Baum's biographer, Rebecca Loncraine, comments what many Americans could only agree with: "He managed to create something that felt already ancient, weathered into such a perfect, archetypal shape that it seemed authorless from the start."<sup>5</sup> Thus was born the first American fairy tale. That the story was inspired and unique is confirmed by the fact that later Baum tried to exploit the Oz vein with many sequels, none of which garnered significant success and interest. They were Frank Baum's personal versions of Oz and very few children or adults remember even their titles to this day.

*The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* is a story of at least two levels. At the most obvious it speaks of the individual's initiation into the spiritual world through the meetings with the Lesser Guardian and Greater Guardians, and the integration of the soul forces. At another one it speaks of America through its growth from East to West and South.

Remarkably little is said about the North and nothing of importance about this region that does not exist in US geography. The only north is that of our Canadian neighbors. But the story also says little about the East, which we can intuit is America's past, the one which is no longer challenging its identity. When the story begins the Witch of the East has been killed and the companions have to move to the center before reaching the West. We will now look at this journey from Kansas to the East, from there to the center and finally the West of Oz. The explorations of the South will not concern us other than very briefly in this book, fascinating as they may be, since they seem to concern the far future of the land.

It is fascinating to see that Frank Baum's color coding of the cardinal directions corresponds with what can be perceived through occult investigation. Jeshaiahu ben Aharon indicates that "Spiritually seen, the eastern side of the globe appears as a bluish-purple, and the West appears as a fiery red-yellow. The West radiates fire from the depths out to the world. This reflects the cosmic spirit. Everything of the West has to do with those forces of the depths: original fire, original electricity, atomic power."<sup>6</sup> And as we know in the *Wizard of Oz* the East has been portrayed in blue, the Emerald City in green, the West in yellow and the South in red. Thus were they color-coded in a felicitous way by W. W. Denslow who complemented Baum's text with the image.

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<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Loncraine, *The Real Wizard of Oz: The Life and Times of L. Frank Baum*, 183.

<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Loncraine, *The Real Wizard of Oz*, xiv.

<sup>6</sup> Jeshayahu Ben-Aharon, *Spiritual Science in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Transforming Evil, Meeting the Other and Awakening to the Global Initiation of Humanity*, 293.

## **The Wizard of Oz from East to Center**

In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* the search for our life in the spirit starts from the very center of the continental United States, Kansas. Here before the turn of the century the American citizen lives in the depleted world of the senses. There is nothing in sight beside the farm; not a tree, not a hill, just the horizon. A land devoid of soul.

Let us notice an element of pure inspiration in the choice of name Dorothy, "loved of God." She is a child, but as an orphan, already tried by fate. The bright and joyful Dorothy has been adopted by the dull, duty-bound Uncle Henry and Aunt Emily. Everything in the Kansas prairie reminds us all too much of a world devoid of spirit. Everything lacks color and joy; grey is mentioned ten times before the cyclone hits. Toto is different; he is not grey but black; and he is a joyful companion. Toto made Dorothy laugh, and saved her from growing as grey as her surroundings. In Dorothy and Toto live true spirit and soul capable of uplifting the grey situation. And yet help comes from the outside, from a cyclone, through the meeting of the north and south winds in the great Midwest prairie corridor. The reference to north and south winds also points to the two good witches who help Dorothy through the cyclone.

After the cyclone, Dorothy is awakened by a severe shock. Darkness had made way to the light of the sun. She awakens in the land of the Munchkins, a land of marvelous beauty, a land thoroughly humanized with fields of grains and vegetables and farmers cultivating them. The Munchkins look like elementals, small in stature, but seemingly old. Dorothy has landed in the elemental world which forms a stark contrast with the depleted physical world of Kansas.

Dorothy, welcomed by the Witch of the North, has inadvertently killed the Witch of the East. All that is left of her are her silver shoes, which Dorothy inherits, and they fit her perfectly. The Witch of the North cannot help Dorothy and she advises she seek the help of Oz, by following the yellow brick road, the road that is "straight and narrow." She offers her kiss on the forehead, whose mark will act as a protection for her travels, and warns her that "It is a long journey, through a country that is sometimes pleasant and sometimes dark and terrible." Dorothy sets off, soon meeting the forces of the soul, before these are tested in the journey toward the threshold of the spiritual world, the Emerald City.

### Meeting the Forces of the Soul

It is only fitting that a child gets to know the forces of the soul on the way to adulthood and its trials. This is what Dorothy and Toto will undertake. Dorothy sets out in the open fields of cleared land and farm crops. Her dress has, coincidentally, the blue of the Munchkins and the white of the witches. The Munchkins in fact believe her to be a great sorceress. The silver shoes fit her perfectly; and that is another sign of that possibility.

The scarecrow is found in a cornfield; in open, civilized land. He calls Dorothy's attention through his eyes and his friendliness. His life has been very short; he was built the day before Dorothy found him. The scarecrow's greatest desire is to have brains. He never tires and does not suffer hunger, but does fear fire.

Gradually the yellow brick road becomes rougher. The bricks are uneven, broken or missing, and holes appear. The path moves from open fields to the forest where the trees shut out the light of day. Toto and the scarecrow can still see through the darkness. While they are in the forest they hear the groans of the Tin Woodman. He holds an uplifted axe in a frozen position. He is entirely made of tin. Contrary to the scarecrow the Tin Woodman has a story. He once had brains and heart, but he prefers his heart. He was persecuted by the Witch of the East, who wanted to prevent him from loving a Munchkin girl. He lost his heart, and his love, and he hit all his body parts with an axe due to the spells of the witch.

The scarecrow has no support; he is stuffed; the Tinman has no insides. Neither Scarecrow nor Woodman eat. The Woodman needs to constantly lubricate his joints to prevent them from rusting from water or tears. He is in fact oversensitive; he has known suffering and cries easily. Woodman can help the companions as the forest grows denser and thicker; he can chop the branches.

Scarecrow and Tinman posit a question for their journey: "Said the Scarecrow 'I shall ask for brains instead of a heart; for only a fool would not know what to do with a heart if he had one.' 'I shall take the heart,' returned the Tin Woodman; 'for brains do not make one happy, and happiness is the best thing in the world.' Dorothy did not say anything, for she was puzzled to know which of her friends was right..."

On the way to meeting the last companion the road becomes harder. The Lion they meet last thinks himself a coward, even though all other creatures are scared of him. He yearns to find courage. Meanwhile he makes up for his fear by roaring out loudly.

America finds itself at the onset orphaned from the moorings of the Old World. Everything has to be pursued anew. Likewise Dorothy has left the grey of habit and tradition to discover new colors and new companions. She has killed the Witch of the East almost without knowing it. She has nothing to do with the past. Other dangers lurk toward the future and the West, and she may not be ready for those, even as she faces them with optimism.

Head or heart, pursuing understanding or happiness, probably posits a question that our continent and history have long articulated. But in the mix there is also a Lion that calls for courage.

From the onset Dorothy has killed the Witch of the East, the Luciferic powers. This is not to say that Lucifer is vanquished in the USA. It only indicates that by and large it doesn't represent a danger for the future. And America as a whole is hardly enraptured with the battle of the ideologies that will hold sway in Europe. Even here it cannot claim to have clean hands, quite the contrary. Rather, it is clear that in America, more than in Europe and the rest of the world, the real test lies in withstanding the full onslaught of the forces of Ahriman and Asuras arrayed together, and of the Sorath that looms behind them. With the help of Lucifer leading us to the Christ we can in America counter the forces of the West. We will meet them in the figure of the Witch of the West. And it is the forces of the spiritual West that will concern us from now on.