

Spirit of the Age.

BY E. M. BROWN.

"Freedom of Inquiry and the Power of the People."

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nected
with the above.

Gov. Wright's Address.

At the Exhibition of the New York State
Agricultural Society, September 16th
1847.

Mr. President, and Gentlemen of the
State Agricultural Society.—Had it been
my purpose to entertain you with an eulogium
upon the great interests confided to
your care—the Agriculture of the State—I
should find myself forestalled by the
exhibition which surrounds us, and which
has pronounced that eulogy to the eye,
much more forcibly, impressively, elo-
quently, than I could command language
to pronounce it to the ear of this assembly.

Had I mistakenly proposed to address
you a discourse upon agricultural pro-
duction, this exhibition would have driven
me from my purpose, by the conviction
that I am a backward and scarcely initiated
scholar, standing in the presence of mas-
ters, with the least instructed and expe-
rienced of whom, it would be my duty to
change places.

The agriculture of our State, far as it
yet is from maturity and perfection, has
already become an art, a science, a pro-
fession, in which he who would instruct
must be first himself instructed far beyond
the advancement of him who now addresses
you.

The pervading character of this great
and vital interest, however, its intimate
connection with the wants, comforts and
interests of every man in every employ-
ment and calling in life, and its controlling
relations to the commerce, manufac-
tures, substantial independence, and the
general health and prosperity of our whole
people, present abundant subjects for con-
templation upon occasions like this, with-
out attempting to explore the depths, or to
define the principles of a science so pro-
found, and to the uninitiated, so difficult
as that of agriculture.

Agricultural production is the sub-
stratum of the whole superstructure; the
great element which spreads the soil and im-
pels the car of commerce, and moves the
hands and turns the machinery of manu-
facture. The earth is the common mother of all,
in whatever employment engaged, and the
fruits gathered from its bosom, are alike
the indispensable nutriment and support
of all. The productions of its surface
and the treasures of its mines are the ma-
terial upon which the labor of the agricul-
turalist, the merchant and the manufac-
turer, are alike bestowed, and the price
for which all alike toil.

The active stimulus which urges all
forward, excites industry, wakens ingenu-
ity, and brings out invention, is the pros-
pect or the hope of a market for the
productions of their labor. The farmer
produces to sell; the merchant purchases to
sell; and the manufacturer fabricates to
sell; and the consumption of their respective
goods, although an indispensable necessity
of life is a mere incident in the mind im-
pelled to acquisition. To gain that which is
not produced or acquired, by the sale of that
which is possessed, is the great struggle
of the laboring man.

Agricultural production is the first in
order, the strongest in necessity, and the
highest in usefulness, in this whole sys-
tem of acquisition. The other branches
stand upon it, are sustained by it, and
without it could not exist. Still, it has
been almost uniformly, as the whole history
of our State and country will show, the
most neglected. Apprenticeship, educa-
tion, a specific course of systematic in-
struction, has been, time out of mind, con-
sidered an indispensable pre-requisite to
credible or successful engagement in
commercial or mechanical pursuits; while
to know how to wield the axe, to hold the
plow, and to swing the scythe, has been
deemed sufficient to entitle the possessor
of that knowledge to the first place, and
the highest wages in agricultural employ-
ment.

A simple principle of production and of
trade, always practically applied to manu-
factures and commerce, that the best and
cheapest article will command the market,
and prove the most profitable to the pro-
ducer and the seller, because most bene-
ficial to the buyer and consumer, is but
beginning to receive its application in agri-
culture. The merchant who, from a
more extensive acquaintance with his oc-
cupation, a more attentive observation
of the markets, better adapted means, and
a more careful application of sound judg-
ment, uniting energy; and prudent indus-
try, can buy the best and sell the cheapest
has always been seen to be the earliest
and surest to accomplish the great object
of his class, an independence for himself.
So the mechanic, who, from a more
thorough instruction in the principles and
handicraft of his trade, or a more intense
application of mind and judgment with
labor, can improve the articles he fabri-
cates, or the machinery and modes of
their manufacture, and can thus produce
the best, and sell the cheapest, has always
been seen to reach the same advantage
over his competitors, with equal readiness
and certainty, and that these results sho'd
follow these means and efforts, has been
considered natural and unavoidable.

Still the agriculturalist has been content
to follow the beaten track, to pursue, and
to depend upon the earth, the seasons,
good fortune and providence, for a crop,
impulsed by the hope that high prices may
compensate for diminished quantity of in-
ferior quality. It has scarcely occurred
to him that the study of the principles of
his profession had any thing to do with his
success as a farmer, or that what he had
demanded from his soils should be con-
sidered in connection with what he is to do
for them, and what he is about to ask of

them to perform. He had almost over-
looked the vital fact, that his lands like his
patient teams, require to be fed to enable
them to perform well; and especially he
has neglected to consider that there is a
like connection between the quantity and
the quality of the food they are to receive
and the service to be required from them.
Ready, almost always, to the extent of
their ability, to make advances for the
purchase of more lands, how few of our
farmers, in the comparison, are willing to
make the necessary outlays for the profit-
able improvement of the land they already
have.

These, and kindred subjects, are begin-
ning to occupy the minds of our farmers,
and the debt they owe to this society for
its efforts to waken their attention to these
important facts, and to supply useful and
practical information in regard to them,
is gradually receiving a just appreci-
ation, as the assimilation which surrounds
us, and the exhibitions upon this ground
most gratifyingly prove.

Many of our agriculturalists are now
vigorously commencing the study of their
soils, the adaptation of their manures to
the soil and crop, the natures of the plants
they cultivate, the food they require, and
the best methods of administering that
food to produce health, and vigor, and
fruit; and they are becoming convinced
that to understand how to plow, and sow,
and reap, is not the whole education of
the farmer, but that it is quite as impor-
tant to know what land is prepared for the
plow, and what seed it will bring to a har-
vest worthy of the labors of the sower.—
Experience is steadily proving that, by a
due attention to these considerations, a
better article, doubled in quantity, may
be produced from the same acre of ground
with a small proportionate increase of
labor and expense, and that the farmer who
pursues this improved system of agricul-
ture, can, like the merchant and mechan-
ic referred to, enter the market with a bet-
ter production, at a cheaper price, than his
less enterprising competitor.

The change in the agriculture of our
state and country, opens to the mind re-
flections of the most cheering character.
If carried out to its legitimate results, it
promises a competition among our farmers
not to obtain the highest prices for inter-
ior productions, but to produce the most,
the best, and the most valuable arti-
cles of human life, the products of agricul-
tural prosperity, with abundant food for
him who will eat within the rate prescribed
to fallen man in the sacred volume of
Divine Law.

Steady resolution, and unremitting
efforts are required to secure permanent
improvements to that agriculture, which
dictated alike by interest and duty, and
stimulated by a strong and remunerating
market will rouse that resolution and
nerve that energy. Without this encour-
agement in prospect, few will persevere in
making improvements which require close
and constant mental application, as well
as severe physical labor.

Agriculture will never be healthfully
or profitably prosecuted by him whose con-
trolling object is his own consumption.—
The hope of gain is the motive power to
human industry, and is as necessary to
the farmer as to the merchant or manufac-
turer. All who labor are equally stimu-
lated by the prospect of a market which
is to remunerate them for their toil, and
without this hope neither mental activity
nor physical energy will characterize their
exertions.

True is it that the farmers of our coun-
try, as a class calculate less closely the
profits of their labor and capital than men
engaged in most other pursuits, and are
content with lower rates of gain. The
most of them own their farms, their stocks
and farming implements, unencumbered
by debt. Their business gives but an an-
nual return. They live frugally, labor pa-
tiently and faithfully, and at the close of
the year, its expenses are paid from its
proceeds, the balance remaining being
accounted the profits of the year. Altho a
moderate sum produces contentment,
without a computation of the rate per-
cent upon the capital invested, or the
wages it will pay to the proprietor and the
members of his family. The result is the
great object of human labor, and, if not
rapid, it is safe and certain. It is a sur-
plus beyond the expenses of living, to be
added to the estate, and may be repeated
in each revolving year.

If, however, this surplus is left upon
the hands of the farmer, in his own products,
for which there is no market, his energies
are paralyzed, his spirits sink, and he
scarcely feels that the year has added to
his gains. He sees little encouragement
in toiling on, to cultivate beyond his wants,
productions which will not sell; and the
chances are, that his farm is neglected, his
husbandry becomes bad, and his gains in
fact cease.

To continue a progressive state of im-
provement in agriculture, then, and to
give energy and prosperity to this great
and vital branch of human industry, a
healthful and stable market becomes indis-
pensable, and no object should more care-
fully occupy the attention of the farmers
of the United States.

Deeply impressed with the conviction of
this truth, benevolent minds have cher-
ished the idea that a domestic market, to be
influenced only by our own national pol-
icy, would be so far preferable, in stability
and certainty, to the open market of the
commercial world, as to have persuaded
themselves that a sufficient market for our
agricultural products is thus attainable.—
It is not designed to discuss the soundness
of this theory, where it can be reduced to
practice; but only to inquire whether the

state of this country, the condition of its
society, and the tendency and inclination
of its population, as to their industrial pur-
suits, are such, at the present time, or can
be expected to be such for generations yet
to come, as to render it possible to con-
sume within the country the surplus of the
productions of our agriculture. The theo-
ry of an exclusively domestic market for
this great domestic interest, is certainly a
very beautiful one, as a theory, and can
scarcely fail to strike the mind favorably
upon a first impression. Still, examina-
tion has produced differences of opinion
between statesmen of equal intelligence
and patriotism, as to its influences upon
the happiness and prosperity of a country
and its population. Any examination of
this question would lead to a discussion
properly considered political, if not part-
isan, and all such discussions it is my set-
tled purpose to avoid, as inappropriate to
the place and the occasion.

I simply propose to enquire as to a fact,
which must control the application of theo-
ries and principles of political economy
touching this point, to our country and its
agricultural population, without raising
any question as to the wisdom of the one,
or the soundness of the other. Is the
consumption of this country equal to its
agricultural production, or can it become
so within any calculable period of years?
How is the fact? May I not inquire with-
out giving offence, or transcending the
limits I have prescribed for myself in the
discussion? Can a fair examination,
scrupulously confined to this point, take a
political bearing, or disturb a political
feeling? It is certainly not my design to
wound the feelings of any member of the
society, or of any citizen of the country;
and I have convinced myself that I may
make this inquiry, and express the con-
clusions of my own mind as to the result,
without doing either. If I should prove to
be in error, it will be an error as to the
fact inquired after, and not as to the
soundness of the principle in political economy
dependent upon the fact for its application,
because as to the soundness of the princi-
ple, I attempt no discussion and offer no
opinion. It will be an error as to the ap-
plicability of a theory to our country, and
not as to the wisdom or policy of the
theory itself, because of the soundness, or
unsoundness of the theory, when it can be
practically applied, I studiously refrain
from any expression, as inappropriate here.
With the indulgence of the society, I will
submit to the fact.

Our country is very wide and very new.
It is subject to every variety of climate and
soil, and is therefore favorable to agricul-
tural pursuits. It is already almost every agri-
cultural product, and the most important are
the ordinary productions of extensive sec-
tions of the country, and are now sent to
the markets in great abundance.

Yet our agriculture is in its infancy al-
most everywhere, and at its maturity no-
where. It is believed to be entirely safe
to assume that there is not one single agri-
cultural county in the whole Union, filled
up in an agricultural sense—not one
such county which has not yet land to be
brought into cultivation, and much more
and the cultivation of which is to be ma-
terially improved, before it can be consid-
ered as having reached the measure of its
capacity for production. If this be true
of the best cultivated agricultural county
in the Union, how vast is the proportion
of those counties which have entire town-
ships, and of the states, which have not
merely counties, but entire districts, yet
wholly unpeopled, and unclaimed from
the wilderness state?

When to this broad area of the agricul-
tural field of our country, we add our im-
mense territories, organized and unorgani-
zed, who can compute the agricultural
capacities of the United States, or fix a
limit to the period when our surplus agri-
cultural productions will increase with in-
creasing years and population? Compare
the census of 1830 and 1840 with the map
of the Union, and witness the increase of
population in the new states, which are
almost exclusively agricultural, and who
can doubt the strong and resistless inclina-
tion of our people to this pursuit?

Connect with these considerations of
extent of country, diversity of soils, vari-
eties of climate, and partial and imperfect
cultivation, the present agricultural pros-
pects of this country. Witness the rapid
advances of the last dozen years in the
character of our cultivation, the quality
and quantity of our productions from a
given breadth of land, and the improve-
ment in all the implements by which the
labor of the farmer is assisted and applied.
Mark the vast change in the current of
educated mind of the country, in respect
to this pursuit; the awakened attention to
its high respectability as a profession, to
its safety from hazards, to its healthfulness
to mind and body, and to its productive-
ness. Listen to the calls for information,
for education, upon agricultural subjects,
and to the demands that this education
shall constitute a department in the great
and all pervading system of our common
school education, a subject at this moment
receiving the especial attention, and being
pressed forward by the renewed energies
of this society. Behold the numbers of
professors, honored with the highest testi-
monials of learning conferred in our coun-
try, devoting their lives to geological and
chemical researches calculated to evolve
the laws of nature connected with agricul-
tural production. Go into our colleges
and institutions of learning, and count the
young men toiling industriously for their
diplomas, to qualify themselves to become
practical and successful farmers, already
convinced that equality with the clerical,
the legal, and the medical professions, that
of agriculture requires a thorough and

systematic education, and its successful
practice the exercise of an active mind de-
voted to diligent study.

Apply these bright and brightening pros-
pects to the almost boundless agricultural
field of our country, with its varied and
salubrious climate, its fresh and unbroken
soils, its cheap lands and free, simple titles,
and who can hope, if he would, to turn the
inclinations of our people from this fair
field of labor and of pleasure? Here the
toil which secures a certain independence
is sweetened by the constantly varying ex-
hibitions of nature in her most lovely
forms, and cheered by the most benign
manifestations of the wonderful power and
goodness of Nature's God. Cultivated by
the resolute hands and enlightened minds
of freemen, owners of the soil, properly
educated, as farmers, under a wise and
just administration of a system of liberal
public instruction, should and will be, and
aided by the researches of geology and
chemistry, who can calculate the extent
of the harvests to be gathered from this
vast field of wisely directed human indus-
try.

The present surplus of breadstuffs of
this country, could not have been presented
in a more distinct and interesting aspect
than during the present year. A famine
in Europe, as wide-spread as it has been
devastating and terrible, has made its de-
mands upon American supplies, not sim-
ply to the extent of the ability of the suf-
fering to purchase food, but in superadded
appeals to American sympathy in favor of
the destitute and starving. Every call up-
on our markets has been fully met, and
the heart of Europe has been filled with
warm and grateful responses to the be-
nevolence of our country, and of our
countrymen, and yet the avenues of com-
merce are filled with the productions of
American agriculture. Surely the con-
sumption of this country is not now equal
to its agricultural production.

If such is our surplus in the present
limited extent and imperfect condition of
our agriculture, can we hope that an ex-
clusive domestic market is possible, to
furnish a demand for its mature abun-
dances? In this view of this great and
growing interest, can we see a limit to
the period, when the United States will
present, in the commercial markets of the
world, large surpluses of all the varieties
of breadstuffs, of beef, pork, butter, cheese,
cotton, tobacco, and rice, beyond the con-
sumption of our own country? And who,
with the experience of the last few years
before him, can doubt that the time is
now at hand, when the two great staples
of wool and hemp will be added to the list
of our exportations?

These considerations, and others of a
kindred character, which time will not
permit me to detail, seem to me, with
unfeigned deference, to prove that the
agriculture of the United States, for an
indefinite period yet to come, must con-
tinue to yield annual supplies of our prin-
cipal staples, far beyond any possible de-
mand of the domestic market, and must
therefore remain, as it now is and has
ever been, an exporting interest. As such,
it must have a direct concern in the fore-
ign trade and commerce of the country,
and in all the regulations of our own and
of foreign governments which affect either,
equal to its interest in a stable and ade-
quate market.

If the conclusion be sound, then our
farmers must surrender the idea of a do-
mestic market to furnish the demand, and
measure the value of their productions,
and must prepare themselves to meet the
competition of the commercial world in
the sale of the fruits of their labor. The
marts of commerce must be their market,
and the demand and supply which meet
in those marts must govern their prices.

The demand for home consumption, as
an element in that market, must directly
and deeply interest them, and should be
carefully cultivated and encouraged, while
all the other elements acting with it, and
constituting together the demand of the
market, should be studied with equal care,
and, so far as may be in their power, and
consistent with other and paramount du-
ties, should be cherished with equal care.

Does any one believe, that for genera-
tions yet to come, the agricultural opera-
tions of the United States are to be circumscribed
within narrower comparative limits
than the present; or that the agricultural
productions to the country are to bear a
less ratio to our population and consump-
tion than they now do? I cannot suppose
that any citizen, who has given his atten-
tion to the considerations which have been
suggested, finds himself able to adopt
either of these opinions. On the contrary,
I think a fair examination must satisfy
every mind that our agricultural surplus,
for an indefinite future period, must in-
crease much more rapidly than our popu-
lation and the demand for domestic con-
sumption. Thus I believe would be true
without the efforts of associations, such as
this, to improve our agriculture. The
condition of the country, and the inclina-
tion and preference of our population for
agricultural pursuits, would render this
result unavoidable; and if this be so, when
the impetus given to agricultural produc-
tion by the improvements of the day; the
individual and associated efforts constan-
tly making to push forward these improve-
ments with an accelerated movement, the
mass of educated mind turned to scientific
researches in aid of agricultural labor;
the dawning of a systematic and universal
agricultural education; and the immense
bodies of cheap, and fresh, and fertile
lands, which invite the application of an
improved agriculture, are added to the ac-
count, who can measure the extent or
duration of our agricultural surplus, or
doubt the soundness of the conclusion,

that the export trade must exercise a great
influence upon the market for the agri-
cultural productions of the country for a
long series of years to come?

Such is the conclusion to which my
mind is forced from an examination of
this subject, in its domestic aspect sim-
ply; but there is another now presented of
vast magnitude and engrossing interest,
and demanding alike from the citizen and
the statesman of this republic, the most
careful consideration. All will at once
understand me as referring to the changes
and promises of change in the policy of
the principal commercial nations of the
world, touching their trade in the produc-
tions of agriculture. By a single step,
which was nothing less than commercial
revolution, Great Britain practically made
the change as to her trade; and subse-
quent events have clothed with the ap-
pearance of almost super-human sagacity,
the wisdom which thus prepared that coun-
try to meet the visitation of famine, which
has so soon followed, without the addi-
tional evil of trampling down the systems
of law to minister to the all controlling
necessities of hunger. Changes similar
in character, and measurably equal in ex-
tent, though in many cases temporary in
duration have been adopted by several
other European governments, under cir-
cumstances which render it very doubt-
ful how soon, if ever, a return will be
made to the former policy of a close trade
in the necessities of human life.

New markets of vast extent and incal-
culable value, have thus been opened for
our agricultural surplus, the durability
and steadiness of which it is impossible
yet to measure with certainty. It is in
our power to say, however, that a great
body of provocations to countervailing
restrictive commercial regulations, is now
removed, in some instances permanently,
and in others temporarily in form; and it
would seem to be the part of wisdom, for
the agriculture of this country, by furnish-
ing these markets to the extent of the de-
mand, with the best articles, at the fairest
prices, to show to those countries, and
their respective governments, that reciproc-
cal commercial regulations, if they offer
no other and higher attractions, present
to their people a safeguard against starva-
tion.

Such is the connection, now, between
our agriculture and the export trade and
foreign market, and these relations are to
be extended and strengthened, rather than
circumscribed and weakened, by our agri-
cultural advances. The consumption of
the country is far short of its produc-
tion, and cannot become equal to it with-
in any calculable period. On the con-
trary, the excess of production is to in-
crease with the increase of population and
settlement, and the improvements in agri-
culture and agricultural education.—
These appear to me to be facts, arising
from the condition of our country, and
the tastes and inclinations of our people,
fixed beyond the power of change, and to
which theories and principles of political
economy must be conformed, to be made
practically applicable to us.

The American farmer, then, while
carefully studying, as he should not fail to
do, the necessities, the wants and the
tastes of all classes of consumers of his
productions in his own country, must not
limit his researches for a market within
those narrow bounds. He must extend
his observations along the avenues of com-
merce, as far as the commerce of his
country extends, or can be ex-
tended; and instruct himself as to the
necessities, and wants and tastes of the
consumers of agricultural productions in
other countries. He must observe atten-
tively the course of trade, and the causes
calculated to exert a favorable or adverse
influence upon it; watch closely the com-
mercial policy of other countries, and
guard vigilantly that of his own; accom-
modate his productions, as far as may be,
to the probable demands upon the market,
and understand how to prepare them for
the particular market for which they are
designed. Next to the production of the
best article at the cheapest price, its pre-
sentation in market in the best order and
most inviting condition, is important to
secure to the farmer a ready and remunerat-
ing market.

So long as our agricultural shall con-
tinue to be an exporting interest, these
considerations, as second only to the
science of production itself, will demand
the careful attention and study of our far-
mers; and in any well digested system of
agricultural education, its connection
with manufactures and the mechanic arts,
with commerce, with the commercial pol-
icy of our own and other countries, and
with the domestic and foreign markets,
should hold a prominent place. A
thorough and continued education in these
collateral, but highly necessary branches
of knowledge to the farmer, will prove
extensively useful to the American citizen,
beyond their application to the produc-
tion and sale of the fruits of his labor.—
They will qualify him the more safely and
intelligently to discharge the duties of a
freeman; and, if called by his fellow citi-
zens to do so, the more beneficially to
serve his state and country in legislative
and other public trusts.

I hope I may offer another opinion in
this connection, without giving offence,
or trespassing upon the proprieties of the
place and occasion. Is it that this educa-
tion in the just and true connection be-
tween the agricultural, the commercial
and the manufacturing interests of our
country, equally and impartially dissem-
inated among the classes of citizens at-
tached to each of these great branches of
labor, would effectually put an end to the
jealousies too frequently excited, demon-