

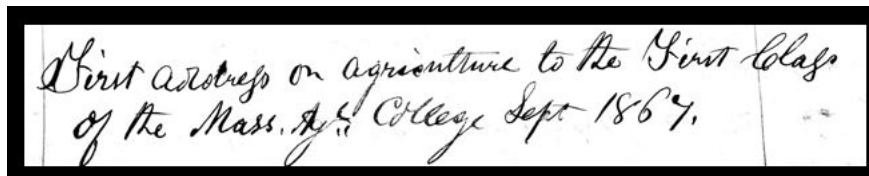
The First Address at the University of Massachusetts

by

Levi Stockbridge, Professor of Agriculture

Massachusetts Agricultural College

October 2, 1867



The image above is Levi Stockbridge's handwriting and says... **“First address on agriculture to the First Class of the Mass.Agr. College Sept 1867.”** These words were written on the back of one of 16 pages of a handwritten address which Stockbridge had prepared to present to the first class at the Massachusetts Agricultural College. Presumably the address was presented in one of the two classroom buildings that had been constructed in readiness of the first class, either South College or College Hall (also known as the Chemistry Building). According to the record, 34 young men would have been present on the first day of class on October 2, 1867.

The original text of the first address was transcribed with minor modifications. Grammatical edits have been made to make it more readable for 21st century readers. For example, Professor Stockbridge rarely marked paragraphs in his handwritten notes. He also did not use a comma when making lists of items. In these few cases, we have made changes to the text. None of the edits however alter the message Professor Stockbridge delivered to the first class to attend the now University of Massachusetts Amherst.



Since there is no record of any speeches given by the other three faculty members present on October 2, 1867, presumably this document represents the **first lecture ever given by a University of Massachusetts faculty member to a class of students.** The four faculty who welcomed the first class were; William S. Clark, Professor of Botany and Horticulture and President of the Massachusetts Agricultural College, Henry Goodell, Instructor of Literature, Charles Goessmann, Professor of Chemistry, and Levi Stockbridge who served as both General Superintendent of the farm and Agricultural Instructor.

First Address – October 2, 1867

Now for the first time there has assembled in our Commonwealth a School of Agriculture, and I assure you young gentlemen, it gives me unfeigned pleasure to welcome you to this institution and to all the pleasures, profit and instruction it may impart. I hope the relationship which is to be now formed between myself as one of the officers of this institution and you, will be pleasant and profitable.

Occupying as I do the position of General Superintendent, an office that does not exist in any other school in our State, and which is a somewhat novel one in the light of the notions that are prevalent in relation to schools and school instruction, I deem it not inappropriate to occupy the present time in calling your attention to a few thoughts on the general subject of agricultural education, of the aims, objects and purposes of this school, as viewed from the stand point of a representative G. of the commonwealth. To be forewarned is to be fore armed, and to avoid impending danger one should be made acquainted with it and where it lies. So in seeking the path of truth, one must know the field of error, its length and breadth, all its ramifications, if possible, all its influences seen and felt, and those still worse which are doing their baleful work silently, secretly and therefore more surely.

I therefore desire to call your attention to the system of education in our state, and the life in that system and animus as it exists in the belief, thoughts and practices of our people. The highest best interest of the State can only be secured by the universal education of its people; not that education which selects pupils from position or takes individuals who are designed for certain pursuits or professions and fits them for the discharge of their special duties but the only education worthy of a state dispensing its privileges equally to the high and low, the rich and the poor, the foreign and the native born, and holding out inducements and rising compulsions that every child may be educated to command the respect of his fellows and fittest for the discharge of his duties as a man and a citizen.

Such thanks be to God and our fathers is the legal system of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, and its effect has been to make ours the model commonwealth of the world. Our people, especially the industrial classes here occupy a higher and more important position in the State. But systems of education are not alone on paper and legal enactments alone can not make them. If that were possible Maryland would be the equal of Massachusetts, for their legal educational system is as nearly possible like ours, yet with a superior soil and climate with natural advantages which other states possess, she is generations behind us in everything necessary to make a great state and a happy intelligent and prosperous people. The only system of education which is effective in its

influence to mold and give character, is that which is in the hearts of the people, and that system will stamp itself upon a community regardless of the written law.

Universal education to a certain extent, is the written law of Massachusetts, and the doors of our higher educational institutions are thrown open to all who desire to enter. But the system in the hearts of our people is one of caste and grades. Our children are educated for positions under the false and erroneous notion that certain pursuits are vastly more important than others to the degree and quality of the education for those pursuits should correspond. The influence of this system and these false notions has been injurious to all the so called industrial pursuits and more especially to agriculture.

While it is universally admitted that the young man designed for the legal or medical profession should go through a complete and thorough course of education, of mental discipline and training, and should then spend years in those special studies designed to fit him for his profession, it is by this system assumed, and the assumption acted upon that the young man who chooses any industrial pursuit, and especially if it be that of a tiller of the soil needs no training or education beyond that which is absolutely necessary to transact the simplest business operations. All the pleasure and profit derive from thorough and systematic culture and training is lost. These notions are not by any means universal but are the rule of action for those who lead in educational affairs and are received as right or acquiesced in by men of less influence, by Parents, and Guardians, and Teachers.

The first effect of this system or of these notions has been to degrade all industrial pursuits, and all the industrial classes. Our people have come to look upon them as so menial and groveling as to afford no scope or pleasure to our higher nature or faculties and as to afford no field for the gratification of laudable aspirations or noble ambitions. The pursuit of agriculture especially, comes to be looked upon as a life of unrequited toil, of hardship without compensation, or pleasure, of unappreciated worth, and in which success and advancement is unattainable.

For this reason our young men born and raised amid all the glories and beauties of the country, surrounded with every thing in the natural world to arouse every latent but noble faculty of the mind, to awaken thought, to create inquiry and to bring into full play and development all their better nature, and to task to the utmost all their strongest powers, tire of their situation and look to other pursuits and other scenes as the proper sphere for development of their faculties and the expenditure of their energies. As a natural consequence, large tracts of land in our state are laying idle or gradually going back to

forest and larger still are giving sure indications of a want of skilled intelligent and thrifty cultivators.

The professions are more than crowded. There are more lawyers than clients, more doctors than patients, more clergymen than parishes, and more clerks and office seekers than customers and offices. Hungry importunate applicants for supposed places of honor and profit endeavor to supplant each other by chicanery and intrigue and legitimate success is the lot of but few. Labor too, care and thought unremitting and exhausting are the only means of success. Bright young hopes are never realized, ambition rarely gratified. The looked-for success in the legal, clerical, or medical profession, or in the counting room is not often attained and while one in fifty or a hundred reaches the goal, the remainder fall out by the many, spending a life of shifts and changes without settled purpose and soured by disappointment and failure.

I desire to have the belief ineffacably impressed on your minds, that the more generally received ideas of the present day to which I have alluded respecting agriculture and agricultural labor, are all wrong from beginning to end, from foundation to top stone. And that the desired goal of honor, position, and influence, of profit and success, can be as surely attained by the intelligent educated and enterprising agriculturist as by him who is engaged in any other pursuit or profession and that too with less corroding care, with less of disappointment, and more of happiness, peace and comfort as the days and hours of life go by.

Ours is a complex nature, of varied faculties and powers, all of which for gratification and development should be brought into exercise and made to do their appropriate work. Physical and mental powers and capacities mysteriously united call for action which shall enlarge and strengthen both. In the legitimate pursuit of agriculture every power and faculty one possesses can find full scope, the discovery unraveling and the potential of all of its hidden principles will bring into exercise our highest capacities and all our latent energies. The ignorant tiller of the soil knows it not, yet he is dealing with all the great powers forces and principles of nature. The heavens above and the earth beneath, sunlight and air, the mysterious changes in the soil, are all at work to carry out or thwart his plans. He who farms an acre of soil with full intelligence of all the processes that are going on under his hand, and of all the principles involved, needs more knowledge of every known branch of natural science than all other pursuits and professions combined. For geology has been at work through its long cycle of ages to get ready his soil as the anchorage ground for his plants, and to place there the material out of which is to be manufactured their appropriate food.

Chemistry must be his handmaiden to prepare by her delicate and mysterious skill this raw material to suit their dainty appetite. The air must minister to his necessities and send its currents to his field, yielding up its gasses to support every leaf that trembles by its motion, and to permeate his soil giving heat and moisture to his crop and vital energy to the forces beneath the surface. The sun and moon must be his co-workers, and the clouds be gathered to gather and send their contents down to convey to his plants their elements of fertility. Electricity must become his servant, and botany his guide; each and all must give their aid and assistance at the right time and in the right manner without interference or collision, lest the result shall be a failure.

Only the adept in both science and practice can turn to his account or control the influences which make only to success. In agriculture no science is too high abstract or far reaching, if properly understood, to minister to its advancement. For the motions of the Earth itself, the rise and fall of the tides, the great ocean and air currents, and storm cycles have a direct influence upon it and that influence should be understood.

An intelligent understanding of the principles of animal and vegetable physiology are indispensable and should be added to the list of knowledge needed by every tiller of the ground. The intelligent pursuit of agriculture brings us a comprehension of the thought and mind of nature's great author and serves to enlarge our every faculty as no other pursuit or profession does.

Destroy, depress, or embarrass the agriculture of a nation, and every other pursuit languishes. Commerce ceases to be remunerative, its ships for want of cargoes decay at their wharves, manufacturing machinery is still, the arts die out and general decay ensues. When short crops are the rule but for a single year in a nation like ours, all its monetary interests are deranged, the millionaire the broker and banker first feel the depression, there is no use for surplus money and no security for its return if disbursed.

From this class the revulsion spreads to all classes who deal in the products of others and general bankruptcy is the result. This must be so from the very nature of things. The solid enduring wealth of a nation is in its land and its crops. These in time of peace are the measure of its prosperity and in man are the pledge of its ability to discharge all plighted obligations, and the sinews of its strength.

Agriculture is the nursery of men, from it are taken those who lead in every pursuit and department of life. The men who a generation hence will manage and control the mercantile world, who will support and honor every interest of the community, contribute to the weal of the state and give direction to the great affairs of the country, will not be the sons of the merchants leaders and statesmen of to-day, but the sons of yeomen, who

have been schooled and disciplined, who have learned self-reliance, acquired energy and unconquerable perseverance while engaged in agricultural pursuits.

It cannot be but that a profession which is the basis on which every other pursuit and profession depends, which is the primal source of all national wealth, strength and prosperity, and in the pursuit of which all the nobler faculties of our nature are brought into full play and all our best powers enlarged and strengthened, deserves the highest consideration from every reflective mind and the first care of the state.

Sagacious men of the past and the present, and all history both sacred and profane, assign to it the highest position in importance honor and usefulness and are in direct opposition to the generally received notions of today. A volume might be written in relation to the agriculture of the bible, giving a view of the designs and purposes of the great Creator of nature and its laws, replete with practical knowledge of its relation to the arrangement of lands, crops and animals. It is remarkable that in all the great epochs in the history of the world and our race, when great changes have transpired, and a new order was about to be entered upon, how minute and unvarying are the directions of the great lawgiver in relation to this, when other pursuits are not mentioned unless as a warning.

When the new Earth had been brought from chaos, fitted and prepared for the habitation of man, when the same was clothed with verdure and stocked with animals, and the newly created pair, the last act the creation were placed upon it, God himself planted a garden, and caused every tree that was pleasant to the sight and good for food to spring up there, he gave it to the pair for a home and it was paradise. But there in that home of bliss the new created man, with all his power in full vigor, no stain of wrong upon him to blunt his sensibilities and in full daily communion with his creator is told his great mission is to “till and dress” this spot prepared by the Almighty’s hand. And it was this employment that was the source of the joys of Paradise, for it made the man a co-worker with God in the new made world.

A co-worker in earnest, for the record says that out of the ground God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them, and whatsoever he called them was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle and to the fowls of the air and to the beasts of the fields. The great commission given him was to subdue the Earth, and dominion was given him over the fish of the sea and over the fowls of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the Earth.

And God said behold I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon all the face of the Earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree bearing seed, and every beast of

the field and fowl of the air and everything that creepeth upon the face of the Earth wherein there is life I have given you. Thus in creation's morning, the representatives of our race, were installed as husbandmen and knowledge and vision given them commensurate with their mission, and with powers and faculties capable of receiving from the pursuit their highest enjoyment.

The only occupation of Earth's primal inhabitants was the tilling of soil and the rearing of cattle but as the years roll on other pursuits multiply, the earth is overspread with inhabitants, man becomes corrupt and the flood is sent and sweeps all to destruction save one family and the animals necessary to preserve their species. The waters subside leaving the earth a wreck of the first creations, and man comes forth from his ark of refuge to new scenes and God again appears to recommission the progenitors of the race, and to covenant with them.

The record says "and the Lord said in his heart I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; neither will I again smite any living thing as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease. And God blessed Noah and his sons and gave them dominion over every thing on the face of the Earth, and said the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the face of the Earth and upon the fishes of the sea, into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb I have given you all things."

Thus in this new era of our race the command to man, and the covenant with him, is to him as a husbandman, and he is told to go forth to his work with confidence for the ground shall not be again cursed, that the genial influence of the sun and seasons shall be given and seed time and harvest shall continue forever. The bible history of our race, from this epoch, until the history of the chosen people commences is meager but enough is given to show us that the leading pursuit was agriculture. That princes and mighty men were the owners of flocks and herds and gave them their personal attention, and that men were great and renowned as their agricultural possessions increased.

But when for his own purpose God selected one, out of all the families of the earth to be his peculiar people, he took as the representative of the new nation, a tiller of the soil, him who though a prince and on an equality with the kings of his time, over his position to the favor of God and on his skill as a husbandman. It seems almost like going back to the days prior to the birth of science and knowledge to speak of Abraham, Issac and Jacob who were the representatives of the Jewish people, but the record scant as it is

shows that in some branches of agricultural pursuit they were far ahead of the agriculturists of today and that it was the honored and favored pursuit of the time.

They were skilled in the growing of fruits and grains and wonderfully so in rearing of cattle. The setting apart the family of Abraham to be a nation under the more especial care and direction of the Almighty is an era worthy of attention, because God himself appears visibly on the scene to inaugurate the new nation and to give to them laws and regulations the most minute, far reaching and best ever received by any people. The laws and regulations are given to them as an agricultural people, though they had many other arts in a high degree of perfection.

They received instruction in relation to the management of the land and the capacity of the soil, which modern science may copy but will not improve. We find this people wandering in the deserts of the east and at the foot of one of its celebrated mountains receiving from the hand of God a code of laws for their future government. They are told that a certain country is set apart for their habitation. Its agricultural capabilities are fully described, but nothing is said of its commercial or manufacturing resources. It is described as a “goodly land” with a soil yielding sixty-fold. As a “land of streams of water,” as a land of the wine the olive, the pomegranate and fig as a land for flocks and herds. “A land flowing with milk and honey.” Each family save one of the nation is assigned a portion of the soil as a paternal inheritance and by divine command made inalienable. If from misfortune to the family it was sold for season in the year of jubilee it must be restored without recompense. Said one of its people to his proud and haughty king, God forbid that I should give the inheritance.

Thus this favored people are made a nation of land owners, and more explicitly commanded to till and care for it, to plant it with all manner of trees for food, but not to injure, abuse or destroy it. For its renovation it was commanded that the land should not be excessively and continuously cropped, but that at stated periods it should rest from cultivation, and one year in seven was to be given it for this purpose.

They were commanded to obey the laws and ordinances given them, but if they disobeyed dire calamities were threatened and it is noticeable that these calamities related to the land and its productions. It is said as a punishment for their disobedience the land should cease to yield its increase, blasting blight and mildew should visit their crops, the rain and dew should be withheld and the earth become parched and barren, there should be no grass in the field, the flocks should be cut off and there should be no herd in the stall.

In obedience to the spirit of these commands, the most remarkable people that ever lived became truly an agricultural people. Though they knew much of the arts, and had workers in all kinds of metals, in wood and stone, dealers in all kinds of merchandise, were skilled in architecture, yet these employments were secondary to agriculture, of less importance and less honorable. Their artists drew nearly all their imagery and illustration from natural and agricultural scenes and operations. The rulers and judges of the people are spoken of as engaged in agriculture, of being present to aid in sowing the seed, and to gather in the harvest. Their kings were taken from agricultural labor, from following flocks and herds to rule over the people. They planted gardens and vineyards and fields of grain, and they together with their courts gathered for a gala day at the shearing and threshing floor. They taught and encouraged the people in this pursuit and one of them wrote of all the trees of the forest and plants of the field, from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that springeth out of the vale.

If we come down to the era of the new dispensation we find that some scenes, modes of life and occupation continue, though the glory had departed from Israel and they are nominally governed by a foreign power. Palestine has yet its fields of waving grain, its hillsides are covered with flocks and herds, it has its vineyards and olive yards. Jerusalem is surrounded with gardens and its people know that the barren fig tree can be made to yield its increase by digging around it, and dunging it.

The great teacher addresses his hearers in a language unto which they are familiar when he draws truth and illustration from agricultural scenes. The fields are white for the harvest. The harvest truly is plenteous but the laborers are few. The owner of the vineyard is seeking for laborers, to whom he says to labor to day in my vineyard. The vine and the husbandman. The truth he wishes to enforce must be intensely real to a people like the one he addressed, for in their best estate these scenes were their pride and glory.

Now, what means this bible history of agriculture if it is a menial unworthy or degrading employment. Was the great author of the earth and man at fault when he prepared the earth for agriculture, when he gave man dominion over it and commanded him to till and dress it? Did He not know all the powers and capacities of the race he had created, their capability to increase in knowledge and to rise higher and higher in the scale of being as these were unfolded?

And did he assign him to an employment that had a tendency to degrade those faculties and to make man groveling and less Godlike? No. Never. He who created and gave these powers, created them for high and noble purposes and for limitless expansion. He

created and knew our complex nature, physical, intellectual and moral, and he assigned to the race as its chief employment, one that would best develop all that nature, promote its highest happiness and good, and advance his own great purposes.

So this sketch of a bible history, profane history of early times, fully corresponds. Egypt is spoken of as the land of corn, and of marvelous fertility. Their works of art, sculpture and painting now being exhumed from the debris of ages are covered with representations of agricultural scenes and labors, and the fruits and grains products of their soil are delineated on stone and canvas giving clear indications of the tasks and pursuits of their people. Greece, Rome and Carthage, located by the sea, and with unrivaled facilities for commercial enterprise, are found to prize agriculture higher than all other industrial pursuits.

Though warlike in character and heathen in religion, their mission directs them largely to the tillage of the Earth as the source of national prosperity and individual happiness. Their poets, orators and sages have depicted in glowing colors, the satisfaction, thrift and happiness of agricultural life. They have given us a list of the crops, the fruits and the vegetables they cultivated. Described the best means of cultivation, the tools, implements and machines used in the process and with great minuteness given us as good rules as have ever been written in relation to the breeding, rearing and improvement of all domestic animals. These are a people of castes and grades, helots and nobles, plebeians and patricians, but all look upon the care of the soil, the crops and cattle, as an honorable and elevating employment.

Cincinnatus leaves his plow in the unfinished furrow, to give the benefit of his wisdom and valor for the good of his countrymen, and returns to his employment crowned with the praise and gratitude of a nation. Between their day and ours the dark ages intervened during which learning, intelligence and virtue were nearly swept from the earth. War, rapine and plunder rule the centuries, the incentives to agricultural and industry are destroyed or pass into the hands of the few and strong, for he who sowed might and probably would do so, for another's harvesting. The lands passed into the hands of the lords and warlike chieftains, who could defend and protect it and they eventually came to own not only the land but also the men who tilled it; and thus serfdom and agricultural labor came to be nearly synonymous terms. In those days, the men who tilled the soil had no instruction hope or will of their own but were completely at the mercy of their lords. They were elevated but little above their domestic animals and in fact were regarded by their owners, in many respects as on the same level. The cattle, the sheep, the

peasant and his family dwelt under the same roof and often in the same enclosure, and the pigs, calves and children occupied together the same play ground.

The reward of his labor except enough to give him a bare subsistence was received by others who harnessed him to the plow or called him out to war at their pleasure. This was the dark age of the world, and dark it was to the agriculturist, a darkness which like the ever-receding ocean wave, has been borne down the ages, and to our own time and country with the slave system, and which the light of modern civilization and knowledge has not entirely eradicated. But a brighter day long since dawned, the mists and clouds of error have been broken up, and the light of truth is struggling through giving life vitality, felt power, position and equal privileges to the masses of the people.

I now come to speak of agriculture as a business. In times like ours, every young man does, or should look forward and mark out for himself some active occupation for life. For this end, he goes through a course of educational discipline and seeks to acquire the knowledge necessary to insure success in the chosen pursuit, and honorable position among those where his lot is cast.

Every young man does, or should have high hopes of the future, and confidence in his ability to work out for himself a success and position better than he now occupies. Before him is a limitless field of labor, a thousand paths inviting him to try his skills and powers in their pursuit. I desire to present to you the profession or pursuit of practical agriculture as one in which honor, wealth, position and happiness are as surely attainable as in any other. I mean of course, agricultural labor directed by the same trained intellectual power, the same thorough systematic special education as is given to prepare for any other pursuit and not that which is at best a leap in the dark, a dealing with the most delicate and intricate operations of nature without any knowledge of its laws, and shuns and despises the light of science and education.

The desire to acquire wealth and position is one of the instincts of our nature and is to be encouraged, if obtained with a due regard to the duties we owe to God, to each other, and our country. Can these desires be gratified by agricultural labor? We answer yes. Look at the aggregate acquired wealth of all those who engage in commercial or manufacturing enterprises and you will find the sum to each individual if divided equally is small. You find at long distances and occasionally an individual who acquires a princely fortune, but the great mass of those in these branches of industry acquire a bare competence.

The occasional prize is only seen in the distance to lead the young into those pursuits while the warning given by the great mass who have met with disappointment and failure is unheeded. Occasionally a toiler in the mountains of the land of gold turns up a

glorious prize, and that prize may lure a thousand eager seekers to poverty hardship and ruin. It is a proven fact that of all those in our commercial centers who engage in trade 99 per cent fail, while of those who engaged in agriculture 75 per cent succeed. This rule in a course of years is so true that you may start one hundred persons in each of the pursuits, agricultural, manufactures and commerce, and it will be found to be invariably true that the aggregate amount of capital acquired by each hundred is greater with the agriculturalists than with the others. And the same is true in a more marked degree when we include those who are engaged in the (so called) learned professions.

This, mark you, is true of agriculture as now pursued. What then may we not hope from it, when we give it the same education advantages that are given to other pursuits. It must be so from the nature of the case. For by agriculture as the primary pursuit, the first great and perpetual wants of the race are supplied. The demand for the products of other pursuits are constantly fluctuating, and may entirely cease, but for those of agriculture, the demand is unceasing and perpetual. The great work of this pursuit at the present age to give its pursuer success sufficient to gratify any reasonable ambitions is to apply to it talent and capital directed by education. Give it this and everything else is surely secured.

Transcribed by Dr. John Gerber, Professor of Sustainable Food and Farming in the University of Massachusetts Stockbridge School of Agriculture and Dr. James Elliot, Professor English at Clark University.