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PRIZE ESSAY

ON AGRICULTURE AND ITS ADVANTAGES AS A PURSUIT.

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[Read before a meeting of the Agricultural Association of Upper Canada, at Brockville, September 26, 1851:—to which was awarded, as a *Second Prize*, given by the Association, a Gold Medal of the value of £5. One condition in the competition for the Prize offered by the Johnstown District Agricultural Society—the Essay obtaining which was published in our last number—was that the competitors should be restricted to *bona fide* practical farmers.]

“The science of Agriculture is yet in its infancy, and great minds are now directed to the study and development of its true principles. Experiments are in progress to ascertain the qualities of different soils; the comparative nutritive properties of different animal and vegetable productions; and the utility and efficiency of various manures.”—*Extract from the Report of the Secretary of the United States of America, December, 1850.*

In the beginning of the world the First Man was sent forth from the Garden of Eden to till the ground, and a Divine decree was made, that he and his descendants should from thenceforth live by the tillage of the earth, or in other words, the practice of Agriculture. Accordingly since that time the descendants of Adam—multiplied innumerable, and spread over all parts of the earth—have mostly practiced and lived by Agriculture. The greater part of them have tilled the earth with their own hands, and those who have not, have mainly been supported by the Agricultural labour of others. And after pursuing that course for five thousand eight hundred and fifty-four years, it is asserted in a State paper of one of the greatest nations of the descendants of that same man, that “The science of Agriculture is yet in its infancy.” If this be the case, at what time will it come to maturity? And what great results may not be expected

from it in its growth—from childhood to boyhood—
—from boyhood to youth—and from youth to manhood, when it will appear in its full vigour, some hundred thousand years hence? But it is wrong, perhaps, to treat a subject of so much importance with levity. It is undoubtedly too true, and as wonderful as it is true, that Agriculture is yet, so far, in its infancy, as to be but imperfectly understood, notwithstanding that it is the most ancient of arts, and has been the main pursuit and support of mankind for nearly six thousand years, and that during every period of that time, as well as “now” there has probably been “great minds directed to the study and development of its true principles.” While other arts and sciences of far less importance and utility are discovered and apparently brought to maturity and perfection, in a few years, or sometimes less.

The American Secretary of State, of course alluded to the *science* of Agriculture as distinct from the *art*—for though the art of Agriculture cannot be considered as in its infancy, it is comparatively but lately that science has been applied to its assistance. At least according to our present knowledge, for I think it by no means unlikely that both the science and art were better understood by some of the ancients, than they are by us at the present day. The Romans certainly practiced the art to great perfection in their own country, and also carried their improvements into the countries which they conquered. Their establishment in Britain produced such great improvements in that country that “prodigious quantities of corn were annually exported from the Island, but when the Roman power began to decline, this like all the other arts, declined also, and was almost totally destroyed by the departure of that people.”* The subsequent decline and fall of the Roman Empire caused a similar decline and fall in the Art of Agriculture over the whole Roman territory,

* Encyclopædia Britannica.