ADDRESS

OF

HON. JAMES G. BLAINE,

AT THE

MINNEAPOLIS FAIR,

MINNESOTA,

TUESDAY, SEPT. 3, 1878.

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ADDRESS.

Mr. President :

An assemblage of the citizens of Minnesota, coming together to rejoice over abundant harvests and to view the bountiful products of their State, is well calculated to inspire recollections that are of interest beyond the limits of the audience that now honor me with their attention.

Near the borders of your State, on the banks of the great river now flowing in our sight, there resides a man in the full vigor of an honorable old age, long my acquaintance and my friend, whose career calls vividly to mind the wonderful progress of the Northwest. In the last two years of General Jackson's Presidency, George W. Jones was the Delegate in Congress from that vast area now forming the States of Michigan, Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota, together with that part of the Territory of Dakota north of the Missouri river and east of the White Earth. In the last preceding Federal census the total civilized population of the entire territory of Michigan was less than 32,000—adventurous men standing on the outposts of civilization and accepting and conquering the hardships of the frontier. There were at that time—forty-three years ago—but two newspapers of any kind whatever published in the whole country of which I have spoken, and not one of these west of Lake Michigan. To-day the same country has eight Senators, twenty-nine Representatives and one Delegate in Congress: has railroads aggregating eleven thousand miles in length and five hundred millions in cost; has seventy-seven daily newspapers, and more than eleven hundred weekly or monthly publications; has great cities larger than Philadelphia or New York when the United

States had taken its second census and chosen its third President; has a population as great, excluding the slaves of that day, as that of the whole country which defied Great Britain to a second contest in 1812; produces a larger amount of breadstuffs than the entire Union produced when General Jones entered Congress; and contains more wealth than was owned in the eighteen States that divided their electoral votes between James Madison and DeWitt Clinton for the Presidency. Such facts as these may well cause us to give thanks to God and a virtuous ancestry for those blessings of liberty and good government which have made all this progress possible.

Geographically the State of Minnesota is a land of singular and surpassing interest. Lying about equi-distant from the great oceans on the east, on the west, on the north and on the south, her situation as compared with her sister States is entirely peculiar, and in one respect is without parallel on any continent. Her surface forms the central water-shed of North America, and not far from where we stand streams have their modest sources that finally lose themselves in one direction through Hudson's Bay in the Arctic waters, in another through the chain of the great lakes in the broad Atlantic, and a third through the Mississippi River in the Gulf of Mexico. To the westward nature has raised an insurmountable barrier to the water-course, but the invention of man has overcome the obstacle, and through the power of steam and over the road of iron there is already projected and partly achieved that great commercial highway to the Pacific foretold by La Salle when, standing on the banks of the St. Lawrence, by the rapids whose name perpetuates his prophecy, pointing to the untrodden West, whither he had already turned his face, he pronounced to his doubting companions the inspiring word, La Chine.

Viewed historically, that which now constitutes the State of Minnesota has had as many and as rapid changes in its sovereignty as any disputed territory in Europe—fought over

by armed hosts set in motion by the ambition of kings or the jealousy of rival races of men. This fair land was under the dominion of France during the reigns of Louis XIV and his great grandson—had Iberville, who led the French colony to Louisiana, for its first Governor, and Bienville, who founded New Orleans, for its second; was pawned by the Regent Orleans in his scheme with John Law for creating value out of moonshine, and made with other territory the basis of that vast swindle in paper money projected by the Mississippi Company in which real estate in Minnesota, in the undisputed possession of the savage and the wild beast, became the shadowy foundation in Paris, one hundred and sixty years ago, of a far greater monetary credit than it could have to-day in the same financial market, with all its improvements and its great intrinsic value. Again, under the dominion in part of George Third of England, who was compelled to yield his right to your soil by the treaty of 1783, and to withdraw the last Red Coat by the treaty of 1795. Still farther, for thirty-seven years, all on the west side of your dividing river was attached to the crown of Spain during the reigns of the Third and Fourth Charles, and given up by the latter in the year 1800 to France, when for a period of three brief years the larger half of Minnesota had Napoleon Bonaparte for its sovereign ruler. The First Consul always did business on a basis of hard cash, and he transferred the French possessions in America to the United States for fifteen millions of dollars. Eighty years before that time, John Law and his speculating partner, the Duke of Orleans, had made the same possessions the basis for an issue of paper money amounting to nearly three thousand millions of francs. Some reflections are naturally suggested by these facts which would perhaps not be entirely pertinent to an address before an Agricultural Society. I may be pardoned, however, for the inference that the "resources of a great country" do not afford a sound and secure basis for an enlarged paper currency.

But these changes of European sovereignty over the soil of Minnesota are not more striking or more strange than the rapid transformation of its government since it came under the sovereignty of the United States. It comes to us as forgotten history, when we recall that the eastern half of your State was claimed during the Revolutionary struggle as part of Virginia, by no less a Governor than Thomas Jefferson; when as part of the Northwest Territory the gallant but unfortunate Arthur St. Clair was its chief Executive; when as part of Indiana, William Henry Harrison, frontiersman, soldier, statesman, was made its Governor at the age of twenty-seven years; when as part of Illinois the large-framed and large-hearted Ninian Edwards ruled over it, appointed thereto by Madison at the personal request of "a young Senator named Clay," as he is significantly styled in a certain record; when as part of Michigan Territory, General Lewis Cass was its efficient, honorable and careful Executive; when as part of Wisconsin, the chivalrous and courageous Henry Dodge was its popular Governor—and also its Delegate in Congress from one-half its domain, while his worthy and still living son, as delegate at the same time from Iowa, represented the other half,—a striking coincidence, rendered still more remarkable by the father and son meeting again in the National Senate from the States which they represented in the House when territories.

Nor of the section of your State west of the Mississippi does it read less strangely, as we recall that when sold to the National Government by Napoleon Bonaparte it became part of the organized Territory of Louisiana; changed very soon to Missouri, and had for long years as its Governor the brave, adventurous William Clarke, who in company with Meriwether Lewis, under the direction of President Jefferson, made that extraordinary journey from ocean to ocean—the first white men who crossed the continent on soil belonging to the United States, leaving their names forever associated with a great achievement—familiar to all who have read the

hardships and conquests of the "Lewis and Clarke" expedition. Afterwards Minnesota formed part of the magnificent and rapidly growing Territory of Iowa, which so soon took on the stature of a full-grown, vigorous Commonwealth.

Iowa and Wisconsin having been admitted as States, their territorial remainders naturally formed one government, and so in 1849 the Territory of Minnesota was organized. And then for the first time since our government acquired Louisiana from France, with the exception of a brief period under the old territorial organization of Michigan, and an equally brief one under that of Wisconsin, Minnesota on both sides of the Mississippi was organized under the same government. And that seems but yesterday; yet the sowing of the next crop will mark full rounded thirty years since the organic act was passed by Congress, and President Zachary Taylor appointed Alexander Ramsey first Governor of the new Territory. And His Excellency is among you to-day, after enjoying the highest honors of your Territory and your State, looking as fresh and as vigorous as when in the administrations of John Tyler and James K. Polk he represented a Pennsylvania district in the Congress of the United States. He might pass still as a young man, if his luminous record, made in two States and in both branches of Congress, did not enable us to measure the ripe three-score years that crown his honored head.

To trace the history and development of Minnesota from its organization in 1849 would far transcend the proprieties or even the possibilities of this occasion. But whoever will enter into the details of the progress here made will find one of the most remarkable advances of civilization ever realized, and in a period so brief that it does not comprehend the life of one generation. In 1849 your Territory contained but forty-six hundred inhabitants; to-day your State has seven hundred thousand. In 1849 you raised fourteen hundred bushels of wheat; last year you raised thirty-three million bushels. And these figures, striking, even startling as they

are, form but an index to your marvelous progress in all forms of material wealth. The pages of your census tables seem like a romance, the statistics of your progress dazzle the reader with their proportions and almost challenge his credulity at every column he peruses.

I am addressing an agricultural community. During all the depression of trade and commerce and manufactures prevailing for these past five years, you have steadily progressed in comfort, independence and wealth. While thousands elsewhere have lacked employment, and many, I fear, have lacked bread, no able bodied man in Minnesota has been without remunerative labor and no one has gone to bed hungry. Your pursuits and their results form the basis of the ideal Republic—happily indeed realized within your own borders. The tendency of all your industry is toward the accumulation of independent competency, and does not favor the upbuilding of colossal fortunes. You are dealing daily with the essential things of life, and are not warped in your judgment nor deflected from your course by speculative and illusory schemes of advancement and gain. You are landowners, free-holders, a proud title that comes to us with centuries of civilization and strength—a title that every man in this country should make it his object to acquire and to honor. Self-government among the owners of the soil in America is an instinct, and where that ownership is widely distributed good government is the rule. Whatever disturbances therefore may threaten the peace and order of society, whatever wild theories, transplanted from other climes, may seek foot-hold here, the Republic of the United States rests securely on that basis of agriculture where the farmers of the Revolution and the framers of the Constitution placed it. The man who possesses broad acres, which he has earned by the sweat of his own brow, is not apt to fall in with the doctrine of the Communist, that no one has a right to ownership in the soil. The man who has the product of his labor in wheat and in corn, in pork and in beef, in hides and

in wool—commanding gold and silver as they always have and always will in the markets of the world—is not to be led astray with theories of fiat paper and absolute money, but instinctively consigns such wild vagaries to the appropriate domain of fiat folly and absolute nonsense.

The farmers of the Republic will control its destiny. Agriculture, commerce and manufactures are the three pursuits that enrich a nation—but the greatest of these is agriculture—for without its products the spindle cannot turn and the ship will not sail. Agriculture furnishes the conservative element in society and in the end is the guiding, restraining, controlling force in government. Against storms of popular fury; against frenzied madness that seeks collision with established order; against theories of administration that have drenched other lands in blood; against the spirit of anarchy that would sweep away the landmarks and safeguards of Christian society and Republican government, the farmers of the United States will stand as the shield and the bulwark —themselves the willing subjects of law and therefore its safest and strongest administrators.

Gradually the Government of the Republic is passing under the control of the farmers of the Mississippi valley. Indeed it is practically there to-day. The swelling and on-rushing tide of population is towards the broad plains and the rich acres that lie between the two mountain ranges of the continent. The soil is so fertile, the land so inviting, the area is so broad, that no man may dare calculate the possibilities of this great region either as respects production or population. Your own State, peopled no more densely than New York, would have a population of nine millions; peopled as densely as Massachusetts, you would have a population of sixteen millions. With the transfer of political control from the old States to the new, there is also transferred a vast weight of responsibility. It is yours to-day; it will be yours still more to-morrow. Take it; use it wisely and well for the advancement of the whole—for the honor of all. The

patriotic traditions of the "old thirteen" that fought the battles of the Revolution, formed the Union of the States, and planted Liberty in the organic Law, will be your safest guide—your highest inspiration. Many of you to-day mingle with your love for Minnesota, your earlier affection for the old home and the old State far to the East, where an honored ancestry lie buried, and where the tenderest memories cluster around the familiar scenes of days long past. It is this kinship of blood, these ties of relationship, that make us indeed one people—uniting the East and the West, the North and the South, in the indissoluble bonds of a common, and I trust, always benificent Government.