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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

CYCLES OF ACHIEVEMENT

In the springtime of the year the farmer feels the impulse of creation stir within him. With the zest of one inspired he fares forth into field and farmyard to match his skill and effort against the odds of accidental circumstance. It is a magnificent adventure, imbued with all the doubts and fears and hopes of any fateful enterprise. But the ifs of uncertainty seem to be of little consequence in the anticipation of achievement. Eagerly the seed is planted, carefully the soil is tilled, continually weeds, worms, and other plagues are met in deadly combat. It is a tremendous struggle, with the forces of nature holding the balance of success or failure.

At last comes the harvest season, the culmination of the rural cycle. If spring showers and summer suns have been propitious, the "melancholy days" of fall are not "the saddest of the year". Autumn is the time of fulfillment. Then the farmer reckons up his loss and gain. He sees the dry and yellow fields as ripened grain — indicative of fruition, not of death; of maturity, but not the end. With the satisfaction born of conquest, he views his bulging granary and his sleek contented live stock as a rich

reward for industry and prudence. Over the country dwells a mood of smug complacency

When the frost is on the punkin and the fodder's
in the shock.

It was in the springtime of scientific agriculture when a few men of vision founded the Iowa State Fair. That, too, was a magnificent adventure. As the farmer faces a new season, so the pioneers, ambitious and hopeful though well aware of incipient disaster, organized the first State fair at Fairfield. With the utmost confidence that an annual competitive exhibition would stimulate improvement in agriculture, the sponsors inaugurated the institution with undaunted courage and enthusiasm. All of the preliminary meetings of the committeemen were said to be "large and respectable" — even when attended only by Caleb Baldwin who weighed three hundred and forty pounds and J. M. Shaffer whose reputation was unimpeachable. Anxiously they broadcast the fair idea; by appeals to loyalty and pride in the name of progress they cultivated patronage; and incessantly they contended with the weeds of entertainment, the worms of indifference, and the plagues of war and hard times.

Persistently and inevitably the Iowa State Fair, started seventy-five years ago in a little six-acre lot with equipment valued at three hundred and twenty dollars, has expanded until it occupies three hundred and sixty-six acres and represents a capital invest-

ment of more than two million dollars. Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday were sufficient for the first exposition, but now ten days are crowded with stock judging, races, carnival attractions, hippodrome acts, fireworks, music, tournaments, lectures, demonstrations, and the viewing of exhibits. The enormous throng of ten thousand people who came to the first fair in 1854 has swelled to more than four hundred thousand. Premiums have increased from eleven hundred dollars to a hundred and forty-two thousand. Sedate society horse shows and women's mounted relay races have supplanted the "bold and graceful" female equestrianism of early years. While Shorthorn and Hereford cattle still dominate the bovine pavilion, the stylish Morgan horses of the fifties have been displaced by Percherons — a gain in traction but a loss in action.

Year by year for three-quarters of a century the habits, ideals, industry, and prosperity of the people of Iowa have been reflected in the State fair. And now has come a harvest season of experience, the completion of a cycle. As the farmer in the autumn takes account of stock and grain, so the Commonwealth of Iowa at this diamond anniversary may appraise the trend of progress and be proud of such a record. Though the occasion signifies maturity, it is not to be regarded as the token of complete attainment. Much indeed has been accomplished, but the future holds a greater promise than it did in '54.

J. E. B.