A prairie country has a fascination which to the careful observer equals or excells that offered by a mountainous district. There is, to be sure, nothing interesting, nothing magnificent and compelling, such as be find in mountain vistas or vast encircling barriers of hills, but rather a subtle charm which increases as one becomes more familiar with it. The prairies are never perfectly level, there are almost imperceptible gradations in the surface, which lead the eye on and on to where some farmstead with its grove marks the horizon. There are boat-like lines of single trees marching across the lands cape, for your prairie farmer is as devoted to straight lines as any Euclid of them all. The fields, under the pale spring sun, were already full of promise of a rich harvest. the cornfields with the stalks still upright, but faded by wind and frost to the palest yellow, the oat stubble already fourth green, the vivid and surprising green of an occasional field of winter wheat, and the rich, glistening blackness of the newly ploughed fields. The sky shows that delicious deep but soft blue which we see only in the spring, the wind has a warm lingering touch, on the fence posts the meadow lark swells his yellow breast and sings his ecstatic song of spring, but the prairie farmer has little time to give to these beauties.

Early this the season is one thought possesses him to the exclusion of all others — the corn. At intervals during the winter he has looked with

anxious eyes at certain strings of plump, yellow ears of corn, hanging in a safe dry place, the machine-shed, an old house or perhaps even in one of the bed-rooms. There have been farmers who held their seed corn so dear that they have actually hung it in their own bed rooms, and have slept the winter through in a bower of gold, reminiscent of past harvests and eloquent of abundance to come.

Very early, in April, perhaps even in March the careful husbandman begins his testing, urged thereto by the newspapers which through columns of figures trumpet the direful results attendant upon planting untested corn. The ways of testing are manifold, there are certain attractive machines for the purpose upon the market, but the ordinary farmer uses a box of earth or sawdust dampened and covered with a cloth marked into squares, each of which is numbered. Four or six kernels of corn, carefully selected from the butt, the tip and the center of the ear are placed on a square and the ear is numbered to correspond. In a few days the dampened kernels sprout and one is able to ascertain if the germination is good, fair or poor. The "rag-doll" works on a similar plan except that the box is dispensed with and the damp cloth rolled up, thus saving space.

When the results of the testing and labours, the sheep are separated from the goats, the good ears are carefully saved and the poor ones thrown out to be

used as feed. This precaution is not equally necessary in all years. in a good season practically all the corn is good for seed, while in a poor season with early frosts good seed is very scarce and ordinary corn which took out well may sell from five to ten dollars a bushel. But good seed corn removes from the mind of the farmer only the first of many worries, wherever two or three are gathered together the talk is all of corn. The ground is too wet, or too dry, the season is cold and late. the corn may not mature, or it is early but one fears late frosts.

The seed-bed is prepared with the greatest care for Sir Corn is a dainty fellow and must have his resting place soft and smooth. Plowing, disking and harrowing succeed one another until a great field which stretches to the limit of your vision will be smooth and fine as the best kept of gardens. Much manure, too, has been worked into this ground for as he loves a soft bed so does the corn love an abundance of rich food. Sometime in May all is ready, there is an old adage that the time to plant corn is when the oak leaves are as large as squirrels' ears, and as the oak is a conservative tree this is a fairly safe rule, it sets the time of planting in an average year about the middle of May. There are always those who plant earlier and are enormously pleased with themselves at having finished before others have

begun but they seldom gain much as the kernels will not sprout so long as the ground is cold. There are the trailers, too, whose work is never done, whose ground is never fitted and whose planters go clicking through the fields when their more fore-handed neighbors are bringing out their corn planters.

A corn-planter is a little machine of most unassuming appearance, which with uncanny accuracy places four kernels of corn at intervals of three feet and six inches back and forth across the large field. The unthinking driver finds nothing wonderful in it and explains its workings so poorly that one prefers to credit the machine with the guiding intelligence. When the corn is planted the ground is harrowed once, twice or thrice according to the time and inclination of the farmer. Then comes a day or so of patient waiting, of uncertainty in spite of the careful testing and planting, and then the glorious moment when the little blades stick up through the black soil, and the farmer returns from a visit to the field with the triumphant announcement that he "can see the rows both ways across the field." In a field planted by a careful farmer the accurately spaced rows give a delightfully checker-boarded effect, but sometimes the rows at this stage are a most damaging commentary on the care and skill of the man who drove the planter.

Once again the corn crop begins to furnish valuable copy to the newspapers when all else fails a cartoon of the corn crop reaming a winning heat with Jack Frost, or of a fat and jolly farmer labelled "Iowa" surrounded by fat and contented pigs and cows, all watching gleefully as the tiny greeen corn develops into huge stalks laden with ears - these are used to fill the space and win unstinted admiration. Paragraphs and even editorials on the crop outlook are also popular, with occasional allusions to the fact that Iowa has never known a crop failure. The reports of the Government, giving the condition of the various crops as compared with other years are weekly features. All this encouragement, however, fails to keep cheerful the countenance of that prince of pessimists - the prosperous farmer. He studies the signs of the weather, he meditates on the condition of the soil, he broods with an anxious and maternal care over his corn-fields. All this while the corn plows are busy, riding plows armed with four shovels, which cultivate each side of the row, stirring the ground so that the rootlets may spread unhampered, and in dry seasons forming a dust mulch which hinders too rapid evaporation.

The corn is ordinarily cultivated four times, first one goes through the long way, then across, through the long way once more, then it is recrossed. All through the month of June one sees in every direction the farmer, in his blue or khaki overalls and blue shirt, sitting hunched up on

his corn plow. while the horses plod back and forth in automatic fashion, comprehending nearly as well as the master when and where to turn.

By the fourth of July the former demands of a well conducted corn crop that it be as high as a horses belly, this means that the largest leaves when stretched out should reach that high – it is furthermore the farmers ideal to have his corn "laid-by" before the Fourth – in other words to have finished cultivating it. If these two wishes are fulfilled, the farmer is in a suitable frame of mind to crank his automobile and take his family to the nearest town to celebrate the birthday of our nation. By this time the corn rows are no longer distinguishable, one sees only a confused mass of broad blade of the darkest verdant green. The frail beginning little plants have made so vigorous a growth that they seem capable of enduring any amount of hard ship. The oat fields are heading out and soon begin to color, the hay-makers work under a sun whose intensity makes the whole lands cape quiver, the roads are hard and dry, the pastures grow brown and scanty, but all this excess of heat rejoices the heart of the corn-belt farmer, for how the corn does grow! The stalks push themselves higher and higher and presently on the tip of each appears an airy and graceful tassel, to be followed by the silks which appear wherever the ears are to ~~appear~~ be. Now a little less heat, please – and an occasional shower, for again

the farmer's brow is corrugated with anxiety and he watches the weather signs with an anxious eye. Too much heat and too great dryness now means imperfectly fertilized ears and a consequently diminished yield, and it is just the time of summer when we may expect high temperatures and hot winds. Spite of gloomy forebodings the pollen grains duly reach the silks and the ears begin to form; for the corn and the climate of Iowa are adapted to one another with the greatest nicety, and when no rain falls for some days the far-reaching roots of the sturdy stalks pierce underground reservoirs of water and drink it thirstily. With the ears well formed, the farmer enjoys a short season of peace. Of a Sunday afternoon he drives through the country mentally comparing his fields with those of his neighbors and finally stopping to pick a few ears from some favored portion of his field to examine more minutely. Huge green things they are, robed in thick layers of husk, nearly as long and nearly as large as a man's arm; the corn stalks are like trees, twelve or fourteen feet in height and the blades murmur constantly in the light puffs of wind like the leaves of a forest. Stories of children lost in just such a field of corn no longer seem apocryphal (and we are not sure that we ourselves would feel safe in crossing it).

Some time during August comes the golden rod with its "six weeks till frost" prediction, and the first

warm fruitful September suns wake in the farmer's heart the spectre of an early frost. With a devotion worthy of a better cause he quotes the words of the oldest settler on file in the records of the weather bureau that ten years ago, or nine or seven "we had killin' frost before September 15th" — "There's a goin' to be an awful lot of soft corn, most of it can't get ripe before frost, we'll be lucky if we have enough to feed"; but he always is lucky, he always does have enough to feed, and many bushels more, to sell at fifty or sixty cents a bushel. Prices once regarded as fabulous but now reached nearly every year. The fall rains, thinks our pessimist, will prevent the ripening of the corn even if the frost holds off — it is just as green! But the corn keeps steadily on. The fields which only yesterday were of the richest green take on a pale yellow tinge, the dry leaves rustle with a voice quite different from the musical and monotonous murmur of the green leaves. The ears are full and hard and each plump kernel is dented across the end, we can see this very plainly for the dried husks begin to turn away from the ear. The frost may come now, the race is over, the victory won and the farmer's crown of gold is as firm, as yellow and as nearly less valuable than the gold from western mines.

October passes with frosts which rapidly

increase in severity, but which are beneficent, even necessary to the corn, for they dry out the ears so that there is no danger of moulding. Late in October or early in November the first huskers appear in the field, a ~~stout~~ side board is erected on the right side of the wagon to keep the ears from going over the wagon and dropping on the ground, to one who is accustomed to driving through the country in the corn belt the thud of the ears against the husking board seems the natural rythm for the golden Indian summer days. It will be Thanksgiving or later before the fields are stripped and many are the frosty mornings when fingers must fly to keep from getting stiff and cold, a light snow and a bitter wind deprive the husking of most of its poetry so far as the farmer is concerned.

The huskers receive from three to four cents a bushel for their work and an experienced man working in a field where the yield is good can husk from ninety to a hundred bushels in a day. Many far exceed this and the corn crop again supplies newspaper items with the statements of the marvelous number of bushels of corn husked and cribbed by some champion husker. When one is reported from a certain section of the country, other quarters are, of course, eager to rival or excel the latest hero, and the next issue of the paper will probably tell him of his laurels.

Early in the winter the crop of the year has passed

into history, the government experts have estimated the yield per acre, the amount sold, the amount held by the farmer, the amount lost by missing bills, wet or dry weather, and have performed a thousand other attractive juggling feats with figures. The farmer gazes contentedly at the long, full cribs and at the hogs and cattle which are putting the precious grain into a form which will bring him an even higher price. His days of uncertainty are over. His hopes and expectations have been transmuted into bushels, for the moment he feels a perfect placidity an almost superhuman serenity, but the laborers in other vineyards need not envy him — at almost any moment he may begin to worry about the seed corn.