

Comment by the Editor

JOURNALISTS OF DISTINCTION

Sometime the intricate story of Iowa journalism will be told. It will be a tale of romance — if struggle against tremendous odds, devotion to high ideals, sincerity of purpose, and ultimate triumph constitute the substance of romance. The narrative will be crowded with picturesque characters — editors violently partisan and others delightfully whimsical; oracles of wisdom and idealists more poetical than practical; stylists who regard a dangling participle as a crime and to whom a split infinitive is positively painful; evangelists with a cause like temperance, free silver, or the suppression of rag weeds; natural-born humorists who would rather be witty than right; and shrewd fortune hunters with a talent for profits.

Among the dramas of newspaper biography many tragedies will be discovered, though happy endings are also common. The lives of some remarkable Iowa papers span three-quarters of a century and the climax appears to be still in the future. On the vast stage of Iowa journalism many rôles have been enacted and the repertoire of publications has included almost every kind of journalistic enterprise.

Of all the different types of journalism, none has

been more significant than the papers intended for farmers. Down through the years the agricultural press has maintained such high standards of service and such intelligent leadership that it has won a place of preëminence in the field of technical journalism. Not a step has been taken in the amazing progress of American agriculture that the farm papers have not urged. Better living conditions, greater crop yields, and finer produce have resulted mainly from the influence of these journals — the guiding stars in the development of improved husbandry. And in the forefront of periodicals devoted to the interests of country people are the Iowa papers. For more than a quarter of a century, Des Moines has been the agricultural publishing center of the United States.

It is not a mere coincidence that among the score or more of noted agricultural journalists, a third are Iowans. From his farm in Keokuk County, James H. Sanders was called to the editorship of the *National Live Stock Journal* and, with the aid of his son Alvin, brought that Chicago paper to a position of high regard during the seventies. In 1881 they established the *Breeder's Gazette* which has attained international prestige. As editor of *Farm and Fireside*, Herbert Quick set a new literary standard for farm journals and gave rural education a cultural impulse that has had an extraordinary influence. But in Iowa the names of Henry Wallace, James M. Pierce, and E. T. Meredith have been

household words these many years. Whatever they have advocated has been accepted as agrarian gospel. To the vision and courage of such leaders — men who often stood alone in their ideas of improving agriculture — the rural progress of this State is in a large measure due.

J. E. B.