

I am an Iowa landlord, or possibly in view of my sex it may be more accurate to say that I am an Iowa landlady. At all events you know what I mean, I belong to that unfortunate order of mortals so execrated in the public prints in recent days. Those mercenary and conscienceless villians who have pppressed the virile tenantry of the state and reduced them to the status of peasants, villeins or serfs as best suited the fancy or the vocabulary of the reporter.

In an experience extending over a period of thirty years I have met many farm tenants but have never yet met the meek creature with the inferiority complex who infests the newspaper columns and the novels of rural life. My tenants have always felt that they were quite as good as I was and indeed, have usually considered themselves better since, if my education was better and my bank account somewhat larger, they knew much more about practical farming than I did. As our contacts were usually along that line they were able to feel a pleasing sense of superiority. They were quite correct in this assumption, to o, I am not a practical farmer, I never "pitched a ton, ner druv a furrer straighter" but I can truthfully claim a considerable experience as a landlord.

My grandparents were the first settlers in the very lovely little river valley in which our small town is situated, much of the land which the family took at that time still belongs to their descendants. The farm on which I live has on it the log cabin which was the first dwelling built by the uncle who bought the farm from the railroad when he was married in 1868 ; another one of my farms was purchased by my mother more than sixty years ago, she earned the money by teaching school at a salary of twenty dollars a month. This farm was given me by my mother when we returned from the year of European travel which followed my graduation from college. My mother did not wish me to leave her to teach and gave me the farm as something which would interest me and occupy me while I accustomed myself to the life of our small town after more thrilling experiences abroad. I cannot, therefore, claim to have achieved the ownership of these farms through any great exertion or sacrifice. The only credit I can claim is that I still possess the farms and that no one can point the finger of scorn at my buildings or fences with the remark, "It looks like a widow lived there."

My very first tenant never materialized and so can scarcely be counted, altho' he was a serious problem at the time. The farm as given me was unimproved and I was building the buildings and looking for a tenant when along came this nice young man from Illinois, he had money, he had farm machinery, he had experience, he had a wife (most important equipment for a farmer). Joyfully I signed a lease with him, only to learn with far less joy in January when all good farmers have signed their leases that he did not intend to carry out the terms of his lease. We learned furthermore that he had no money, little equipment and most disillusioning of all no wife. I was able to rent the farm, through a stroke of good luck, to a Scotchman, a former London policeman and a very fine farmer. His landlord decided to raise the rent, a mere twenty five cents an acre, but it was an offense to the truly Scotch character of his tenant who preferred to move into my as yet unplastered house on a chilly first of March rather than pay what he considered an unfair and untimely charge.

Naturally, in the course of the years I have had many varieties of tenants, some were very good while others could be parted from without much grief. If one has a good farm with good buildings it is not necessary

I am an Iowa landlord ; or possibly in consideration of my sex it¹- may be more accurate to say that I am an Iowa landlady. At all events you know what I mean. I belong to that class so execrated of late in the public prints, those mercenary villains who have oppressed the viril tenantry of the state and made of them peasants, villeins or serfs according to the fancy of the reporter.

Through gift and inheritance I have come into possession of several farms in very excellent farming communities. I am not a practical farmer. I never "pitched a ton, ner drove a furrer straighter", nor can I personally claim to have achieved the ownership of these farms through any great exertion or sacrifice. My mother gave me my first one when we returned from the year of travel abroad which followed my graduation from college. She did not wish me to leave her to teach, and gave me the farm as something which would occupy me and interest me while I accustomed myself to the life of our small town after our experiences abroad. My mother bought this 280 acre farm with money earned as a school teacher at twenty dollars a month, but the only credit I can claim is that, after thirty years, I still possess the farm, unincumbered and well improved.

I have read many articles about landlords and tenants in recent papers and magazines, the theory of these articles seems to be that the landlord lives in sinful luxury while the tenant inhabits a wretched hovel and slaves from dawn to dusk for a ruthless taskmaster. I live on one of my farms which is only a mile from our charming little town, picturesquely situated on a river amidst wooded hills. It is quite true that my house is larger, better furnished and far more completely equipped with plumbing than those of any of my tenants. Plumbing is a luxury when one lives beyond the reach of water mains and sanitary sewers ; all the tenant houses have cisterns, however, and sinks with drains and good drinking water, easily reached. The tenant house on the farm where I live has electricity, there are also lights in the barn, in the hog house and on the corn crib and a deep well pumped by electricity. Such equipment is not possible on the other farms which are not on the high line, altho' a rural electrification project promises to reach one of them.

The houses are all neat, attractive dwellings of six or seven rooms, set in attractive lawns with shrubs and fruit trees. I can picture myself as living contentedly in any one of them, and I am inclined to believe that my tenants are satisfied since one man is starting on his ninth year on the farm, another on his eighth while the tenant on the third farm had lived there seven years before I purchased the place and has lived there two years since. He should be there for at least two years longer as he signed a three year lease last summer.

So much has been said in various articles about the injustice of the short leases. My experience leads me to the conviction that the lease is much less important than the character of the man who makes it. Only today I visited the farm which seems most truly mine, the one my mother gave me so long ago. This tenant has lived there more than seven years and has had only one year leases. As we spoke of renewing the lease today I said, "I am willing to sign a three year lease with you if you wish to do so." He laughed and said "I would not want to stay on the place if you did not want me, and I know that I can stay as long as I farm the land satisfactorily, under these circumstances the length of the lease does not mean much."

to deal with the poorer class of tenants. One has a wide choice under those conditions and it is usually easy to discover whether a man is a good farmer, reliable and in fair shape financially. This does not settle all problems, however, landlords and tenants, like husbands and wives may be incompatible, as in marriage the first year is the honeymoon when all things work together for good, plowing is done early, manure is hauled out promptly and is spread on remoter fields and not on that east forty which is so handy to the buildings. The landlord too feels the glamour of the new relationship and is generous with paint and lavish with paper. The second year is the proving ground for both.

Much has been written in various articles about the injustice of the one year lease, in my experience I have found that the lease is much less important than the characters of those who sign it. On two of my farms the same tenants have lived for seven and eight years respectively and have never had anything but a one year lease, we renew the lease from year to year until we can no longer find a place to sign our names and then we write a fresh one. A former tenant lived on the one farm for twelve years and would probably be living there yet had he not elected to dedicate my new two thousand dollar barn with a public dance. My protest was an earnest one since such use invalidates one's insurance, he was equally firm and held the dance but the next March first saw him joining the parade of movers. That time I had the last word.

Only yesterday I visited the farm which seems most truly mine, the one which my mother gave me so long ago. As we talked of renewing the lease I told the man that I was quite willing to sign a three year lease with him if he wished to do so. He laughed and said, "I would not want to stay on the place if you did not want me, and I know that I can stay as long as I farm the land satisfactorily. I don't care anything about the length of the lease."

If one can believe what one reads in the magazines and newspapers landlords live in sinful luxury while their tenants are without the barest necessities, inhabiting wretched hovels and laboring from dawn to dusk to satisfy the demands of a relentless taskmaster. I live on one of my farms only a mile from our little town which is picturesquely situated on a river amidst wooded hills. It is true that my house is larger, somewhat better furnished and more fully equipped with plumbing than those of any of my tenants. Plumbing is an expensive luxury when one lives beyond the range of water mains and sewers. The tenant houses are all neat attractive dwellings of six or seven rooms, set in attractive lawns with fruit and shade trees. I can picture myself as living contentedly in any one of them and I believe that my tenants do live contentedly.

All of these families have good cars, they go to church, to Farm Bureau activities, to school activities, and to the Parent-Teacher meetings: in short I cannot see wherein their activities differ from those of any of farmer owners, landlords or business men in our town and country side.

Two of my farms are in consolidated districts, they are on gravelled roads and the school busses come to their gates each morning to take their children comfortably to school. This makes an important difference in my taxes but is worth the difference in increased opportunity to the children. The third farm is just outside the consolidated district but has a modern rural school built only last year.

When one speaks of this condition it is necessary to remember that

my farms are all leased on a standard form of lease very popular in this vicinity which calls for a crop share and cash for pasture and hayground. I have tried to overcome the fault of a lease which takes the grain off the land by seeding down a number of acres each year. During the recent lean years I have several times taken much less cash rent than the lease called for but I have found the men entirely reasonable and appreciative of the reduction.

All of these families have good cars, they go to church, to Farm Bureau activities, to school entertainments and to the Parent-Teacher meetings, in short I cannot see where their activities differ from those of any of the farmer-owners or of the business men in our village. Two of these farms are in consolidated school districts, they are on gravel roads and the school busses come to their gates each morning to take the children comfortably to school. This makes a very important difference in my taxes but it is worth the difference in the way of opportunity to the children. The third farm is just outside a consolidated district but has a modern rural school building built only last year.

Naturally in the course of the years I have had many varieties of tenants, I cannot say that I have had any bad ones altho' in one or two instances I have not grieved at parting from them. It is quite easy to learn about the prospective tenant and if the farm is a good one it is not necessary to take a man whose reputation is not good. A reputation for fair dealing, good health, ambition, suitable equipment not too heavily mortgaged are important requisites for the tenant. I suppose that I cannot so easily characterize a good landlord, the one to be avoided is the one who wants to get every cent he can from the land without returning the necessary seeding or being willing to make the essential repairs. An owner who has no pride in the appearance of the farm is likely to be a sinner in all these particulars.

I think that my saddest experience was with a man who lived twelve years on the place but gave me some unpleasant publicity by bootlegging and appearing in the public prints as living on my farm. This same man was the one who gave a dance in my new barn which had cost me two thousand dollars. Such use of the barn invalidates ones insurance, and the risk seemed greater than the possible pleasure to me. I think it did to him also as while he had the dance in August I had a new tenant in March.

My very first tenant never materialized. When I was building the buildings on the farm a young man from Illinois came to rent it. He gave what seemed satisfactory references, and related at length stories about his wife and his farming equipment. But alas! a short time later it developed that he had neither money, farm machinery nor wife and I was once more hunting for some one to break my grassy acres, acres which had never been plowed.

Another man who did very well when he first rented the farm later started to sell milk in town. He took so much time to distribute his milk and to converse with the customers that he had no time left to cultivate the crops. He felt very bitter when he was told that his lease could not be renewed, altho' he had been warned several times.

Of all the tenants with whom I have had to deal he was the only one who seemed to feel that he had been unjustly treated and even now when nearly ten years have passed, he considers us as his enemies.

One of my tenants was an ex London bobby, another had been in a German Hussar regiment, two were Swedes from the same province.

neither class is static, there is a continual movement from the one class to the other. Before the war the carefull and industrions tenant could count absolutely on being able to purchase a farm after several years. Immediatly after the war when the land boom came many farmers increased their holdings only to lose everything during the slump and re-enter the tenant class. Whatever coditions may be elsewhere there is, in our happy valley absolutely no social discrimination. To be a landlord confers no dissinction and often, if the land is encumbered, is of no financial impottance either.

Just now the harvest is in full swing, the fields of oats o r barley dotted with golden shocks contrast pleasingly with the dark green of the corn and the vivid green of the alfalfa. Frequent rains have kept the pastures fresh and the cattle are luxuriating in abundance after the scanty pickings of last summer. Soon the threshing will begin, there are s ix families in our small ring, three of them own their f arms a nd three of them rent from others. Not even the astutest judge of human nature could tell which was which as the men, attired in the universal uniform of blue shirt and blue overalls pitch bundles or haul away the loads of grain. When the threshing is finished and the picnic is held it would be even more difficult to select the tenants daughters from th e others, entirely up to the minute in dress and wearing the latest shade of rouge and lipstick, they are charming girls and one of them, at least, will be the wife of a future landlord if thae young man has anything to say about it.