



**OPPORTUNITIES** for character always bloom along the pathway of our duty and make it fragrant even when it is thorny.—S. J. Burrows.

## Ira Gilson's Choice

(Rural Life)

By LADD PLUMLEY

ALTHOUGH his farm had been so long the home of Ira Gilson and his wife, and although he loved it and knew it to be productive, healthy, and even beautiful, yet he had become much dissatisfied. For a long time there had been a good deal of talk in his neighborhood of the opportunities in a distant state where several of Ira's former neighbors had migrated and from whence there had come rumors about prodigious crops, apples as big as small squashes, amazing grapes, and pears like pumpkins; in fact, a kind of fairyland of farming. True, there were doubters who called attention to the fact that while in their vicinity a few places were for sale yet from many advertisements it seemed as if all the wonderful farms in the distant Eldorado could be bought.

Ira's was certainly a good farm. Except for hedgerows of thorn-apple, wild cherry and striped maple, there was hardly a square foot that was not rich black bottom land, while the most, sloping toward the south, gave excellent pasturing. Not far from a bustling little town, Ira had the advantage of a local market, and it can also be said there were pleasant neighbors and a church not a great way off.

The farmhouse itself had been built by Ira's father. Large and commodious, it had many conveniences not found in most farmhouses. Besides, it was nicely sheltered from storms. From the great kitchen at one end of the long building could be seen meadows stretching away, with a range of distant hills lifting against the horizon their blue silhouette. "I'm really discontented," remarked Ira on a wonderful July evening as, after milking, his wife came to the door of the spring house. Below them the mists lay like shadowy lakes, where already the fireflies glistened their lanterns against the borders of the fields.

"Perhaps, Ira," said his wife, "you're thinking of me."

"Yes," replied Ira. "You've been a little cut off. Of course we've had a good living and put some money in 'th' bank. But there ain't a fortune in dairy farming, and with all this talk seems as if we, too, ought to jump in and make our pile same as others."

"Pears to me it's takin' a big risk even to think of it," said Ira's wife. "But if you're gettin' discouraged—well—I dunno. There is times when we all want a change—though—well—as I said, it's taking a risk to let such thoughts into your head."

"Discontent is more contagious than the measles. At first Ira's wife had refused to hear of any change. She had loved the farmhouse ever since as a bride she had been kissed by

her husband at the door. But this evening she listened with a new interest to what her husband again told her of the distant fairyland. And after the chores were finished husband and wife looked over maps and discussed a possible change until far into the night.

"I know an agent who made it his business to trade in farms, and having been written to concerning a pos-

**It is a good thing to get away from everyone, even for a brief time, and look yourself square in the eye and ask yourself all you want to know about yourself. In this way you may get acquainted, for the chances are that, being cornered, you won't undertake to deceive yourself. You will probably find at first that your acquaintance with some of your friends and their shortcomings and besetting sins, is much more intimate than with yourself.—Burdette.**

sible deal, the agent appeared a few days later.

"Do you wish to sell for cash or are you thinking of a trade?" asked the man.

"I ain't much on such things," confessed Ira. "What are your ideas? S'pose you owned this farm, what would you do?" Ira swung his hand around in a circle, the agent's shrewd eyes following the direction of the pointing finger.

"I can make it look well in print," remarked the agent.

"Can you?" asked Ira eagerly.

"Sure thing. Now, do you want to sell for cash or make a trade?"

"What do you advise?"

"Suppose we try a trade?" The agent knew his business; he would make a commission on the price of only one farm if sold for cash; he would make a double commission on a trade. "If I was you, I'd make a trade. I would trade for a farm out in that country where they're picking money off of apple trees and boxing it in grapes. That's the country for you; you'll grow rich over night."

"That sounds pretty big," remarked Ira.

"There's lots of money in fruit," said the agent. "Yes, make a trade and I'll do all I can to suit you."

Then followed long conferences with Ira's wife. All her complaints of the various drawbacks of her home were entered in the agent's book. Entered also were many things that could induce another to take Ira's farm.

"I'll send you exchange slips," agreed the agent, as after staying to dinner he was about to drive away. No tie had told such stores of irrigated lands as made both Ira and his wife gasp with amazement.

But when the slips began to arrive they seemed most unsatisfactory. There was an unfamiliar almost foreign look to the cuts of great checker

board fruit farms, and the talk of ditches, flumes, and water rights seemed complicated and puzzling. The more Ira discussed irrigated lands with his wife the more it seemed that they were a little loathe to change the entire manner of their life.

"It's just this way," complained Ira, when the agent dropped in again. "All that pile of circulars is nothin' less than wasted on us. When we come to take this and that into account, Man and I have decided that we want another milk farm. There ain't no use changin' to raisin' apples as has to be handled like eggs, as them circulars say, and where you'll have ditches along the rows, and water gates at the end, same as it you was raisin' a saw mill mixed in with a fruit farm."

"But that's the sort of thing you had in mind in the beginnin'," remarked the agent. "There's money, good money, in that kind of farmin', and you might as well have it as 'Tom, Dick and Harry.'"

"We've changed our minds," said Ira. "Send us some more exchange sheets; this time about some nice milk and stock farms."

"No more," said Ira a few days later, after the supper dishes had been washed up and the committee of two had gone into executive session. "This is just about the correct thing."

"Country town where the women folks can trade," continued Mrs. Gilson, "ditches as good as any best. Farm houses and locality right in every way. Healthy country, beautiful scenery; temperate climate!"

"Where does it say that amazing farm is located?" asked Ira.

"Doesn't say no more than the other slips," remarked the agent. Information as to the location of this splendid dairy farm together with further important particulars can be had by addressing P. T. Emory, special agent in farm lands, at the address given below."

As the specialist descended from his buggy the following Saturday evening, he was greeted by an excited couple.

"My goodness me, those biscuits smell good!" exclaimed the agent as Mrs. Gilson motioned him to a seat at the supper table in the corner of the big cool kitchen. "And I was telling my wife about that special dairy farm, yours, a fine one. She wants me to get the receipt. She says that isn't going to be peace in our house till she makes me some."

Mrs. Gilson's face beamed as she brought a steaming plate of biscuit and placed them before the guest. But a moment later her curiosity to know immediately the whereabouts of the wonderful farm made her forget the compliment.

"Pa's s'pose's proper to get Mr. Emory to talk business while he's eating his supper?"

"Sure thing, Mrs. Gilson," exclaimed the agent, already busy with hot biscuits and strawberry jam. "I am always ready when a deal's on hand."

"It's those slips," announced Ira. "Those first slips didn't do no way, but there's one in the last bunch that is as perfect as if it had been made to order. If the feller is really open to a trade that ends it so far as we are concerned."

While he had been speaking Ira had left the table. After a moment he returned, and selecting one of a package of printed slips he placed it at the side of the agent's plate.

In the intervals of enjoying his supper the agent hastily scanned the slip.

"Looks pretty good to me," he said. "But of course I handle so many plans that I'm expected to keep track of where they all are. If you wait a moment I'll look up the number in my note book."

Presently the book was produced from the agent's pocket and he held the pages open with his right hand, while with his left he lifted to his mouth a piece of biscuit neatly coated with strawberry jam. The next moment his face became distorted and he fell to choking as if he would strangle.

"Get me some water!" he gasped. After being helped to his feet he had been slapped across the back.

"It must have been a bit of ginger," exclaimed the anxious Mrs. Gilson. "I always put a little in my jam. Take another swaller of water."

"It wasn't the strawberries!" explained the agent when he could speak again, puckering up his face. "It's funny and all that, but if I had my clerk here I'd give him a piece of my mind. When we print I have him see to the owners of the description of their farms. He got things mixed; I've had my doubts about that young man. However, it's easy to fix things up; I'll send you some more slips."

"But we've set our hearts on this farm," remonstrated Ira, picking up the slip of the perfect farm from where the agent had dropped it on the floor.

"Forget it," said the agent. "You wouldn't be satisfied."

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