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Selected Story.

LIVING EASY;

OR,
ONE YEAR IN THE CITY.

BY SARAH M. HATTOUGH.

"Jane, I think you are a perfect slayer. I would not work as hard as you do for three times what it brings you. Early and late you are at it. No time for anything but work."

"Oh! no, sister, I find time for recreation sometimes; but it is true, I work very hard, and I often wish I could find a way to live easier. When Nina gets older I shall have more help, I hope."

"Nina is by far too delicate for the rough work of a farm," said the first speaker. "But she would make a fine appearance in the city. I do wish, Jane, that you could persuade James to move to the city."

"What better off would we be there?" asked the other.

"Why, you could live easier. My husband is getting a good salary as foreman, and my family is as large as yours, and I am sure my work is not half so drudging as yours."

"I have thought about it often," sighed the farmer's wife, "and I have often told James so, too, but he will not listen to it."

"I will talk to him about it this very night," said the first speaker.

The above conversation took place in the sitting-room in James Arnold's house. He was a comfortable, well-to-do farmer. His family consisted of himself, wife, two sons, and a daughter. He had a good house, a well-stocked farm, and prided himself on his good living. His wife had been reared in the city, but had moved to the farm shortly after her marriage, and had settled down as a thrifty farmer's wife, contented with the labor and rewards of her life. True, sometimes she felt a longing for the excited easy life which the city affords. And these longings were always intensified after a visit from her sister, Mrs. Brown, who lived in the city. Mrs. Brown was always holding up to her the pleasures of a city life contrasted to the "drudgery," as she termed it, of a farmer's wife. She had succeeded in impregnating her sister with her own ideas; especially when she pictured to her the advantages it would bring to Nina, her daughter; how well she would appear in society there, and how she needed the refining influence of a city life. All these things had worked on Mrs. Arnold's mind, until she said—"If James would only be persuaded they would sell everything and move to the city."

One evening, during one of Mrs. Brown's visits, as they were all sitting together on the front piazza, Mrs. Brown set the ball rolling:

"James," she began, "how tired and careworn you look. I declare, I never saw any one grow old so fast in my life as you do. You look as old now as my husband, who, I am sure, is five years your senior."

"Well," replied the farmer, "I have to work pretty hard through the summer, both Jane and I; but through the winter we take it easy."

"Yes, take it easy, and eat up all your summer's labor, and then go at it again when spring comes. I tell Jane I would not work as hard as she does

for three times what it brings you.— And Jane looks careworn and thin, too."

"Jane always was thin, Martha; she belongs to Pharaoh's lean lineage, mother?" said he, patting her upon the shoulder. But his wife did not respond to his pleasantry; she was thinking of her sister's words.

"Now," resumed Mrs. Brown, "you see how much better it would be for you to move to the city. You have a good trade, and could make one hundred dollars a month as easy as nothing, and I am certain you do not do as well as that here, do you?"

"Well, no; not in greenbacks, but I reckon it amounts to about the same in the end."

"But see how much easier we could live," quietly put in his wife.

"I am not so sure of that, Jane," he replied. "There are more things than money to look after. Would it be as well for the boys and Nina?"

"Better, better," said Mrs. Brown eagerly. "William could get a situation somewhere, and James and Nina could go to such good schools. And Nina could learn music, too, which she so much desires to do."

"But you would not have me sell the place?" and the farmer's tone was sad.

"Oh! no," said both women, "rent it out. The rent of the farm, would pay your own rent in the city."

"Oh! it would be so nice, father," said Nina.

"So it would," said William, a lad of eighteen years, and the oldest of the children. "For my part, I hate farming, and mean to quit it soon, anyway."

"It will not be nice at all," said James, the youngest child. "I do not want to be cooped up in your dusty city, with only a yard about six feet square, and not a blade of grass or a bird to be seen, except hanging up against a window somewhere in fancy cages. I got homesick enough that time I went home with auntie."

"But you will not get homesick if father and mother are there, will you?" said Nina.

"Well, I know I shall not like it and I do not want to go, either."

The conversation was kept up by the children for awhile; but soon they, too, fell to thinking, and thus the subject was dropped. A few days after, and Mrs. Brown left, declaring that she could not bear to see Jane slaving her life away, and Nina rusting out, down there in the country, and urged her sister to keep at James until he should consent to leave the farm and remove to the city. "It will be so nice," she added, "to live near each other again."

After Mrs. Brown had gone, Mrs. Arnold was so full of the thoughts of a city life, and gave herself so completely to it, that she became perfectly miserable. Labors that had been light and pleasant before, now were looked upon as most arduous, and she made it the theme of their conversation every time they were alone.

"But, Jane," he said one evening, when she had been "sermonizing," as James, the younger, had called it, "I cannot see what profit this will be to us. Surely, I must work wherever we are; and why not stay here, where we have always lived comfortably?"

"But, James," she replied, "I think the children can have more privileges and advantages in the city. William can go to a trade, and board at home; and Nina can learn music, and perhaps in time teach it, if need be. You know she is very apt at music."

"Well, but did not Julia May offer to teach her for ten dollars a quarter?"

"Yes; but Martha says that Julia is not much of a teacher; and, as long as she is to learn, why not have the best teacher? And, besides, we have no piano."

"Well, wife, we can get a piano here as well as there."

"I suppose we can," she answered; "but, really, I am tired of farming; I want rest, too. I think we might live as easy as others when we can."

The heaven of discontent had set Mrs. Arnold's honest heart to fomenting. After a long pause, Mr. Arnold said—"But what will I do with the farm, and the stock, and everything?"

"Rent it all out. There's Abe Rawlings would take it to-morrow, and give your own price for it, too."

"But he does not want the stock; he has cows and horses enough."

Mr. Arnold said no more. He had almost come to think that reasoning with a woman about something she had set herself to accomplish, was about as hard work as beating the north wind.

"I think mother must be crazy," said James to William one night, after they had gone to their room. "If I was father I would let her go to the city and try it. I'll bet she'll be as keen to come back as she is to go."

"I only hope they will go," said William. "I am tired of living on a farm, anyhow. It would be so much nicer for a fellow to go spend an evening at the theatre now and then. Cousin Ralph Brown says he goes two or three times every week."

"Well, I don't like Cousin Ralph much," said James. "He's always making fun of everything around the place, saying he would not live down here. I notice he is glad to come in fruit season, when he can make something."

"A continual dropping will wear a stone," Mrs. Arnold, following her sister's advice, kept at James until he reluctantly consented to rent his snug farm, sell off his stock, and move to the city. Mrs. Brown had been informed of this state of affairs, and had been appointed agent to hunt up city quarters for our country friends, being instructed not to engage rooms above two hundred and fifty dollars a year. Every person knows that that sum will not procure rooms any more than comfortable, even for people accustomed to the cramped living afforded by the city.— What, then, must it have been to the Arnolds, accustomed to plenty of room down-stairs all their lives, besides cellar and garret? Mrs. Brown had done the best she could for them, by securing a back basement and second story in a genteel neighborhood, where the landlord lived in the same house.

"How can I ever find room for all my furniture?" said Mrs. Arnold to her sister, as dray load after dray load was brought in.

"I'll tell you what to do," said Mrs. Brown. "Just unpack what you need and stow the remainder away."

"Where will I stow it?" inquired Mrs. Arnold, in dismay.

"Why, you have a nice wood-house in the back yard; put it into that, or sell it."

But Mrs. Arnold could not think of selling the things she had possessed so long, so she followed the other piece of advice, and stowed innumerable things away into a little eight-by-twelve wood-house, and left them.

It took a long time to unpack and "set to rights;" but that was finally accomplished, and city life to our country people was fairly begun.

"O dear! what shall I do with these without a cellar?" said Mrs. Arnold, as a barrel of apples was brought in.— "The house is literally full, and where I shall keep these without their getting frozen I can't tell."

It was not the first time the good little woman had been perplexed by similar things. But she had resolved not to complain. She had often looked around her narrow room, filled, as it was, with various things, and contrasted it with the roomy, pleasant kitchen at the farm. And then her sitting-room was up two flights of stairs, and she had often said to herself that she would rather walk a mile than travel up those stairs so many times a day. Nor is it the pleasantest thing in the world for tenant and landlord to occupy the same house. Mrs. Arnold thought so, at least, as James was often reprimanded for noise he made, such as whistling through the halls, singing on the front steps, and various other privileges which to the country boy were free as air.

"I should like to know what harm there is in a fellow singing, no matter where it is, or whistling, either, if he likes," said he.

"But, James," said Aunt Martha, "it is not genteel to sit on the door steps and sing. People will wonder where you were brought up."

"Well, auntie, I can tell them, with no shame, either, if they ask me," was the reply.

Mr. Arnold had been fortunate enough to procure work at his trade in the same shop where Mr. Brown was the foreman, so he found no difficulty in providing for his family.

Nina and William were delighted with their new life, but James found it not to be compared with the country.

"I wish you would let me go back to the farm," he said to his father. "I will be Mr. Rawlings's hired boy if you will let me."

"Tut, tut, James, how you do talk," said William. "I think this is much better than going out cold mornings and helping with the stock."

"Well, you may think as you please, Will; but if father will let me I will go back."

"No, James," said his father, "I want you to go to school here this winter; perhaps in the summer, if you wish, you may go back."

James was silent for a time.

"James," said Nina, "I hope you do not want to be a hired boy! Why, that is being somebody's servant."

"I want to be anything rather than a *prinny* like Ralph Brown, or a bad boy like John Snell. I do not like those city chaps at all. And, sis, I think you are getting some of the 'genteel airs' that auntie talks about, for you raise your eyebrows when you talk; and, I vow, you can say horse equal to a horsejockey now."

"Silence, James!" said his mother.

"Mother, you never can *refine* James I am sure," said his father, smiling.— "But, as I said before, James, go to school this winter, and in the summer you may go to Mr. Rawlings's."

The winter passed rapidly away.— Mrs. Arnold was not quite happy. Various things had occurred to worry her, foremost of which was a desire on William's part to be absent evenings. He at first had attended school, but that had come distasteful to him, so his father had been trying to get him into his own shop, but so far had been unsuccessful. William had fallen in with some boys his own age, who were not calculated to do much if any good to such a boy as William. His mother had seen all this, and her true mother's heart was grieved in consequence.— Another source of annoyance was with Mr. Arnold himself. He was silent and sometimes sullen. She feared he was ill, but to her anxious inquiries he always returned a negative answer.— The truth was, he missed the free-and-easy life he had always led before he removed to the city. He missed his old neighbors; in fact, he missed his entire farm, together with its surroundings, and, in turn, his family missed his sunny temper and merry words.

One afternoon Mrs. Brown came in, and found Mrs. Arnold in tears.— "What is the matter, Jane?" said she. "Is anything wrong, or has anything serious happened, or have you a fit of the blues?"

"Quite a variety of questions, Martha," said Mrs. Arnold, making a feeble effort to smile, "but I believe, I can answer 'yes,' to all of them. Something is the matter, and something has happened, and I have got the blues;" and the poor woman burst out again into tears.

"Now I will sit down and hear all about it, Jane."

Mrs. Arnold dried her eyes and began—"Martha, I am so worried about William. He is out every evening, sometimes until midnight. He says he goes to the theatre, sometimes some other place. He is growing rough, chews tobacco, and altogether is very different from what he was a year ago. We have been here only four months, but four years ought not to have changed him so."

"Now, Jane," said Mrs. Brown, "I think you notice these things too much. There's my Ralph, he goes out nights, and never think of asking him where he has been. Boys of their age do not like to give an account of all their actions."

"But, Martha, they ought to be required to give an account of themselves. I think mothers cannot be too careful about their boys. And when children arrive at that point when they consider it none of their parents' concerns where

they are or what they are doing, they are not from the gates of evil."

"People accuse me to living in the country look at these things in a different light from what city people do," said Mrs. Brown sulkily.

"But why should they, sister?" "There is no amusement or entertainment going on in the country, and boys are obliged to stay at home evenings. Now that you have moved here, William sees so much that is new and entertaining that he is carried away by it. After a time he may become satisfied and settle down."

"Yes, but perhaps at a fearful cost," said Mrs. Arnold sadly.

The conversation was not again renewed, but Mrs. Arnold did not stop thinking, nor did her thoughts become less troubled. "What if William should get to drinking?" and thought sent the blood to her heart in quick beat.

"I almost wish I had never come to the city," she said to Nina one day.

"Why?"

"Oh! everything seems different and strange."

"But, mother, you do not work so hard, do you?"

"I cannot see much difference as regards that," replied her mother. "It takes much more time to fix and go to market than it did to go to the cellar and get what I want for the table; and I think your father works much harder now than when on the farm."

"I have noticed father looking pale," said Nina, "but I thought it was because he was indoors all the time."

Spring came at last, but spring in the city is very different from spring in the country. There everything sings a joyous welcome, from the boisterous child to the tiny blossom which lifts its head in beauty, and lends its breath of fragrance to the vernal morn.

"O mother!" said James, one beautiful morning early in May, "how grand the old place must look in the sunshine this morning. I wonder if the robin has built his nest in the sweet-apple tree by the barn yet, or if the swallows have harbored in the old hay-house yet? Wouldn't I like to be there this minute?"

"Well, I wouldn't," said William.— "You don't get me back to the farm again."

"What will you do?" inquired James. "I'll go to sea if I don't get anything else to do."

"I'm afraid you will never get anything to do, my son, loafing on the streets as you do," said his father a little sternly. "I think there will be an opening in the shop soon."

"I do not want to learn the carpenter's trade," said William.

"What trade do you want to learn?" asked his father.

"None at all."

"Oh! he wants to be a merchant or a professor," said James.

"I do not want to be a 'country Jake' again, tending horses and cows. That work I'll leave for you, James."

"Well," answered James, "you may be the professor, I will be the farmer. Mother, wouldn't you like to be fixing up the garden now?"

"Yes, James. And I should like to see the old place this morning. The orchard must be all in blossom now."

"Well, mother," said Nina, "I am sure you need not miss the garden, for you can get things as nice at the market."

"I do not know where I am to keep my butter and milk when the warm weather comes, without a cellar."

"It'll be very easy keeping the milk, mother, 'cause it's more than half water. Guess it won't thicken much."

His mother smiled pleasantly, and all arose from the breakfast-table, each one going about his own work.

had feared had, indeed, come upon her.

O mother! where now are thy fond hopes for thy first-born? Far less anguish would it be to know that he rested upon the hill-side in the country graveyard than living before thee, sense and honor lost in the poisonous cup.

Mrs. Arnold helped her unconscious son up the stairs to his own room, and after seeing him in bed safely, she left the room, mentally determined that no one should know her boy's shame and her own disgrace. But we cannot always hide such things when we wish to. Other eyes than Mrs. Arnold's had seen William. Mrs. Taylor, the landlady, had heard the bustle at the door, and, as almost any other person would have done, she peeped out of her parlor door, and saw what was going on. "I am sorry for you," she said, as Mrs. Arnold came through the hall; "but young men will commit wrong acts sometimes."

Mrs. Arnold made no reply. She felt all the indelicacy of the proffered sympathy, and could not accept it.

"What was it, mother?" asked Nina and James in one breath, as their mother re-entered the sitting-room.

"Nothing that would interest you, my children," was the quiet reply.

Shortly after, James took a lamp, and went up to his room.

"Be careful not to disturb William," said his mother; "he is not very well to-night."

That was a night of mental anguish for Mrs. Arnold, the first that she had ever known, and, oh! how bitter was the cup. There was a twinge of remorse, too, withal, for she thought if they had remained at the farm some of this might have been avoided. She could not help contrasting her life in the city to that in the country. She saw her mistake, and, noble woman as she was, confessed it to herself, and resolved to set herself to remedy it.

The next morning found William awake, and perfectly aware of the shame that he had brought upon himself and others. "How," thought he, "will I ever face my mother again?— How could I have so far forgotten myself as to be led into such a thing?"— He was aroused by a quiet knock at his room door. "Who's there?"

"I, my son. Do you want your breakfast now?"

"Not yet. I will come down presently."

The more he thought of what had happened, the more reluctance he felt at seeing his parents again. He determined to dress himself, slip out unseen, and go— he knew not where—but anywhere out of sight of those he knew.— So, acting upon this sudden impulse, he arose and was soon dressed, and slipping down stairs softly, opened the front door, and was gone.

Ah wayward boy! many will be thy heart-aches and hardships ere thy mother's dear voice falls again on thy ear, and far deeper the sorrow of her true heart to know her boy is gone from her sight.

Mrs. Arnold waited long for William to come down-stairs, and finally ventured again to his room. She first knocked gently at the door. Receiving no answer, she called. Still no answer. Then she opened the door—the result the reader already knows, but words cannot express them other's anguish when she saw that her boy had gone. Nor can we attempt to describe how day after day she watched and waited for his return, or for some tidings of him. But none came. And thus weeks lengthened into months, and the summer was, indeed, upon them. The city had been tolerable during the winter, but now it was intolerable to the Arnolds. James, according as had been promised, had gone to the farm to work for Mr. Rawlings. Nina still continued at school, and Mrs. Arnold had several times noticed her daughter's languid step and pale face, and had questioned her as to her health. But Nina always said she was well.

"Nina studies too hard," said Mrs. Brown one day. "I think she needs rest. Vacation will soon come, then we will see her pick up again."

"I wish she was in the country," said her mother.

"I wish we were all there again," said