

# THE GENTLE ART OF FOOLING

By HELEN MATHERS (Author of "Comin' thro' the Rye," etc.)



To fool properly, I take it, in a purely physical sense, requires two persons, young, slim, long-limbed and light of heels and heart, not necessarily of opposite sexes, as two girls, or two youths can fool together with equal felicity, sometimes even better than when love interferes to make too serious their frolics, and end them.

Yet to watch two graceful young lovers in the initial stages of courtship is a pretty sight—the swallow-like character of their advances, flights and retreats; the half-averted way in which they glean hints of each other's characters and predilections, till gradually the circle narrows, and by imperceptible degrees they draw nearer to each other, and, the sport over, the fooling done, they sit hand in hand, dull human fashion, and we know that unless one of them is wise and keeps the game up after marriage their happiest days are over.

For the gentle art of fooling does not comprise fooling another person; it means that you yourself have a great capacity for playing the fool, and with wise discrimination admit another person to share your pleasure; it means that you have a gift for seeing the light side of nature, and human nature, instead of the dark; the humorous instead of the tragic; and this is less a gift than an art that can be acquired, if you resolutely set out to learn it.

**Be Cheerful.**  
And, primarily, I say that none of us fool sufficiently, but grizzle far too much; that if for only one hour of the day we tied up memory and our worldly and domestic worries in a bag and dropped them somewhere out of sight, then did something that, without hurting any one else, most particularly pleased us, our tempers would improve vastly, and we should make much brighter companions to those with whom fate, or circumstance, has jalled us. The heart of youth is light, because pure, and fooling follows inevitably; but as years advance it inevitably gathers weight, feels that it cannot rise, and this is where art should come in, to teach us that if we will throw overboard the useless lumber we have piled on it that heart will spring light as air to meet the thousand joys of life, aye, and enjoy them consciously, as in careless youth it did not.

I have seen some exquisite fooling between quite old people when they thought themselves unobserved, persons in whom an innate gaiety of heart and a happy knack of seeing the bright side of things has outlived all the pain and disillusionment of life, and I have been fain to ask them the secret of this art—for is it not an art to retain in middle and old age a privilege peculiar to youth? They must have analyzed this precious quality, have tracked it to its source, finding out what qualities of heart and brain go to its making, or is it that they have emptied their wallets of all grievances, throwing overboard malice, selfishness, acquisitiveness—above all—fear?

**Be Brave.**  
It is the bogie man fear who extinguishes in us that joy of living, which is the very essence, the raison d'être of our presence here, fear of the future, fear of the past, fear of death, fear of losing what we love, what we have amassed, though since

we know clearly the conditions on which we hold existence—that we are as torches lit only to be sooner or later extinguished—why fear? Death must come—well, let us meet it with decent dignity, loss of what we love must come—that, too, is in the bond. Being human, we must more or less often, according to the strength of our humanity (it is not the strength of our will, but the feebleness of our desires that most often gives us the victory over them) do things that make us regret the past—but the future? Avaunt fear! We mean to do our best with it—if we fail we shall still have tried—fear makes our defeat a foregone conclusion—we will have none for him.

Less of worldly goods? If the brains and will to work are there these may be replaced. The only real calamity to be dreaded is loss of health, and that very state of things is oftener than not brought about by the fear of it. Fear is an artificial condition of mind that nature knows nothing of in its chronic state—her children only experience it in moments of acute physical danger, when their racial enemies are near, and if we also reserved our energies for meeting the inevitable bad moments of our life, instead of anticipating them, we should have considerably more time left over for enjoyment, in a word, we should fool more and grizzle less.

**Be Judiciously Forgetful.**  
Just as our houses contain numbers of perfectly useless things, so do we insensibly allow our minds to become receptacles for disagreeable, tedious, unprofitable thoughts, regrets and desires, that wander aimlessly to and fro like ghosts, and like them, vanish into mist. If we resolutely set ourselves to enjoy, moment by moment, the much that life has to offer, facing our misfortunes with equal courage, and forgetting them, would we not add enormously to our own, and others' store of happiness? How few of us dare to say, "I am happy," yet the reasons are purely artificial that prevent our being so, and when we realize this, when we climb up, and look over the paling that man has raised to fence us off from God and his works, we are ingrates, indeed, if we do not take of the feast so bountifully set before us.

All nature rejoices in its own way, and at proper seasons, all but man, who, even when neither hunger, thirst, nor sickness threaten him, looks about for trouble, and stores it in his mind as a bee, with more wisdom, stores honey in the hive.

He is always expecting something to go wrong, he completely misses the moment of enjoyment in fearing, or expecting it will be snatched from him—surely if, as a recent brilliant writer suggested, a school for happiness should be founded, a school for cheer-

fulness is even more necessary, with teachers who would diligently point out to us our blessings and occasions for rejoicing, instead of reviling. By comparing what we might have been with what we are, physically, mentally, commercially; by counting up the misfortunes we have just missed; the occasions when luck or circumstance has saved us from ruin of one kind or another; by forcing ourselves to measure our paltry grievances with those

of the really afflicted and heart-broken, how many of us would not then sit down to reflect soberly on our advantages, feeling ashamed of our perpetual grumbings?

**Be Active.**  
Over much reading, especially of society papers with their idle tattle of rich folks' doings, is responsible for a good deal of mind-vaporing, especially among women, whose minds are confused by a variety of matters not in the least essential to their comfort or happiness. But let them fix their attention rather on the wants of those beneath than the extravagance of

those above them in the social scale, and they will end by hugging themselves rather on what they have than desiring what would probably make them no happier than that does which they now possess.

It may be taken for granted that those having great possessions cannot fool light-heartedly, for even as the soldier with the lightest knapsack sleeps out quickest, so are the rich weighed down to earth by the gold taken out of it, or rather the overwhelming responsibilities attached to their position.

They may be the cause, and often are, of others' light-heartedness, but seldom of their own; it is the moderates who inherit the earth, those who have known neither starvation nor a plethora of the good things of life, and it is among them that we must look for the "merry" men and women who take the sunshine with them wherever they go, and who, whatever may be their faults, are loved accordingly. To turn always a bright face to the world may at first be difficult, but how quickly it becomes a habit, how great is the reward! To call the diseased mind out of its self-built dungeon; to blow like a clean wind through the dust and morbidity of the four-walled life lived by most unhappy humans; such is the mission of the cheerful, the gay of heart, more glorious by far than to go about preaching and teaching, and though they may have their own very moments (where the light is brightest the shadow is deepest), they are using up their "ounce of cheerfulness" with which to serve God royally.

Do not we all more or less hypnotize each other, impress our own moods on those near to us, elevating or depressing their spirits, and forcing them to look through our own spectacles, rose-colored or blue, as the case may be? May not we even narrow and vulgarize their mental vision, even as we have power to inspire them with that larger humanity which throws its weight into the scale of pity, not condemnation of its fellow man?

**Be Considerate.**  
We can make them see the strong under-current of fun that runs through life; the gleams of pathos and humor that illumine the most sordid and unlikely subjects; in a word, each one of us is a maker of sunshine, or a producer of gloom in himself and others, and loved or disliked according to which role he elects to play.

To be "merry and wise" is not given to all, but to cultivate the bright side of things, to get a laugh out of unpromising material is open to every one, and it is astonishing how the habit of laughter, once indulged in, grows on us, till at last we come to recognize it as one of the great sweeteners and pu-

rifiers of life, while from a physical point of view its value is untold. The veriest grumbler and misanthrope alive might be improved by a laughter treatment, supplemented by plenty of fresh air, for in addition to brooding far too much over imaginary troubles, we are all too much indoors for our spiritual and bodily health. The gentle art of fooling does not permit stagnation of men's mind, but rather makes it quick-moving, keen to observe the humors of the crowd, of nature, and lastly, of oneself, for not to be able to smile at our own peculiarities and foibles is to be entirely bereft of that sense of the ridiculous which encroaches so nearly on humor, and is so priceless a belonging to its possessor, keeping him armored against all the minor misfortunes and accidents of life.

**Be Appreciative.**  
It is a good world, a beautiful world, it is man himself who makes most of the trouble by indulging in purely fictitious desires and sorrows. Turning his back on all the glories of the universe, he fights tooth and nail for the one bit of colored glass that has caught his fancy, only to discover its worthlessness when seized; meanwhile he is blind to all most worth having in life, for are not his the sky, the earth, the sea, his also the parks, the treasures of picture galleries and museums, such as the richest men alive cannot bring together?

It might do some of us good if we deliberately set ourselves to count up the amount of pleasures we can take for nothing; it would not hurt us indeed to be vainglorious, and strut about, vaunting the joys so freely provided for us; we might even in time come to patronize the multi-millionaire who has not a tittle more right in a superb sunset, a gay dawn, and the recrudescence of spring, than we have.

If we come to measure our personal happiness with his, he might be the loser by the comparison, but in any case it is a fine thing to stand up to wealth, not be cowed by it, to say "A man's a man for a' that—and a' that"—and when we are able to do this, we are far on the road to serenity of spirit that begets the desire to fool discreetly at a fitting opportunity.

"There's always a little something—she can't abide the moon," said one old farmer to another, when bragging about his daughter's married happiness, and while not unduly rejoicing over those whom the world envies, it may console poor folks to reflect that there is always "a little something" to discount the happiness of fortunate people, who, if we only knew it, deeply envy us, the obscure and happy. They may have all the desire to fool that we have, feel impulses as eager to take life rather as a picnic than a solemn feast, but they cannot escape from their surroundings, or rather from the circumstances that make them famous or remarkable. Let us then more happy, learn to fool gently, fool wisely, and laugh while we fool, encouraging others to a like pursuit, only taking care that such fooling does not degenerate into sheer folly, or worse—but to the honest and pure of heart, to whom I especially address myself, the practice is more likely to tend to their ennobling, than to their deterioration.

## SUBTLE INFLUENCE OF FATHER AND MOTHER UPON CHILD

### SEVENTEENTH TALK TO PARENTS

BY WILLIAM J. SHEARER

Each parent should be considerate of the other, but the father is the husband or houseband. He is the head of the family. This is the teaching of the Bible, which is accepted by all men and most women. It may be argued that in some families, because of peculiar temperaments, the mother is better fitted to be at the head than the father. The fact remains, however, she is the queen of the house, not the king.

Too many fathers consider that, since it is their duty to provide for the family, they have no duties in connection with the training of children. A moment's consideration will convince every thoughtful father that this is not the case and that, no matter what success he may gain in his business or profession, he is a complete failure if he has not proven himself a true husband and an interested and devoted father.

At every point it is the father's duty to stand ready to co-operate with the mother in her attempts to train the children. This duty becomes even more imperative as the child grows older and approaches the time of going out into the world.

If the father does not take interest in the training of the children it will be exceedingly hard for the mother, and they will not generally be trained as they should be; for there are many things which can be learned only from the father. While the home is the mother's world, the father is the connecting link between the world and the home. Each has a part to perform, the performance of which is necessary for the best results. When they do not do so, the training will be as discordant as the song of two singers whose voices are not in harmony.

One great trouble is that many men, and not a few women, who are considerate of others all day, have little consideration for those in their own homes. They have a pleasant word and smile for every one until they reach home,

which should be the most joyous place on earth—a place for which each has reserved the most pleasant word and happiest smile.

Every father should feel the absolute necessity of having the mother understand that he is ready, willing and anxious to give all possible assistance in the training of children. Other things being equal, his help would be in proportion to the amount of time he spends home. Some fathers are home so little that children hardly know whom to call "father," and are led to ask as did one little fellow, "Mamma, who is that man that whips us nearly every Saturday?"

Mothers and fathers should recognize the absolute necessity of co-operation in the training of children. Vital as it is elsewhere, it is even more important here. There must be no conflict of authority, for it is one of the most potent causes of failure in the management of children. It has caused the ruination of more children than almost any other mistake. When either corrects a child, how often the other takes his part! Unless there is marked injustice or brutality, that is not justifiable. It is the surest way of making a child rebellious against the authority of both. The sensible way would be to wait until they are alone and then discuss the matter in a reasonable way.

Some fathers object to having anything to do with the management of the children. They say they have many trials during the day which a mother cannot fully appreciate. Let this be granted, is her sympathy not ever ready? On the other hand, it must also be remembered that the mother has many cares which the father cannot appreciate. If he would take her place for one week he would know more about it, and, afterward, would have plenty of sympathy. She works at home, away from associates, which might make things seem to move easier. How often, with aching head, the many difficulties must be met and conquered. How many times have her quivering nerves been shattered and her strength taxed to the uttermost by the trying cares of home when everything seemed to go wrong. The young child may have been sick and troublesome. The older ones may have almost

broken her heart by some real or imagined terrible acts. There may be no servant, or what is just as bad, she may have left or be about to leave. A hundred other troubles crowd fast upon each other. Should she not feel free to call for any assistance needed from the father? Such is the time for showing the flowers of appreciation. On the part of too many there is a tendency to keep all sympathy and praise until it is too late. How many patient mothers would be surprised if they could see the flowers heaped upon their coffins and hear the words of praise from lips which, for years, had spoken scarcely a word of appreciation or sympathy! Truly, it is time that the father awaken to the training of the children. Surely he owes to the home the best influences of his life. It should not be a boarding-house where he sleeps and eats and pays the bills. It should be the center of his life.

If only the mothers, these patient, long-suffering, representatives of the Almighty, could but faintly appreciate the grandeur of their office and their unbounded power and influence over the present and future lives of their children! It can scarcely be overestimated. Almost daily the writer has to appeal to the most troublesome boys and girls that are found among thousands. Many are just one step from the reform school or the jail. A consideration of such places has little or no effect upon them.

Harshness and threats make no impression. The most brutal punishments by parents have had no effect. The last parent spoken to said: "I do not want to commit murder; I have done everything else—have even by chain and padlock confined him to his room, yet he is no better." An appeal to the love for his mother saved that boy. Such an appeal will generally reach the most stubborn cases. Even where it fails, it comes nearest to breaking the chain of habits which have bound them. The writer does not remember a single case where this appeal did not have great influence. With such

thoughts and experiences as these, he approaches the subject of the mother's influence in the training of children. Would that he could say something which would help them to appreciate their power over their children, even long years after all other early influences have been forgotten.

Of necessity, the father must be away from home most of the time. When he returns, wearied by the end-late cares and work of the day, he is often not fitted to consider carefully and patiently the cases of management which the mother would gladly place in his hands. So far as possible, these matters will be attended to by the thoughtful mother. Only when absolutely necessary is she apt to call upon the father for assistance. For this, and for other reasons, the management of the younger children at least will be almost entirely in the hands of the mother.

The character of the child will very largely be determined by the time the child reaches the age of 10. None but the very strongest influence will affect him after that age. Before that time the character may generally be molded at will. For the first five or six years children are almost entirely under the influence of the mother. After that time her influence will be strongest. Next to her influence, that of the teacher, father and companions will be most powerful.

In the hope of encouraging some weary mothers, who are sometimes discouraged by the daily trials with wayward children, attention is called to a few of the many beautiful tributes to the memory and power of a mother's noble, self-sacrificing love. To the sentiments all loving hearts must assent. "Blessed is the memory of an old-fashioned mother. It floats to us now like the perfume of some woodland blossoms. The music of other voices may be lost, but the entrancing memory of hers will echo in our hearts forever. Other faces will be forgotten, but hers will shine on until the light of heaven's portals shall glorify our own."

Another one has well said: "Who can fathom the depth of a mother's love? No friendship so pure, so devoted. The wild storm of adversity and the bright sunshine of prosperity are all alike to her; however unworthy we may be of that affection, a mother never ceases to love her erring child. Often when alone, as we gaze up to the starry heaven, can we in imagination catch a glimpse of the angels around the 'great white throne,' and among the brightest and fairest of them all is our sweet mother, ever beckoning us onward and upward to her celestial home."

Is it not true as has been said: "Better than all the gaud of wealth, better than all the fastidious tastes and refinements of luxury, better than the highest esthetic culture or intellectual superiority, is the presence in the home of one of these queens of the hearth, whose realm is bounded by the affections and well being of her household? Such mothers and such homes will send out sons such as the world needs and men delight to honor, and daughters whose loveliest adornments are the virtues and graces which they possess."

Almost all great men have been noted for their devotion to their mothers. All have recognized her unlimited influence. Who can read the history of Washington or McKinley without being struck with the great appreciation and the loving tenderness they manifested toward their mothers? How many will join with Lincoln in saying, "All I am, or can be, I owe to my angel mother!" How sweetly Lord Macaulay speaks of his parents; of the pleasure he had nesting close to his mother's bosom; of her good-night kisses and loving glances. "Until the day of her death his love never lessened. He said, 'Years have passed away since we laid her beside my father in the old church yard; yet still her voice whispers from the grave and her eye watches over me as I visit the spots long since hallowed to the memory of my mother.'"

The wondrous power of a mother's love was well shown by her whose daughter had wandered from home and had been lost in the whirl of sin of New York. Having had her own portrait printed, the mother placed it in a mission house where the fallen creatures sometimes came for a crust of bread or a kind word. The poor fallen daughter saw the picture. Upon the floor she sank, crying "Mother! my mother!" That mother's love so melted her poor heart that she was saved, and returned to her home a ransomed child.

In words that can never be forgotten, Miss Taylor speaks thus of a mother's love:

How thou rounded the depths of yonder sea, And counted the sands that under it be? Hast thou measured the height of heaven above? Then mayst thou measure a mother's love. Evening and morn, hast thou touched the bee Go forth on her errands of industry? The bee, for herself, hath gathered and toiled, But the mother's cares are all for her child.

There is not a grand, inspiring thought, There is not a truth by wisdom taught, There is not a feeling, pure and high, That may not be read in mother's eye. There are teachings on earth, and sky and air, The heavens the glory of God declare, But more loud than the voice beneath, above, He is heard to speak through a mother's love.

Parents are apt to forget how great is the price they place upon their precious children. In the press of many cares it is natural they should do so. However, if they would but stop and consider how hard it would be to part with any one of even a large family of children, they would be more likely to appreciate how highly they prize each child, and more willing to devote time and thought to their training. Who has not read with emotion Mrs. Beers' account of the attempt made by needy parents who were striving to decide which child should be given in exchange for comforts for all those remaining. This is the letter: "I will give a house and land while you shall live, if, in return from out of your seven, one child to me for aye is given." Hand in hand the gray-haired, poorly clad parents walk from bed to bed for the purpose of deciding which one shall be given. How hastily they pass the helpless babe, "Not her," said the father, as he gazed at the crib which held little Lillie and her doll. "Nor Jamie, he's but a baby, too," the mother said. Then gazing upon pale, patient Robbie's angel face, the father

whispered, "No, not for a thousand crowns, not him." Next came "Poor Dick," bad Dick, wayward son. "No, only a mother's heart can be patient enough for such as he." They passed by sweet Mary and the trusty, truthful, oldest boy who so resembled his father and

So they wrote, in courteous way, They would not give one child away, And afterward toll lighter seemed their load, Happy in truth, that not one face Was missed from its accustomed place.

Truly, most parents do love their children, as did these parents. Yet how few love them so wisely as to be willing to give the attention necessary to train them properly.

Every mother must read with increased determination to strive to properly train her children such lines as those written by Miss Allen. They but echo the sentiments which millions of children hold and will hold in years that are to come, long after the mother's spirit has been wadded to the other shore:

Backward, turn backward, O Time, in your flight, Make me a child again, just for to-night; Mother, come back from the schoolhouse shore, Take me again to your heart as of yore; Faithful, unselfish, and patient like you; Many a summer the grass has grown green, Blossomed and faded, your face between; Yet with strong yearning and passionate pain, Long I to-night for your presence again. Come from the silence so long and so deep— Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep! Over my heart in the days that are flown, No love like mother-love ever has shown, No other worship abides and endures, Faithful, unselfish, and patient like you; None like a mother can charm away pain From the sick-souled and world-weary brain. Slumber's soft calms o'er my heavy lids creep— Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep. Mother, dear mother, the years have been long Since I last listened to your lullaby song; Sing, then, and unto my soul it shall seem Wondrous, unselfish, and patient like you; Clasp to your heart in a loving embrace, With your light lashes just sweeping my face, Never hereafter to wake or to weep— Rock me to sleep, mother—rock me to sleep. Noble mothers, grow not weary and faint. Upon you depends not only the happiness of the home, but even the future of our country. Upon you will forever rest not only the blessings of your children, but the highest benediction of Almighty God, whose representatives you are on earth.