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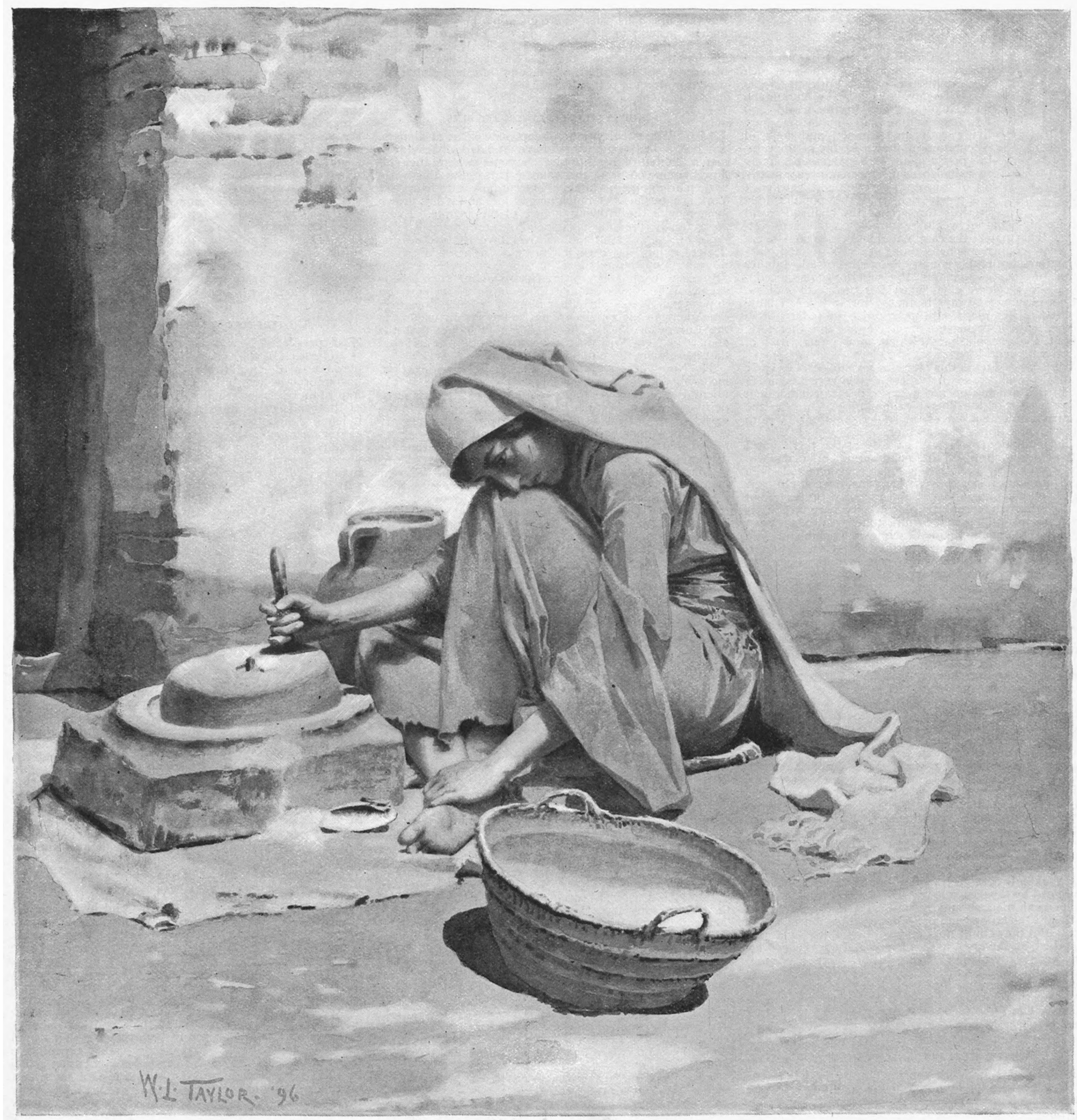

THE MOTHER'S SONG

By Virginia Woodward Cloud

DRAWING BY W. L. TAYLOR

"Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."

"All day, and all day, as I sit at my measureless turning,
They come and they go—
The little ones down on the rocks—and the sunlight is burning
On vineyards below;
All day, and all day, as I sit at my stone and am ceaselessly grinding,
The almond boughs blow.

"When she was here—O, my first-born!—here, grinding and singing,
My hand against hers,
What did I reck of the wind where the aloe is swinging,
And the cypress vine stirs?
What of a bird to its little ones hastening, flying and crying,
Through the dark of the firs?

"When she was by me, my beautiful, here by me grinding,
I saw not the glow
Of the grape; for the bloom of her face that the sunlight was finding,
And the pomegranate blow
Of her mouth, and the joy of her eyes, and her voice, like a dove to me singing,
Made a garden agrow!

"Was it I? Was it I, for whom Death came seeking and calling
When he found her so fair?
At the wheel, at the wheel, from dawn till the dew shall be falling
I will wait for him there.
Death! (I shall cry) I am old, but yon shadow of plums that are purpling
Was the hue of her hair!

"Death! (I shall cry) in the sound of the mill ever turning
Till dark brings release,
Till the sun on the vineyards below me to crimson is burning
There is measure of peace,
For all day, and all day—with the wheel—are her eyes to me turning!
But, Death! (I shall call) take me hence ere the daylight its shadow is spurning!
Hence, ere the night-time can wrap me around with my tears and my yearning—
When the grinding shall cease!"

THE YOUNG MAN AT PLAY

By Rev. Charles H. Parkhurst, D. D.

IT MAY be objected that my talks to young men have thus far been overtinged with seriousness. So much of the character and fruit of a man's after life depends on the way he starts that it is difficult to handle the subject thoroughly without giving to it a decided inflection of earnestness. The jocular treatment of a great matter is always an offense against both religion and taste.

We should be interested to know how much of what we each of us do we do because we have to, and how much we do because we like to. The first of these is work; the second, play. It is rather necessary to suppose that the finest order of activity is always that in which we act with the will instead of against it, and that life will never become quite perfect till all our exertions are put forth in gladness and unconstraint. Looking upon play in this way helps to rescue it from suspicion of indignity and foolishness. Play is far more in the order of Nature than work is. It is in that key that the music of a child's life is regularly composed, and a child whose early years are not largely play-spell not only misses one of the sweetest possible experiences of life, but is thereby put under a blight which will by-and-by betray itself in the dried juices and faded colors of manhood; and this easy, generous and uncalculating swing of feeling and action, so essential to the child, never ceases to be indispensable as the years of our life go on multiplying. It is rarely the case that a man can retain a free spirit when all his actions are dominated by compulsion. Some of my readers, at any rate, will be interested in recalling the fact that the Bible has nothing to say about work till after sin had entered into the world. Primeval Paradise is scripturally represented as a kind of beatific play-room, in which our first parents were doubtless more or less busy and put forth a measure of effort, but not effort that was a cutting across the grain or that had in it the spur of requirement or the lash of necessity. They may have accomplished as much in the way of horticulture before they were cast out among the thorns and the thistles as they did after, but it ceased to be Paradise when spontaneity was exchanged for compulsion. In Paradise they played; out of Paradise they drudged and perspired. Perspiration is the point at which doing a thing because one likes to becomes doing a thing because one has to.

WHEN PLAY IS REALLY PLAY

EVERYTHING is in the nature of play and amusement that we do with a glad unconsciousness of effort, and it is a wise and safe end to pursue to let just as much of our life be so expended as we can consistently with the moral proprieties that need to be observed and the personal duties that require to be discharged. If we were morally and physically perfect, and the world we live in were similarly perfect, then it would be pleasanter and easier to do right than to do wrong, and no duty would be distasteful or burdensome. In that case the play impulse could always be in force, and life would be a permanent season of "good time." For it is not the putting forth of energy that makes us tired. It is the putting of it forth in ways that are repugnant to our abilities and feelings, just as water might be conceived of as running down hill eternally, or the planets be thought of as describing their rounds to all generations without either the water or the planets suffering fatigue, and only the attempt of water to flow up hill or of the planets to make their way through an opposing medium beginning to suggest the possibility of weariness. A little boy was once set by his father to throw a big pile of stones into the river. He worked a little while and desisted in sheer exhaustion. The exhaustion was genuine. It was not simply that he did not want to throw any more stones, but that he was so tired he could not. His father at this point hit upon the device of proposing to him to see how many times out of a hundred he could hit a rock that was situated in mid-river. The exertion as thus represented to the boy was thoroughly congenial. It now ceased to be work and began to be play, a state of affairs of an entirely different nature. The stones were soon all of them in the river, with the result that the little fellow was not only not wearied by the fun of throwing in the last half but was altogether recuperated and refreshed from the work he had done in throwing in the first half.

EDITOR'S NOTE—The ninth of a series of articles by Dr. Parkhurst addressed to young men, which began in the JOURNAL of February, 1896.

A PART OF A YOUNG MAN'S LIFE

ACTION we do not object to, but we none of us like to work, which is to say that the only work that is congenial to us is the work that we can perform without being conscious of the effort we put forth in doing it—and that is only another way of saying that the only thing after all that we like to do is to play. There is no fault to be found with this. It has not been proposed for the sake of being disproved. One of the prettiest utterances which Scripture anywhere makes concerning natural things is that the lilies of the field do not toil. The same impression is made upon us by the energies and processes that appear elsewhere in Nature. There is in it everywhere an element of apparent sportiveness. The machinery of Nature never creaks as its wheels go around. We should never bring ourselves to speak of the work of the lightning, but only of the lightning's play. Neither the waves of the sea, the rush of the wind, the stirring of the leaves upon the trees, the flying of the birds in the air, nor the revolution of the stars create in us the feeling that they must be growing tired and need a vacation.

If I have dwelt upon this aspect of the case to considerable length it is because I want to cultivate an appreciation of the dignity that attaches to play. It is man's normal condition. Work is unnatural. I am not denying that as things are, work, and a good deal of it, is a necessity, but that is because we and things are out of joint with ourselves and with each other. Children play when they are children, and they could play, and play all the time, after they had become men and women if everything were as it ought to be and as we expect it some time will be.

The matter of play and amusement is not, then, one to be considered as though it were something apart from the substance and real meaning of life, but as though it were part and parcel of a man's life.

AS WE ARE, SO DO WE PLAY

SUCH portions of time as we appropriate to ends of this kind are not necessarily to be thought of as relapses into a state of puerility nor as foretastes of a condition of senility. They are simply breaks in the monotony of a life ordinarily more or less irksome. They are seasons wherein the tired jade slips his harness and takes to the pasture—which is really his more natural abiding place. It is not to be inferred from this that because play is our normal conditon it is therefore an experience to be indulged in without discrimination. Because play is the absence of constraint a man in his play will be himself sincerely and unaffectedly. In play there is no affectation. If indulged in without consideration its character will denote perfectly the character of the player. He will sink or rise in it to his true level. One may do very good work and commit himself to reputable and magnificent purposes, and yet in the intervals of enterprise may fall to an exceedingly low key—be a grand worker but a degraded player. That is because work is subject to constraint, and play (so far forth) is not. The only way we can exactly determine our own character is by noticing what it is we do when we are doing exactly what we want to do—that is, what we do when we are at play. There is no criterion of a man's quality so accurate as his amusements, for in them there is the renunciation of disguises. Our real inwardness discloses itself not in what we do but in what we perfectly enjoy doing. This test is rather a severe one, and is, perhaps, calculated to make the average man flinch. The strength of a man's mind cannot be estimated by the books he devotes himself to when he is studiously at work, but by those he is absorbed in when he is reading for the pleasure of it.

What holds of intellectual vigor is equally applicable in matters of moral vigor. The moralist may assert elevated ideals of feeling and action, and under the stress of his vocation as a professional expounder of the doctrines of rectitude may publish on the platform or in the pulpit systems of behavior that will stand well up to the ethical standards of Epictetus, Aurelius and even of Moses. If, however, when his professional work is done he respites himself by an indulgence in literature that is equivocal, in conversation that is off color, or in theatrical entertainment that is tainted, it is the pleasure he takes in his diversion, and not the tone he announces in his occupation, that will have to determine for his acquaintances his moral latitude and longitude.

MY ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE DRAMA

ALL of this, also, is as true of the amateur as of the professional. Mention has just been made of the theatre. Its quality is something of which I cannot speak from personal knowledge. My acquaintance with the drama in its present condition is derived from statements of theatre-goers, from newspaper criticisms and from the bill-boards. I have also recently had the opportunity to discuss the whole matter thoroughly with one of our most distinguished English actors, who has frequently made professional visits to America. These four authorities, each in its own way, tell substantially the same story, and leave upon my mind the distinct impression that if the American theatre were suddenly to omit all its vicious accompaniments, and to come out frankly upon the ground of unequivocal purity, the theatre-going world would withdraw in impatient disgust and the whole business go into the hands of a receiver inside of a month. I want to repeat that my estimate is not based on any immediate personal knowledge of my own, but on what theatrical people have told me. To this I would like to add that I have no natural prepossession as against the theatre. The theatre I believe in profoundly. As a means of intellectual stimulus and of moral uplift there is nothing, with the possible exception of the pulpit, that could stand alongside of it as an enginery of personal effect, provided only it would maintain itself in its proper character as the dramatized incarnation of strength. Personally, I would like at least once a week to get out from under the incubus of ordinary obligation and to yield myself up intellectually and emotionally to the domination of dramatic power. I could live with a fresher life and could write and speak with a more recuperated vigor, I am sure.

HOW TO DISCRIMINATE IN OUR DIVERSIONS

BUT from all this parenthesis we have to come back again to the characterization just quoted from the theatre's own friends. It does not meet the point to say that a considerable percentage of theatre-attendants are habitual church-goers. A great many people go to church because they have not the religious courage to stay at home. Per contra, out of the thousands that are in attendance upon the theatre in our city on a given night probably not one is there who is not there because he enjoys being there. According to the testimony above cited the existing theatre is morally tainted, but people enjoy it, taint and all, and the thing they enjoy has to be taken as the measure of their own quality. This is not a plea against the theatre, and still less is it a plea against amusements. I only want that it should be understood with what sensitiveness a man's amusements mirror his own moral features, and what a complete "give-away" we practice, therefore, whenever in the time which we devote to doing just what we enjoy doing we are found doing that which is flatted from the key of simplicity and purity.

This is not the place either to prescribe or to proscribe specific amusements. It is enough to say that no man can afford to allow himself a diversion which the best that is in him can take exception to. It is not enough to say of such an amusement that there is nothing in it particularly evil. Deterioration grows by that which it feeds upon, and it takes very little coarse nutriment to keep it in good flesh. If we allow ourselves the enjoyment of what is but a little bad it will be only a short time before we shall need something that is a shade worse in order to produce the same amount of enjoyment. Refined and elegant depravity differs in this respect in no degree from the coarser sort except that its drapery disguises its animus, and so can bring us near to the evil one without letting us suspect what road we are on.

All of this, however, nowise militates against the principle stated at the outset that it is play rather than toil that is most germane to our true nature and that lies closest to the Divine intention. The care needing to be exercised as to the quality of our amusements must never be construed into a verdict against amusements in themselves considered. With most of us the play impulse stands far more in need of encouragement than it does of restriction. The proverb, "It is better to wear out than to rust out," is true in form but false in spirit. The flowers do not wear out, but neither do they rust out. One reason why so many people are asking whether life is worth living is that we are teaching ourselves that man's chief end is to struggle and to crucify spontaneity on a cross of drudgery. We are not arguing for indolence. Indolence is as distinct from play as a pool is from a mountain brook. But we shall be greatly disappointed in Heaven if it does not give a great deal of opportunity for energy to issue in activity that takes no thought and is a joy to itself; and an experience that will be saintly in Heaven can hardly with reason be criticised as limp and puerile if indulged in before we enter Heaven.

C. H. Parkhurst