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Stephen Pearl Andrews

The Baby World

Tract No. 1 of the Grand Order of the Social Relations. Published
by the League.

1855

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Did you ever have clutched, by the icy hand of Death, a sweet darling baby which had opened its eye's upon earthly existence only long enough to twine the chords of affection around the inmost fibres of your heart? And did you not feel, while writhing under the agony of the blow, that there was something direfully mysterious, nay, almost something horribly cruel and vindictive in that Providence or Fate by which the tenderest ties are rudely snapped asunder in the hour of brightest promise, and desolation planted at the dreary hearthstone in the place of joy?

But, did it ever occur to you to think that, perchance, this apparent cruelty of the great director of all events might be purely a fault of ignorance on your part and the part of others, such as Nature or Nature's God punishes with an evil result for the sake of constraining men to study and to understand her laws and be wise? May *that* not be true? Is it not possible that mankind is making and has always made some grand mistake in the delicate business of rearing children? Nothing is so complicated and so easily disordered as the human system, and yet nothing is so perfect. Like the nicely

adjusted machinery of a superior time-piece, nothing is so certain to go right if rightly guarded and understood, and nothing so certain to go wrong and be ruined if badly treated, from ignorance or design. The organization of the infant is far more delicate than that of the adult, but even more perfect; and, we might suppose, less liable to disease and death, if the right *conditions* were understood and observed.

But what are the facts? horrible, absolutely horrible to recite! If the civilized world were not, in part, hardened in its sensibilities by the constant presence of the fact, and, in part, profoundly ignorant of its enormity notwithstanding its constant presence, men, and still more women, and mothers most of all, would swoon with terror at the bare statement that five-eighths of all the infants born are still infants when they die. Such is the fatal tale of medical statistics. More than one half the whole human family nipped in the bud and sent to the grave during the first few months of existence. No other animal, but man, of a high grade of organization suffers any such loss of progeny—man, the most perfect of all the animal world, hut the most delicate, and requiring the most perfect conditions and arrangements for his safe and comfortable existence.

Grand discoveries and improvements have been made, of late years, in almost every department of human affairs. In so simple a thing as traveling, or moving our bodies over the surface of the earth, the people of this age perceive that the people of all other ages have been stupid and ignorant. May it not be that we are still stupid and ignorant in some things not lying quite so much on the surface. Is it impossible, for example, that the far more intricate subject of infant physiology should yet have to be subjected to some grand discovery and revolutionary improvement?

How stands the case now? No science has been studied out on the subject. No grand discovery has ever been made. No grand improvement has been realized hitherto, in this department of human affairs. No thought has been given to it. There is as yet no Baby World. There never has been any in the world. Every mother is

servants, taken from among the lowest of the people, and what the poor do not surrender only because they cannot. When the Baby World exists that cure will be taken by wise, loving and experienced guardians of the young creatures, whose natures and wants they will make the constant study of their lives.

The babies will then inhabit their own world. There will then be a Baby World. The babies will then live and not die.

The big houses are going to be built. The Baby World is going to exist. The grand Domestic Revolution is going to take place. The tiny coffins will no longer be made and hid away in the dark tombs. The little gravestones will no longer be planted in the graveyards; and the voice heard in Rama, Rachel weeping for her children because they were not, will forever cease to be heard.

left to her own ignorant and unaided management of the tenderest plant ever planted in a rude soil, and exposed to the harsh winds of an uncongenial sky. The tiny coffins in the tombs and the little gravestones in the graveyards tell the sad story of the results.

Something must be done for the new born millions. There must be a Baby World. Reform must begin where reform is most needed. The right to life is before all other rights and should not be forfeited in the cradle. The right to love and to be loved by the dearest objects of our love is equally as precious as the right to life, and the hearts of all the people of all the nations of the earth should not be constantly crushed by the realities of untimely bereavement, or kept bursting with the agonies of fearful apprehension.

The wrong is, that there is no Baby World. Every creature, to live and be happy, must have its own world—a world fitted up and prepared according to the wants of its nature. He who rears any animal must be a student of its nature and its wants. Even the most hardy will pine and die, if removed from the sphere and contact of its kind, and deprived of the necessary conditions of its organization and habits of life.

The Baby World would be a world fitted up for and inhabited by babies. A single baby in the midst of the grownup members of a household is stifled, overshadowed and killed. Or, if it lives, it struggles, at best, for life, as a delicate shrub would do in the shade of a forest of tall trees.

It has been said by physiologists that if a few drops of blood are taken from the arm of a grown person and injected into the veins of an infant, the infant will die. But the blood is not the only fluid that circulates through the veins of society. All the persons who associate together intimately, affect, each other through vital currents which are none the less potent because they are unseen. For thousands of years it has been well known that if a young person sleeps habitually with an old person, the elder draws life and strength from the younger, and that the younger declines and tends to death or disease. The same effect results, in a less degree, from

the less intimate contact of persons of unequal age and power. The less positive and potent are drained of their file, preyed upon and destroyed by the spheres of their older and stronger companions. This law of contact is simple and certain in its operations, and immensely important. Ignorance and neglect of it must have slain millions of the human family in infancy, and have stunted and dwarfed the development of all. The baby needs to breathe the atmosphere of a Baby World. It is a horrible thought that parents must be, in the isolated household, in some sense, the vampires that suck the life of their own children. The little creature that cries, and cries, and finally sickens and fades gradually out, or dies suddenly in convulsions, would revive like a plant under the influence of kindly showers if placed in the proper surroundings of a Baby World. Instead of dragging with a constant weight upon the mother or nurse, until by destroying health in the fountain of life it multiplies the causes of its own death, it would require but a tenth part of the attention it receives if babies were its companions, if all the apparatus of amusements which science and art could devise were constantly at hand and if from its birth it were attended by scientific and professional nurses, matrons and physiologists, who regulated ventilation, temperature, the hours, quantity and quality of food, clothing, bathing, and the like.

But the mothers—what of them? Is it not the institution of nature that the mother should suckle and caress her own child? Doubtless it is. It should and would be the cherished privilege of every mother to enter the Baby World at all times when prompted by love or by the call of Nature to administer food to the object of her love, *but always under the direction and advice of those who make a special study of the laws of infant life*—a direction submitted to, not by constraint, but from love, and because through it the precious treasure of her heart is to be preserved to her in health and made to enjoy, for itself, and to bless her with its own continued happiness and bloom. Relief from a crushing sense of helpless responsibility during long hours of solitary watching by

the bed of the sick infant, would constitute a part of the blessing to parents, furnished by an organized system of nursing and medical attendance.

But how can fifty or one hundred mothers be present at the Baby World? They live asunder, in separate houses. The distance, and a thousand inconveniences, are in the way. True, but shall the babies be left to die for all that? Must the people necessarily live in small and separate tenements, as they now do? May it not be that this is itself the very error to be remedied for this and for all other reasons? Is it not possible that the paltry and diminutive houses which the people now style their homes, may in a few years be looked back upon with as much contempt as that we now feel for the huts of the Indians or Hottentots? Possibly such shabby accommodations were never intended by Nature for the homes of the race, and that she scourges us, by the loss of our loved ones, into the knowledge of her designs.

There is wealth enough now to house the whole people in palaces, if they rightly knew the use of it. Why may we not build ordinary dwelling houses to hold one or two thousand people, as well as to build great ships, steamboats and hotels? These are all the creations of the present age, and were never known before lit the world. Things are rapidly tending, in the large cities, to a similar revolution in the mode of domestic life. Huge changes are about to take place in the world. Economies so immense would result from living on the large scale, that the whole world would be made almost rich by that single change.

The Baby World would be the nursery of the big house. It is not all mothers who are specially qualified for or attracted by the care of children. Such as are so are the natural nurses of the infant world. All others should be free for other pursuits. Such continuous care is not necessarily connected with the duty and pleasure of suckling the child which nearly all mothers would always fulfill and carefully reserve to themselves. What would be surrendered is simply what the rich now surrender often to ignorant, filthy and unfaithful