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Fatlings of the Flock

The decision of the Directors of the Mechanics' Institute to suffer a Baby Show to be held in the Pavilion is one which every intelligent male adult should "study to resist." The modern Baby Show is a fruitful source of mischief—a degenerate successor of that ancient display whose beneficent purpose was to ascertain what ailing or deformed or measly puny infants might most advantageously be flung off a cliff. The object of the modern Baby Show is not improvement of the race by assisting Nature in "weeding out," nor is such the practical result. Prizes, we are told, are commonly bestowed by a committee of matrons, and necessarily fall to the fattest babe. In the matron's ideal "scale of being" the pudgiest, the most orbicular babe holds the summit place, the first adiposition, so to speak.

This is not as it should be; no true improvement in the race can be effected by encouraging our young to bury their noses in their cheeks and their knuckles under a mass of tissues overlying them like a boxing-glove. The prize winners do not become better men and women than their unsuccessful but more deserving competitors; while the latter, beginning life in the shadow of a great disappointment, retain to the end of their days a sharp sense of injustice incompatible with warm and elevated sentiments. The effect upon the characters of the beaten mothers is even more deplorable. Every mother of a defeated babe is convinced, and in her own judgment rightly convinced, that her exhibit is incomparably superior, physically, intellectually and morally, to the roly-poly impostors, honored by the committee of matrons. Her wrath at the unjust decision is deep, constant and lasting; it embitters her life, sours her temper and—a worse calamity—spoils her beauty. As to the fathers, the only discernible effect upon them of either winning or losing is to make them unworthies a trifle more ashamed of their offspring than they were before. "The proud and happy father" had never the advantage of existence outside the female consciousness, but if he really existed the Baby Show would be fatal to both his pride and his happiness.

In enumerating the manifold mischiefs that fly from that Pandora's box, the Baby Show, we are perhaps not justified in mentioning the desolating effect upon the committee of matrons whose action springs the lid. It is doubtful if the disasters which themselves incur can rightly be rated as evils in the larger sense of the word; and, anyhow, the nature of them is imperfectly known; for after making their award they commonly vanish from the busy haunts of women. The places which knew them know them no more forever, and their fate is involved in obscurities previously only to conjecture. In view of this regrettable but apparently inevitable fact, it is desirable (if the Baby Show cannot be averted) that the lady judges be selected early, in order that our citizens may bestow upon them before they are taken from us some suitable testimonial of public esteem and gratitude attesting the popular sense of their heroism in accepting the fatal distinction.