

At a Baby Show.

BY FRAMLEY STEELCROFT.



BABy shows are not fashionable functions, solely because babies themselves are not fashionable. Her ladyship may take an inconceivably ugly dog for a drive in the park, but her own baby!—why, the thing is too frightful to contemplate. And as to shows! Well, if it were a cat show, now, or even a bird show; but babies—and society shudders.

Nevertheless, if somebody would only get up a big baby show—say, at the Royal Aquarium or the Crystal Palace—where the dogs might give place just for once—success would be absolutely certain. *Crede experto.* I speak not as an inexperienced scribe, but as one having authority—the authority of an eye-witness.

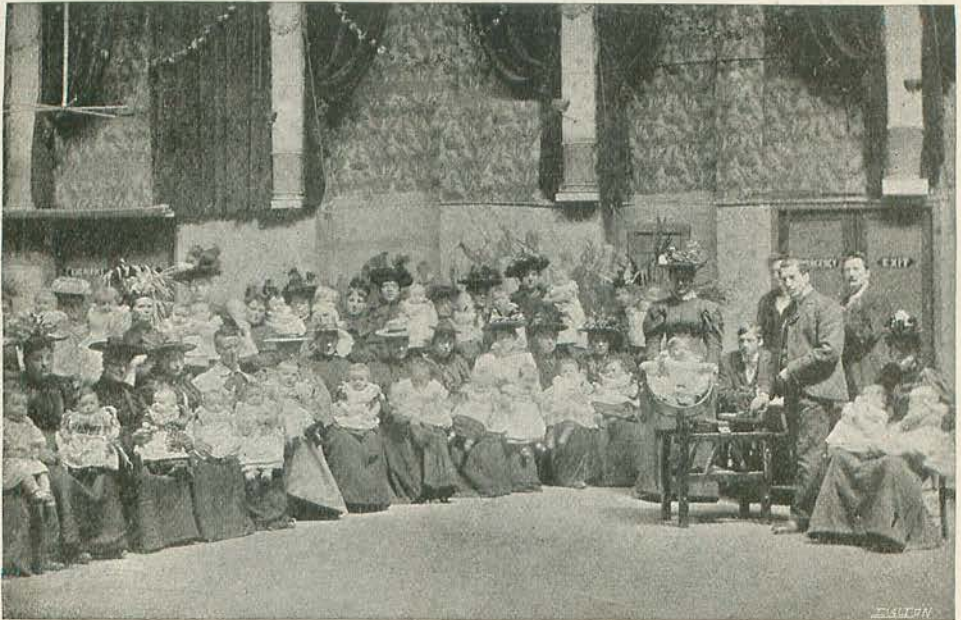
These reflections are suggested by the baby show I attended in the East-end of London, and which I will endeavour to describe, leaving the task of illustration to the photographer. Poor fellow! One wonders how he escaped with a whole camera.

Babies *are* fashionable in the East-end, where their number is usually in inverse ratio to their parents' income. Naturally, therefore, baby shows suggest themselves to Whitechapel folk as readily as bird shows or donkey shows. It is entirely a question of prizes. The offer of a mere bonnet or

pelisse awakens but a languid interest in the mother's breast, whereas the handsome mail-cart offered by THE STRAND MAGAZINE stirred the East-end to its utmost depths—which is saying a good deal.

I can't dwell on the preliminary arrangements; nobody could dwell on them, or even near them. I must introduce you at once to a display of infant beauty (No. 1) so striking that, if it will not exactly cause anxious mothers to send their youngsters to be "boarded out" in Whitechapel, it will, at least, create amazement that such splendid children should be reared in the teeming streets of Whitechapel and Bethnal Green.

Surely never before were there such numbers of babies and mothers brought together under one roof! As you see them in photo. No. 1, order has been evolved out of utter chaos; and the actual ceremony of weighing is about to commence. And a difficult, delicate, provoking, anxious business that ceremony was, I can assure you. No one but Mr. J. Woolf, of "Wonderland," Whitechapel, could ever have done it. Mr. Woolf's unrivalled knowledge of East-end society enabled him to mollify angry mothers and shrieking babes, and at the same time to facilitate the work of his able lieutenant, Mr. J. H. Wood, who acted as "recording angel" on this interest-



I.—SOME OF THE COMPETITORS.

ing occasion. The show was decided upon at a sort of Cabinet Council. The conditions were drawn up and the posters drafted out. One of these—a lurid thing—lies before me. It calls the function “The Queen’s Record Reign High-Class Baby Show.” Which announcement recalls Sam Weller’s marvellous magnifying glass. The news spread from Aldgate even unto Beckton. Mothers met, bonnetless, at the street corners and spoke wonderingly of the prizes, which were to be on a scale of unprecedented magnificence. For the heaviest baby under three months there was a beautiful silk bib, a hood, and a pair of new shoes—all given by a philanthropic Hebrew from Stoney Lane.

over twelve months old were not eligible at all.

Then came the weighing. Many of the one-year-olds could sit up pretty straight, and for those a pair of ordinary butcher’s scales was used. Photo. No. 2 helps one to realize the scene. A dear little boy is being weighed, and he really appears to be conscious of his responsibilities, foremost among which is to win a prize. That seems to be the definite aim of every mother. “Win a prize; honestly, if you can, but win a prize.” The mother of the baby-boy aforesaid—the second front-bench lady from the left—looks terribly anxious. Indeed, the whole ordeal was found so trying for the mothers



2.—THE WEIGHING COMMENCES.

No wonder, then, that babies, metaphorically speaking, poured down upon Mr. Woolf like leaves in Vallambrosa. When inquiring applicants came, Mr. Woolf spoke of the production of birth certificates as an absolute *sine qua non*. The mothers grew huffy. Did he think they would *hire* heavy babies, or otherwise fail to “act straight”? Bluntly, he did, and he said so. Moreover, anyone who didn’t abide by the conditions would have to “drop out.” Well, the great night came at last, and hundreds of children found themselves literally in “Wonderland.” Mr. Wood went round systematically collecting the certificates and arranging the babies into classes according to age. Infants

that at the close of the weighing they clamoured for refreshments—chiefly liquid. The lady we referred to above has apparently brought her mother—a portly person of determined appearance—who has come to see fair play.

But how shall I describe the scene before the classification commenced? The immense hall is packed to suffocation. More than half the audience consists of mothers and babies; but there is also a miscellaneous crowd, whose hilarity knows no bounds.

In batches the mothers advance upon the recorder, Mr. Wood. That gentleman carries a specially printed register. On learning the name, address, and age of each

competitor, Mr. Wood enters these particulars strictly according to class. There were four class prizes; offered respectively for the heaviest baby under three months, under six months, under nine months, and under twelve months. Above all, there was the champion prize—THE STRAND MAGAZINE Mail Cart for the "Heaviest, Fattest, Prettiest, and Best-Dressed" out of all the babies present, class prize-winners included.

Consolation prizes, consisting of toys and gloves, were given to every competitor who failed. When the classified register was complete—and this was no light task—all was ready for the weighing, which was conducted on the big stage at "Wonderland." No. 3 shows a typical group of mothers and babies. The fine child seen in the middle

infants entered (no entrance fee was charged, by the way), there was not a single puny or sickly baby to be seen. Photo. No. 3 shows half-a-dozen as fine, healthy children as could be found even at the most salubrious health-resort in the world. And so keen was the interest excited by this most interesting function, that many of the mothers took long journeys to procure copies of lost birth certificates, and for these, of course, they were called upon to pay certain fees which they could ill afford.

Naturally, every mother thought her own baby a certain prize-winner. Not all aspired to the "champion" prize, perhaps, but every maternal heart was bent upon bearing away some of the gorgeous robes offered as prizes in the various classes. This keen desire not



3.—HALF-A-DOZEN "LIKELY" BABIES.

of the front row is one of the class prize-winners. Whilst waiting to be called up to the weighing committee, the mothers manifested much anxiety, not to say jealousy. They carefully scrutinized other babies, and compared them with their own precious darling. Also they scowled so ferociously at babies that were better dressed, or obviously weightier than their own, that one trembled for the safety of the gentleman at the scales, who might be compelled to give adverse decisions. It is a fact, however, that out of the hundreds of

to be "left," naturally led to a little sharp practice. No sooner had one infant been handed to Mr. Woolf, than that astute gentleman removed about 3lb. of lead which had been placed in the child's clothes for the most obvious of reasons. The innocent herself crowed and chuckled as though she enjoyed the affair as much as anybody there. Needless to say, the mother was disqualified.

The accompanying photo. (No. 4) shows a representative group of a certain class—babies from seven to ten months old. The second child from the right, in the front row,



4.—REPRESENTATIVE GROUP—SEVEN TO TEN MONTHS.

carried off the prize, which consisted of a handsome pelisse and cape.

Here it may be interesting to give some of the weights. Names are immaterial. Well, then, the heaviest baby about three months old weighed 18lb. At four months, the heaviest weighed 23lb.; at five months, 25lb. 20z.; six months, 24lb. 9oz.; seven months, 29½lb. (champion of all; more of this baby later); eight months, 22lb. (a curious falling off); nine months, 26¼lb.;

ten months, 24lb. 10oz.; eleven months, 24¾lb.; and twelve months, 28¾lb. No doubt many thousands of mothers, on reading these figures, will be anxious to put their own babies in the scale, to see whether they come up to the "show" standard. The heaviest twelve-months-old baby (and therefore class prize-winner) is seen in our next photograph (No. 5). It is the infant in the middle of the front row, next to the fine twins.

A few words about the actual weighing may



5.—"UNDER TWELVE MONTHS."



6.—COAL-SCOOP SCALES FOR WEIGHING THE YOUNGER BABIES.

be interesting. When Mr. Wood had completed his difficult task of compiling his census, or class register, the classes were brought together so as to be within easy hail of the weighing committee. The last consisted of Mr. Woolf, who actually weighed the children; Mr. Wood, who proclaimed the fatal figures in a loud voice; a representative of the general audience, who was elected to see that the business of weighing was conducted without fear or favour; and a fourth person who registered the weights, with many flourishes, on a sheet of foolscap. The whole process is shown in the photo. (No. 1) reproduced on the first page of this article. Though naturally very anxious at the crucial moment of weighing, the mothers' presence of mind rarely failed them. One lady implored Mr. Woolf to "be careful of my Annie," and whilst the infant was in the scale, she leant lovingly on its shoulder, thereby adding a few pounds to its weight! Long experience, however, had rendered the head of the concern proof against such wiles. Mr. Woolf remembers one sad-eyed little woman at a former show, who took a modest back seat, bearing painfully in her thin arms a stupendous two-year-old child weighing 84lb. It was her own, she said, calmly. Yes, indeed; how could it be otherwise? Didn't she know her own?—and so on. It turned out, however, that the woman had merely borrowed the infant from a travelling show, whose proprietor she chanced to know.

No. 6 shows us the weighing apparatus at close quarters. For children about a year old, who could sit bolt upright, the ordinary scales used by a butcher or baker did very well; but in the case of still younger infants, it was thought necessary to have a scale capable of receiving the whole of the baby's body, and one, moreover, that would support the child's back. For these reasons a coal-scoop, such as we see in No. 6, was decided upon. It was nicely lined with felt (which was carefully allowed for in weight), and baby was placed or laid right into the scoop as in a cradle.

The baby seen in the scale in No. 6 is Elsie Florrie Callcut, the champion of all. This child carried all before her—class and championship prizes alike. In the photo., her mother is seen standing behind the scale; and in the foreground is the mail-cart presented by THE STRAND MAGAZINE. This splendid child is seen to still better advantage in the next illustration (No. 7). Though only seven months



7.—THE CHAMPION BABY.



8.—THE "UNDER SIX MONTHS" PRIZE-WINNER.

old, she weighed 29½lb. Her parents live at 53, Windsor Terrace, Beckton, E., her father being employed in the great gas-works there.

"As a rule," remarked Mr. Woolf, "there is a good deal of heart-burning over the award of the championship prize; but on this occasion the baby towered so pre-eminently over her rivals that an extraordinary unanimity prevailed as to the soundness of the judges' decision. Apart from freaks and monstrosities," the organizer went on, "I have never seen a more magnificent child. Really, I thought the mothers present would tear it to pieces—in their admiration, I hasten to say."

Everybody in fact wanted to nurse little Elsie, who was as good-tempered as she was weighty. The champion created roars of laughter whilst she was being weighed, grabbing up the 21b. weights and delightedly presenting them to the audience. Again, when her mother was about to take possession of the elegant pair of vases awarded to the prettiest baby, little Elsie clutched hold of them for all the world as though she would say: "They're mine. I've won them fairly."

This child, of course, bore off the prize in her own class ("under nine months"); besides securing the prize for the "prettiest" baby, and the prize as champion among all comers. In all cases where a decision was required it was arrived at in accordance with a show of hands among the general audience.

Here is reproduced (No. 8) the "under six months" prize-winner. His name is Jacob Strasburg, and his exact age five months. Jacob weighs 25lb. 2oz., and he was "raised" in Whitechapel, out of which unfashionable locality he has never yet been.

Many of the babies, mothers will be interested to learn, fell right off to sleep during the evening, as though they took no further interest in the proceedings, and had become bored. It was a pathetic sight to see these unconscious mites laid helplessly in the coal-scoop to be weighed, and, later on, hauled out by their waistband, limp and drooping. The ladies in the audience murmured, "What a shame!" The men inconsiderately cheered, which had the effect of waking the "dears," who thereupon protested in a way that was not so much pathetic as maddening.

Another prize-winner is depicted in No. 9.



9.—THE "UNDER NINE MONTHS" PRIZE-WINNER.



10.—THE "UNDER TWELVE MONTHS" PRIZE-WINNER.

This is Albert Charles Morton, aged about nine months, and weighing $26\frac{1}{4}$ lb. Albert was a merry little soul, and he was photographed crowing at nothing in particular, unless it be the three or four pounds' difference between him and the next heaviest baby in his class.

The twelve-months-old baby who bore off the prize in that class is shown with his mother in No. 10. His name is William Volgesky, and his weight $28\frac{3}{4}$ lb. Plainly, William ran little Elsie Callcut pretty closely for the championship prize; but then there is a great difference between the ages of the

two children, the girl being but seven months old, whilst the boy is twelve months.

The excitement and hubbub were truly terrific. As might be supposed, each mother had brought a few friends with her, and the sight of the handsome array of prizes set out on tables so worked upon the mothers' feelings, that I really believe they would have done anything to insure the success of their baby.

No matter how explicitly you set forth the rules and conditions of a baby show, there are sure to be loving, anxious mothers, who will bring wholly ineligible children. One matronly person turned up at "Wonderland" with a baby about three weeks old, whilst another was accompanied by a grown-up girl of seven or eight, who maintained a heated argument with her mother the greater part of the evening. When the thing was all over it was noticed that a strange hush had come over that great army of babies. The fact was they were all tired out. The last photo. to be reproduced here (No. 11) is an amusing and pathetic picture. The twins, Beatrice Victoria and Grace Helena Sturge (aged ten months), are utterly exhausted up after their exertions, which have been considerable. Beatrice weighs $23\frac{1}{4}$ lb. and Grace four ounces less. It was virtually impossible to tell one from the other. They were awarded a special prize, poor little souls, though it is doubtful whether this afforded them as much gratification as it afforded their proud, young mother.

At the close of the great event some little differences arose between the ladies; this was but natural, since the mothers of prize-winners indiscreetly flaunted their trophies before the disappointed ones, with the result that, after the distribution of "refreshments," arguments arose here and there. Acrimonious remarks grew into maledictions, and, finally, some of the quarrels were settled in a manner as summary as it was surprising.



11.—PRIZE WINNING TWINS—"TIRED OUT AFTER THE SHOW."