

The question I ask about all these, and the varieties which they but suggest, is, "What are the rights of children?" And the answer which I consider most just is, "The child has a right upon all mankind to receive good food, clothing, education and physical and moral care." Its parents, its relatives, the community or State, and even mankind in general are bound to respond; as among themselves the primary duty rests upon the parents, and then upon the others in turn, on the failure of those preceding them; and this order of duty is only as among themselves; and all are bound to supervise the result; for the right of the child is peremptory on all and independent of any rights appertaining to the other parties between themselves. The basis of this right is the moral rule: "To each according to his need;" the helplessness of the most helpless of beings, the infant, makes upon our conscience the most imperative demands. The duty to succour is not a mere optional pity, but an obligation. But what I wish particularly to emphasize is the feature that the right of the child is independent of its parents; it is inalienable from itself, and where the parents disregard it the State ought, if necessary, to set their claims of authority and interference aside, and directly do full justice itself.

Let us measure these rules by past and existing systems. Under the most ancient of human regimes—that of instinct—the inherited reason of the race—which was the same as its inherited conscience—for function, instinct, habit, conscience, reason, and evolution itself are all but shapes of one great reasoning process which proceeds within and without us, and half reveals to us the greatness and depth of our soul's life—as vast and profound as, and in fact identical with, the mighty ocean of thought and feeling which we name the universe—under that most ancient of human regimes, that of instinct, in the first crude dawn of institutions, the right of the child to good shelter and protective care was recognized by the warm hearts of primitive parents.

With the formation of the earliest patriarchal communities we find the child's rights still affectionately recognized, as for example, among the village communities of rural Hindostan, and among our North American Indians, amidst whom the children are the cherished treasures of the whole tribe, and so valued that their regard for children