

these signs of restlessness with inward alarm, conceived the happy idea that the baby needed a change of position. So he stood it upon its feet.

It is unnecessary to tell any mother of a family that by the execution of this apparently very simple movement, the unhappy man had every thread of that baby's clothes under its arms and around its neck in an instant. A general but suppressed giggle went around the room.

Mr. Thumbledirk blushed, redder and hotter than ever, and the astonished baby, after one horrified look at its strange guardian, whimpered uneasily.

Mr. Thumbledirk, not daring to risk the sound of his own voice, would have danced the baby up and down, but his little legs bent themselves into such appalling crescents the first time he let the cherub's weight upon them, that the wretched man knew in his heart of hearts that he had forever and eternally most hopelessly "bowed" them, and felt that he could never again look a bow-legged man in the face without a spasm of remorse. As for meeting the father of this beautiful boy, whose life he had blighted with a pair of crooked legs—never, he would face death itself first. And in coming years, whenever he met this boy waddling to school on a pair of legs like ice-tongs, he would gaze upon them as his own guilty work, and would tremble lest the wrath of the avenging gods should fall upon him.

Alarmed at the gloomy shadows which these distressing thoughts cast over Mr. Thumbledirk's face, the baby drew itself up into a knot and wailed. Mr. Thumbledirk balanced it carefully on his hands and dangled it, for all the world as he would "heft" a watermelon. Instantly the baby straightened itself out with such alarming celerity that the tortured dry nurse caught it by the heels just in time to save it from falling to the floor.

"He'll kill that child yet," said the gloomy woman who talked bass, and Mr. Thumbledirk felt the blood curdle in cold waves in his veins. By this time the baby was screaming like a calliope, and the noise added inexpressibly to Mr. Thumbledirk's confusion and distress. He would have trotted the baby on his knee, but the attempt occasioned too much comment. The fat woman with the market-basket said:

"Oh-h, the little dear!"

And the short, pretty woman snapped her eyes, and said:

"Oh-h-h, how cruel!"

And the woman in the black bombazine,

and the woman in the sun-bonnet said:

"Oh-h-h! just look at him!"

And the woman who talked bass said, in her most sepulchral and penetrating accents:

"The man's a fool."

And the baby itself, utterly ignoring the fact that Mr. Thumbledirk was labouring in its own interests, threw all the obstruction it could in the way of further proceedings by alternately straightening itself out into an abnormal condition of such appalling rigidity, that Mr. Thumbledirk was obliged to hold its head tightly in one hand and its heels in the other, and then suddenly doubling itself up into so small a knot that the poor man had to hold his two hands close together, like a bowl, and hold the baby as he would a pint of sand; and these transitions from the one extreme to the other were made with such startling rapidity and appalling suddenness, that Mr. Thumbledirk had to be constantly on the alert; and his arms ached so, and he exhibited such signs of fatigue and distress that the depot policeman looked in to say to him that if he was tired out, he would send in a scotion hand or the steam shovel to give him a spell.

It seemed to Mr. Thumbledirk that he never heard so much noise come from so small a baby in his life. The more he turned it around and tossed it about the more its cloak, and dress, and skirts and things became entangled around its neck, and now and then the mass of drapery would get over the baby's face and stifle its cries for a second, but the noise would come out stronger than ever when the tossing little hands would tear away the obstruction. And the louder the baby screamed the faster the vigorous, fat legs flew, kicking in every direction, like crazy fly-wheels with the rim off. Sometimes Mr. Thumbledirk made as high as a hundred and eighty grabs a minute at those legs and never touched one of them. He was hot and blind and wild with terror and confusion. Once he tried to sing to the baby, but when he quavered out a "Hootchy, pootchy, puddin' and pie," the women laughed, all but the gloomy woman who talked bass—she sniffed, and he stopped. He gave the baby his pearl-handled knife, and the innocent threw it into the stove. He gave it his gold watch, and it dashed it on the floor. He gave it his emerald scarf-pin, and the baby put it into its mouth.

The pretty woman screamed.

The sad woman in the bombazine shrieked.