

THE NEW PARENT'S ASSISTANT

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The New Parent's Assistant by Stephen Paget

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STEPHEN PAGET

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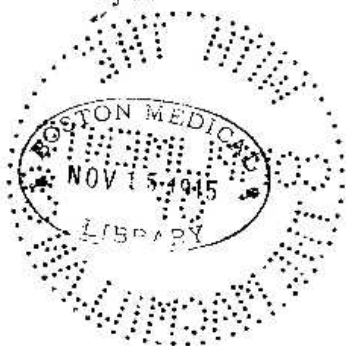
BY
STEPHEN PAGET



Periculosa plenum opus alea

NEW YORK
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
66 FIFTH AVENUE
1914

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C. J. ...



TO MY WIFE

PREFACE

MISS EMILY LAWLESS, in that delightful book, the 'Life of Maria Edgeworth,' told us how 'The Parent's Assistant' came to be written. It was the work of a girl not long out of the school-room, with a crowd of little brothers and sisters always round her; it was written to amuse herself and them:

'These tales were begun without any idea of publication, simply for the benefit of her particular charge "little Henry," and of such of the small brothers and sisters as came nearest to him in age. They were written out upon a school-room slate; were altered; were added to; were approved of, or summarily condemned, entirely according to the verdict of her short-petticoated judges. . . . That the stories themselves owe their really extraordinary vitality largely to this method of production we cannot doubt. They are stories for children, written, not from above, but from a level; from the point of view of those to whom they were addressed.'

From then to now, it is a hundred and thirty years:

consider, what forces in that time—the French Revolution, to begin with—have been impelling home-life toward liberty, equality, and fraternity. Where are the old conventions, the old sense of distances and of differences? If any of us parents were to try to restore the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere of Miss Edgeworth's home-life, it would be like dressing up for a charade: the children might be amused at us for an hour or two, and would then say that they wanted to play at something else. And if any of our children were to affect toward us that extravagance of filial piety which Miss Edgeworth rendered to her father and his four successive wives, we should be more than embarrassed—we should be resentful and suspicious.

Take one instance. The child of a friend of mine was told, in the course of a sermon, that *we have lost the key to Amelia Sedley*. She knows her 'Vanity Fair,' and she came home furious. *A good job too*, she said. Doubtless, she was right—they always are; but the fearful among us are saying that we have lost not one key but the whole bunch, with the ring which kept them together. But the question is whether we have lost the key, or the children have lost the lock. See, by this instance, the depth and the intricacy of the problems of home-life; surely, we need a new sort of Parent's Assistant, not written on a slate for children. It must begin with us parents, now and here, taking us as we are, and examining us: not concerning itself