

## CHILDREN OF THE PANTOMIME.

By ANNE BEALE.



As said in our last sketch that the Children's Rooms at the Theatrical Mission, 21, King-street, Covent Garden, were below the basement. We accordingly descend a flight of stairs, and find ourselves in "the parlour," where a score or so of children are disporting themselves. Some are swinging vigorously on a rope attached to a doorway between two of the rooms; some are playing dominoes and other games; two or three are striving to form some sort of building with toy-bricks; one is curled up on the window-seat, deep in "Sunshine," not of the sky, but a magazine; and one is absorbed in reading the Bible. Subsequently to the North London tea described in our last sketch an early Bible-class was arranged for the children of the Marylebone Theatre, and twenty copies of the sacred volume were presented to them. This was one of many results of the gathering where we became acquainted with "mother" and her troupe. As we are unexpected interlopers into the parlour, where are only children, no "scene" has been got up for our edification, but all is natural and unpremeditated.

The youngsters are shy at first, but a packet of sweets gradually emboldens them, and we are soon surrounded by all, save the readers, to whom, however, their friends convey a share of the sticky compound. What honest children they are! Not one attempts to receive more than her due. Others come in by twos and threes, until nearly forty are assembled, and introduced to us and the sugar-balls, which, fortunately, go round three times. They have a magic effect, not only in loosening tongues, but curing carache, over which one little mite is crying.

"Mite!" aye, some of them are tiny as was the "midshipmite," who died singing the sad little song that was wont to "bring down the house" in "Her Majesty's Ship Pinafore." Here is one in the arms of her sister, who looks but a baby, and yet is, the sister tells us, four years old, and going on in the next pantomime.

"And you—are you on the boards?" we inquire of the elder.

"I was at Her Majesty's, but I am leaving the stage," she replies. "I don't like it, and hope to learn a trade."

She looks so small and delicate that we think her young for her intended work; but she astonishes us by saying she is thirteen. She might be ten. We are afterwards informed that she is called at the mission "our text girl," because she is always ready with texts when they are asked for. She is a young disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"And you—and you. What are you?" we ask, glancing round.

"I am Ladybird, and I Housemaid, in 'Red Riding Hood.'" "We are soldiers and sailors in 'Valentine and Orson.'" "We are soldiers in 'The Egyptian War;' and we have uniforms and swords, and we fight. One of us hurt another's knee, because he didn't fight properly." "I am a gipsy, and I dance and sing."

The last speaker is a black-haired, black-eyed child, who might be, and possibly is, a

descendant of the Egyptian race. She looks sharp enough for anything, and at seven years old is going through rehearsals and performances enough, daily, to undermine both health and morals. All these young creatures, when "on," as they call it, are kept up till midnight in their various theatres; often shivering with cold, in their gauzy, shining costume; often hungry; always in a state of unnatural excitement. Yet, before the season of Christmas pantomime, the doors of the theatres are besieged by clamouring mothers, who will sell their children for hire, to become any sort of creature that the exigencies of the play demand—sylphs and fairies, gnomes and dwarfs, imps and demons; animals of every description, from the wolf in "Red Riding Hood" to the frog in the fable—birds in the air, fishes, reptiles; nothing is too high or too low to be represented by infant humanity, when so-called "amusement" has to be provided, and the appetite of a greedy public pandered to. And sometimes much cruelty and hardship are undergone during instruction in theatrical arts, particularly in acrobatic or equestrian performances.

Here is a "young lady" who has just returned from a circus tour. She is so smartly dressed that her young companions look admiringly at her. She is a horsewoman at twelve, and accustomed to perform wonderful feats. She is apparently well cared for, since she says, "My pa and uncle are in the troupe, and my ma always fetches me. We've been to Brighton, that's why I've got a colour, for I bathed in the sea. I come here sometimes when I'm in London." Only the few initiated know what "touring" means, and the labour and temptations of the precarious existence gained by the circus people, who roam from town to town, performing twice daily, parading the streets also twice, and probably disappearing in the morning before the population is astir. Let us be thankful that our Theatrical Mission seeks, by its agents in town and country, to carry the good news of the Gospel to these tired brothers and sisters, and to hold evangelistic services for their spiritual benefit. They will listen gladly; and even at the "World's Fair," at Islington, giants and dwarfs, and many another abnormal specimen of poor humanity, were gladdened by "a word in season" in their respective shows, and thanked our judicious director and his wife for visiting them. To all these "miracles of nature," as we are told by the showmen to consider them, a Bible, or a portion thereof, was presented; and we are rejoiced to think that in the intervals of representation fat women and black men, and all the monstrosities provided, and even fashioned, for the delectation of a stupid public, may learn to read the Word of God.

"I am making a patchwork quilt, and I shall have it for my own when it is finished," volunteers a small pantomimic specimen. "We learn to work at the sewing classes."

This little maiden is but poorly clad, and is one of the numerous class who too often exchange the tinsel and spangles of the stage for rags and destitution at home. A patchwork quilt will be a treasured gift to her and her family, and, possibly, supply the place of blankets, which are, alas! too often an unusual luxury in the homes whence some of these children spring. Who will send pieces of patchwork, clothes, toys, books, paint-boxes, games, anything, to our reading rooms for the help of these poor children? One little ragged pantomime boy was found the

other night asleep on the stairs, while numbers of children leave the theatres at midnight, having miles to walk, unprotected, before they reach their garret. Oh! how the children suffer!

One has just been sold for eight pounds by her father, a Jew, to be brought up for the stage by a professional trainer. She is to change name and religion, and to see her unnatural parent no more. She has been, as

little Jewess, a regular frequenter of the Mission, reading her Hebrew Bible and eating her passover cake. We will hope that, as she still comes, she will receive the truth "as it is in Jesus." She is only ten years old, is what they call "a clog dancer and banjo soloist," and has, truly, a hard and dangerous life before her. But she, as well as all these children, has a kind lady who writes to her every month, and lovingly directs her, sending her texts and books and otherwise interesting her. Our little actresses, as well as those of "larger growth," become very fond of their correspondents, and we are asked more than once, "Are you So-and-So? Is Miss Blank here? She is the lady that writes to me, and I do so want to see her. She promised to come if she could."

"I belong to the Scripture Union. I learn my text and read my portion every day," says one little maiden.

"And I come every Sunday evening to service, and go to Sunday-school besides," assures another.

All are energetic in their expressions of affection for "Mr. Todd," and no sooner does he appear than his name re-echoes, and he is surrounded by a happy, buzzing company, like a queen bee by her followers from the hive. And no wonder, for what has not "God wrought" through his instrumentality?

One Sunday evening a juvenile member of the Bible-class and services appeared, attended by a score or more of children more ragged than herself. They came from a distant, miserable court, where neither pure air nor pure religion penetrated.

"We are come to have church here, please, Mr. Todd," she said, confidently. "They know all the texts and the hymns, and we haven't room enough in the court."

It transpired that this little *danseuse* had been so much impressed with what she had learnt herself that she had gathered her companions about her and taught them to sing the hymns and repeat the texts, so that the court where they dwelt became, as she expressed it, their "church." Her vivid description of the teas and the rooms so impressed her improvised "class" that they all tramped together to the mission. It was difficult to make them understand that only theatrical children were eligible, though they were welcomed on that particular evening, and the young evangelist encouraged to persevere, which she has done.

So popular is the Bible-class, that at Christmas it was held twice weekly, at the special request of the children, and the whole of a juvenile company walked regularly six miles from an outlying theatre to take part in it. The dresser who took charge of them has since given up the stage and gone with her husband to Canada, where they hope to make a new start in life.

But the great object of the mission is to shield and aid theatrical employes, for whom hitherto little Christian sympathy has been shown. As to the children, an extract from

the last Report will describe better than we can the guests at the teas.

Other 'stars' were there that afternoon. 'The Bijou Transformation Dancer,' to whom we had written from time to time; Sybil, the 'Infant Serio-comic Vocalist,' barely six years old, who once interrupted a Bible-class to sing the hymn solo, 'Jesus loves me, that I know,' adding 'That's my favourite, because it's true;'; the 'Champion Zither Queen,' barely nine, yet accustomed to sing, play, and dance for twenty minutes in from three to five halls nightly; the 'Two Flirts,' known to us for years, and now 'come out' and talking of their 'agents' as if they were 'old stagers.' At a table by themselves were very small children, ranging from three to seven years old, 'members of the Ladybird ballet troupe,' and many others representing the *bona fide* theatrical-class, reached by our constant efforts from time to time."

This extract takes us to the dining room, whither our forty, not "thieves," but actresses, gladly repair for tea, cake, and bread-and-jam. The friends would have done good work had they merely taught the children to sing their grace so reverently, but they have also taught them how to behave themselves.

"You haven't put no sugar, please," says a tiny mite, reproachfully, as we pass down the steaming cups. We remark that the "text girl" takes especial care of her wee sister, and, indeed, family love is not extinct in this assembly, most of the members of which talk of, and labour for, fathers out of work, or sick mothers, or endless brothers and sisters. As usual, thanks to the Religious Tract Society, we are enabled to distribute picture cards, which are received with great delight.

It is now that the religious influence is brought to bear on the children as it was on their elders. They form a small congregation, and, with well-worn hymn-books in hand, raise their youthful voices in praise to Almighty God for His mercies. Mrs. Todd leads them, and so earnestly vigorous are they that she is obliged to say, "Sing softly." Then their kind friend and director addresses them, and calls for texts on various subjects, which are answered simultaneously by all who remember them. The new text for the evening is, "Be sure your sins will find you out," and it would be impossible for the dullest to forget it, after the reiteration of it, word by word, by each individual present. The stern fact and moral are engraven on the minds of the impressionable youngsters by anecdotes and stories, which they would also find it difficult to forget.

"This is, perhaps, the only religious instruction many of them will ever receive," whispers a friend at our side, who founded, some fourteen years ago, the theatrical teas at the Crystal Palace for the juvenile pantomimists, described in a book called "Pantomime Waifs."

But the seed is sown, and already bears fruit a hundredfold. Mr. Todd tells his juvenile congregation that his family is now so large that it is difficult to keep his children under his eyes, but we know that they carry with them to their theatres, north, south, east, and west, the thistle-down that contains the seed, in the shape of Bibles, texts, and religious instruction. From the grains dropped at the Crystal Palace, trees have sprung which bid fair to overshadow with cooling and healing influence the theatrical world, and each child before us may, with God's grace, "help to raise the tone," as the phrase goes, of a profession beset with no ordinary dangers, yet capable of extraordinary influence for good or evil.

Their faces are earnest, their manner reverent, and the instruction they receive seems, at least, to penetrate to their heart. It is very

touching to hear them sing harmoniously "Safe in the arms of Jesus," and to feel that those tender arms can enfold them all, and lead them to fountains of living waters. Very pathetic, too, is it to watch them shield their eyes with their hands when they are dismissed with a final prayer, and to reflect that they are about to quit the shelter of their own "parlour," for that strange world called "The Stage."

## HOW I KEEP HOUSE ON £250 A YEAR.

### HOW I ARRANGE THE DAILY ROUTINE WORK.



IN this paper I purpose going through the house work day by day, but before doing so I will take the work that has to be done every day. It is hardly possible that this should be the same in any two houses, yet I am sure that many young housekeepers will find it an assistance to see on paper the ordinary work to be done in a house. One is so apt to say, "Oh, the servants have only so-and-so to do," forgetting the numerous small things that take time. The result is, we often expect too much, then complain of work being negligently done.

Our servants are down by half-past six. As I object to disturbing the rest of the household by ringing for the servants, I never call them; if they say they cannot get up without, I tell them they must wake or go. The result is that they do wake. Perhaps being an early riser myself keeps them to it. I always come down at ten minutes to eight, and certainly should not be pleased if everything were not in order and prepared for me. At the same time, I make a point of not appearing before my usual hour. Every day before breakfast the cook lights the kitchen fire and cleans the hearth, cleans the boots, does the dining-room, and prepares the breakfast; the housemaid does the drawing-room, or sweeps the stairs, takes the hot water to the bedrooms at seven o'clock, lays the breakfasts in the dining-room and in the kitchen, and after prayers, puts our breakfast on table at exactly eight o'clock, and goes down to her own.

They finish breakfast in the kitchen before we do in the dining-room. Cook then does the door and steps, and the housemaid goes up to strip the beds and open the windows. In each room the bed clothes are stripped right off the bed and placed on two chairs, and the mattress is turned over the foot of the bedstead; every bed has to remain open an hour to get thoroughly aired and cool, except on Sunday mornings, when they are made as soon as the washstands are done, to enable the housemaid to get to church in good time. When the beds are stripped the housemaid attends to the baths and washstands. As soon as she has done them and filled the jugs and cans and put filtered water in the water bottles, she goes downstairs, washes out her basin cloths, hangs them up to dry, and fills up the filter. Meanwhile, the cook has washed up the breakfast things, tidied the kitchen, and been out to the larder with me, and is ready to go up with the housemaid to make the beds. The housemaid carries up with her whatever she will need in the way of brooms, dust pans, cover sheets, etc., for any room she is going to clean. The cook answers all bells during the morning, and lays the luncheon

and the kitchen dinner; the housemaid brings up lunch, we wait on ourselves, and she goes down to her dinner. If we are to partake of any dish that is intended for the kitchen, we take at once what we wish, and the dish goes down again immediately. The cook washes all up after lunch, except the silver and glass from the dining-room, which the housemaid does; afterwards she washes out her tea-cloth and puts it to dry, so as to have it nice for the dinner glasses. She always has two tea-cloths in use, and washes one out every day. In the afternoon, any dusting that there has not been time for in the morning has to be done by the housemaid, who then gets the kitchen tea. After tea a little needlework is done, either for me or for herself, until it is time to lay the cloth for dinner. A clean wash-leather is kept in the sideboard drawer, and I always expect each spoon and fork to have a rub with it before being placed on the table; if this is done regularly, silver wants very little cleaning, and always looks nice. The table has to be ready a quarter of an hour before dinner-time, and everything (such as cold sweets or cheese) that can be brought into the room before dinner is placed on the sideboard ready. By adopting this plan of having the table ready a little before time, I find my little maids rarely forget anything, and soon become quite good waitresses; it gives them confidence to know all is ready, whereas if they lay the table in a hurry they are flurried and nervous all dinner-time.

There is in each bedroom a second jug or small can. Half an hour before dinner, and again when she goes to bed, the housemaid takes up a large can of hot water, and from it pours some water into each of the jugs provided for the purpose. The cook washes up the dinner things after dinner, and the housemaid her glass and silver, takes the latter upstairs, and prepares her bedrooms for the night. They have supper in the kitchen at nine, and go to bed at ten.

If hot-water bottles are required, the servants take them up with them when they go to bed. To prevent the bottles singing, and the water oozing out, they should be screwed down as soon as filled, then after they are taken upstairs unscrewed again to let the steam escape, and screwed up again as tightly as possible.

In the afternoon, while she is cooking the dinner, the cook stews down any bones she may have, or makes soup for the next day, or if there is a cake or pastry to bake it is done while the late dinner is being cooked, as doing so saves the expense of much fire being kept up during the morning.

If there is suet in the house, that is chopped in the afternoon so as to be ready for use, and it keeps better when the veins are taken out and it is chopped and covered with a little flour. Any pieces of bread should, at the same time, be carefully dried white (not brown), pounded in a pestle and mortar, and put in a tin ready for frying fish or other things. The housemaid (as we call her) being really a very young girl, the other servant has to help upstairs some mornings in the week, so that anything that can be arranged the afternoon before for the midday meal.

Having gone through the general work, I will now take the special work of each day:—

Monday morning.—Housemaid sweeps stairs before breakfast. Immediately after, the beds are made, the clothes are looked out for the wash, I sort out and write down the things that are to go to the laundress, and put aside those that are to be washed at home, and also see what wants mending, for table-linen, sheets, etc., should always be repaired before being washed; shirts and starched things should be rough dried before they are mended. The mending done, I go down to the kitchen and give my orders and take a look round; occasionally the inside of the dust-bin