

## AN OLD LETTER.

By SARAH DOUDNEY.

I FOUND an old letter, long lost, to-day ;  
 The ink is faded, the words are few,  
 But they speak to my empty heart, and say,  
 "One love in your life was deep and true !"  
 And far away from this quiet room,  
 Away from this working-day world of ours,  
 My soul flies out through the twilight gloom  
 To a land of temples and palms and flowers.

Once more I am watching the minarets shine  
 In the last rich glow of a tropic sun ;  
 Once more I am clasping his hand in mine,  
 When the sultry hours of day are done ;

The air is full of the balmy scent  
 Of Orient blossom and shadowy tree,  
 And I muse and rest in a still content  
 On the heart that ever was fond to me.

It is but a dream that is far too fair !  
 The voice is silent, the rich light dies ;  
 I am here in the dim old London square,  
 He sleeps in peace beneath Indian skies ;  
 And I fold the letter, and meekly pray  
 For strength to suffer my life-long pain,  
 Till I come at last to the quiet way  
 That shall lead me home to my love again.

## GIRLS OF THE BALLET AND CHORUS.

By ANNE BEALE.



HERE'S mother !  
 There's mother !  
 May she come and sit  
 with us ?" said  
 several young  
 girls, seated  
 round a tea-  
 table at which  
 we were pre-  
 siding.

Permission  
 being given,  
 one of them  
 scrambled over  
 the form, dis-  
 appeared, and  
 returned with  
 "mother," for  
 whom we had  
 placed of honour.  
 But instead of  
 the middle-

aged or venerable dame we expected, a young woman appeared and took the offered seat. Seeing our look of surprise, the dozen girls began to laugh, but she explained—

"They call me mother because I am their ballet and wardrobe mistress. I have thirty-six under me. Now, be steady, young ladies," she added to her pupils, some of whom were slightly obstreperous.

But they all calmed down when they were called upon to sing the grace, and subsequently invited to partake of the excellent meal provided for them. This was the first entertainment of the kind any of them had attended, and not only our especial round dozen, but nearly a hundred other girls and children seemed pleased and amazed at the unwonted hospitality. They were all engaged in the theatres of North London, and the feast was provided to attract them to join the Theatrical Mission, and to give opportunity of speaking to them of a Saviour. During the meal mother and girls asked and answered many questions concerning it, and said they thought it very kind of people to interest themselves in them, and they would certainly not forget it. From the mother we learnt not only what hard and doubtful work it was to train and be trained for the stage, but something of her own history. Tears filled her eyes when she said she had lost her own mother a year ago, when she was engaged in the provinces.

"It would not have been so hard, if I could have been with her," she added ; "but when I came home, she was gone." Her face brightened at the gift of a large floral text card, and she said she should have it framed. So did her attendant "sylphs and fairies," when they received a smaller one. This was succeeded by a card of invitation to the weekly teas and meetings, held gratis, at the Theatrical Mission Rooms, 21, King-street, Covent Garden ; and it was curious to watch the wondering faces of the impressionable young people, which seemed to say, "What is it all about ?"

Their question was answered by the founder and director of this good work, Mr. Courthope Todd. No sooner was the tea over than he addressed them, and succeeded in interesting them by means of a series of revolving Scriptural pictures and texts, and apt anecdotes, which he knew well how to apply to those whose knowledge of such vital subjects was sadly limited. Again he invited them to King-street, and membership with the Mission, and after singing a hymn, the hour of separation had come. This was early, because most of the guests were about to "turn night into day," by acting in pantomimic dancing in ballet, or singing in chorus, for the amusement of a London public, who little understands the poverty, blighted lives, and unnatural excitement of the twenty-one thousand actors and actresses who minister to its so-called diversion and relaxation.

We were so much engaged with the seniors of the gathering, that we had not much time for the juniors, who had a table and lady-waiters to themselves ; but they were interchanging comments on various picture-cards and little books which they had received, and were quite ready for another treat. Our especial friends took leave of us, with hopes that we should meet again ; and the mother and several of the girls expressed their determination to accept the invitation to the central reception rooms, on the first convenient Thursday, the day named as the "At Home" for the ladies of the ballet and chorus.

We, too, will wend our way thither, and see what is done for the theatrical *employées* in this great wilderness of London, where high-ways and byways are full of pitfalls for the young and ignorant.

We find that not only Thursday, but every day, Sunday inclusive, there is an "At Home," at 21, King-street, Covent Garden, and that Mr. and Mrs. Todd are always there to receive

their guests. These grow ever more and more numerous, for within ten minutes' walk of the small but hospitable dwelling, there are twenty theatres, all of which send their quota ; while from every point of the compass, and from considerable distances, come others of the invited, often at much personal trouble and fatigue, for are there not forty theatres in this our intricate and ever-widening maze ? Of the young girls and children employed nightly in these, five thousand are members of our theatrical union, and numbers daily take advantage of the shelter provided, 8,000 having visited the rooms during the last three months ; while so many flock to the teas, meetings, and entertainments, that the rooms are already too narrow for them.

Let us glance through them. They are small, but well arranged for service. On the drawing-room floor are the reading-room, dining-room, and tiny kitchen. In the first we find a dozen or more of young women, looking over periodicals and papers, judiciously chosen for their moral or religious tendency ; in the second, as many or more seated at tables with tea, coffee, cake, eggs, and what not before them, consuming a cheap meal between rehearsal and play ; in the third, stoves and boilers, prepared to supply the constant demand for edibles and drinkables. Coffee, one halfpenny per cup ; bread and butter, or cake, on the same terms. A respectable matron superintends this small establishment, and when we think that but for it, those who frequent it must wander about the streets for hours, too often alone, unprotected, and frequently strangers in London, we cannot be too thankful that the devotion and energy of one individual has done such "great things" for them. Here, too, is a lending library, which has already seen such good service that the books are worn out, and must be renewed. Anyone who will visit these rooms, and learn *via voce* all that is done here for the benefit of the actresses, will be heartily welcomed ; and anyone who will send healthy, cheerful, pleasant volumes, either religious or secular, will be looked upon as a true benefactor of the theatrical profession. In the room, at this moment, is a sad mother, who attributes the ruin of two of her daughters to the reading of what she calls "those yellow novels," meaning the "cheap and nasty" books issued by publishers without consciences. She says that her girls were well employed at trades before they took to them ; but that they suddenly left her, and

went to Ireland, where they are now on the stage. She has come, like many another anxious parent, to endeavour to trace them through this mission.

On the mantelpiece is the photograph of a young girl who has also left sorrowing parents for this acting chimera, who hope to find her through her companions of the stage. Mr. Todd always appeals to them for aid, and many runaways have been traced and restored by their loyal help, together with that of photographs. One is now in the room who is believed to have deserted her home, but who does not choose to acknowledge it. Still, her presence at the Mission gives hope that she may repent. Who can imagine the misery and heartaches of parents whose children thus forsake them? And for what? To pass through the fire of temptation, and probably fall into sin. People talk of purifying the stage; they must first purify our literature and the plays acted on the stage. Therefore, kindly reader, we clamour for good books for our lending library, for funds for our Mission, and, above all, for personal help and sympathy. To the library is due the formation of a theatrical institute for the boys. "Mr. Todd, sir, we like the books you lend our sisters; will you give us, too, a library and reading-rooms?" said a couple of "young stagers" one day; and the appeal has been answered. At 14, York-street, "Christian club rooms" have been opened for the masculine theatrical element, where pantomime lads, "juvenile tenors and baritones," acrobats even, come "between the acts." One day lately a strange scene was enacted there. Three young acrobats terrified the respectable Scotch matron by performing wonderful feats of gymnastic prowess. They turned somersaults, stood on their heads, vaulted to the ceiling and became so obstreperous, that she was compelled to close the rooms much earlier than usual. When subsequently Mr. Todd expelled them, one of them said he felt more at home in the air than on the earth. These were exceptions, for the lads are generally well behaved, and attend the Bible-classes, which they really like, and other meetings regularly. A library is also in formation for them. The other day two old men looked in and asked for a "book with no religion in it." When invited to enter, they declined, saying "They did not want to be converted." A book being given them, they turned it over to be sure "that it contained no tract."

A general idea exists among the *employés*, male and female, that if they are "converted," they must leave the stage. Hundreds desirous of leading religious lives, and feeling keenly the temptations of their profession, would gladly do so, could they find other occupation. This is the difficulty, since they have generally been trained for the stage, and know no other sphere of labour. Moreover, they are too often looked upon with suspicion, and shunned on account of their profession. A young girl not long since burnt her theatrical appliances, and resolved never again to set foot on the boards. She studied as a hospital nurse successfully, and obtained employment; but, incredible as it may seem, she lost it when it was understood that she had been on the stage. An accomplished young lady, once a governess, was equally unfortunate. Hundreds of examples continually occur to warn girls against this delusive and tempting profession; but, to such as pursue it, the Theatrical Mission is an incalculable boon. Even while we are looking about us the rooms fill with young women, varying in age from fifteen to

twenty, or over. The tables have been rapidly cleared and laid for a tea similar in character to the one described at the commencement of this sketch, and we may here chronicle the fact that the guests who now frequent these assemblies are vastly improved in manners and conversation since their institution. Fifty-three seat themselves at the "boards," and we learn that many of them have walked miles to this half-past four o'clock tea. Lambeth, Kennington, Battersea, Walworth, Marylebone, are amongst the places they name, and all will hasten to "play their mimic parts" when they leave King-street.

Truly strange, and often melancholy, are their stories. Some have been actresses all their lives. Among those known to the lady-visitors are a mother and nine children, all on the stage. The two youngest walked from Lambeth to the children's tea last week "because they liked to come," they said. Some good ladies devote themselves entirely to house visitation, and often appalling cases of distress are revealed to them. Work could be found for many more visitors, would they volunteer. Once on the books, and the members are never lost sight of. During this, our brief sojourn, a letter is brought to Mr. Todd, entreating for a loan, the writer having had her purse stolen, in which she had laid aside the money for her rent. She is well known to the director, has a paralysed husband, and children who labour to support him.

Most of these young people are bread-winners. Here is one who tells us she has left the stage for conscience' sake, and now works at a trade, at which her earnings are small, but they aid in helping the family while the father, a painter, is out of work. Another, once a ballet dancer, now employed at the black-lead works, was twitted by a friend of "the profession" for her dirty hands. "Better soil your hands than your heart," was her apt reply. But the majority are juvenile actresses or chorus singers, and the former speak unhesitatingly of their parts, and have ceased to think shame of their unbecoming stage attire. "I am a Bengalee," "I an Italian girl," "I act in *Faust*," "We are soldiers and sailors," they say, and so on. "I never get home till past twelve; on Saturday night, nearly half-past, for the omnibus men impose on us after midnight," says one; and we reflect sadly how the "poor players" and the "poor drivers" are compelled to break the Sabbath, to minister to the amusement of others. Let us all examine our consciences in this matter. Rapidly the forms are arranged for the address. This is given by Mr. Frank Bevan, who, like ourselves, comes to examine this remarkable work. But it is preceded by a chapter of the Bible, a prayer, and hymn. Very hearty is the singing, sweet are the trained voices, and kindly and judicious are the words of counsel that follow. Every eye is fixed on the speaker, and the attention of the auditors is unquestionable. We have not space to repeat, and can only add that we rejoice to think that so many young people will bear with them to their unreal evening performance the echo of the realities of true religion.

When they rise to take their departure, their kind friends ask for the addresses of such as may have changed either theatre or residence, and also inquire where So-and-so is to be found, and if one particular girl has been traced. Satisfactory answers resound. One or two strangers present themselves, and receive cards of membership. One of these, a pretty, bright-looking girl, says she is fourteen;

has been on the stage since she was three, acts in the provinces; has even been on the Continent, and would like to attend the meetings, and join in the Scripture Union.

Mr. Todd tells her that she shall be placed under the care of a lady who will write to her once a month, and to whom, he hopes, she will reply. This brings us to one of the earliest efforts of the Theatrical Mission, that of correspondence.

Some Christian lady interests herself in a particular individual—woman, girl, or child, as maybe—and by means of what is called the Letter Mission, succeeds in influencing her, and often in discovering much of trial or privation. The young people, especially, grow to like their correspondent, and show much anxiety for a personal introduction. From these letters have proceeded wonderful results.

In every large town in Great Britain and Ireland where there is a theatre, ladies connected with the Mission by bonds of Christian love are prepared either to visit or receive visits from the *employées*, and to advise or aid them if necessary.

Many clergymen are also active in the work, both in London and the provinces. Even in the principal Continental cities there are friends at hand to whom the members of the Mission may be entrusted. In Paris, Miss Leigh has opened a home for young actresses. But let us warn girls, whether on or off the stage, against advertisements to entice them abroad. They are too often snares for the unwary, and many innocent victims are entrapped by them. We would also advise such as begin to seek a livelihood not to be attracted by the glare and glitter of the theatre; but to those already surrounded by its temptations, we would say, "adorn your profession," and, under all circumstances, act the Christian's part. God will help all who sincerely desire to lead good lives.

For such as are unbefriended in London, Mr. Todd would fain have a home, superintended by a respectable matron, who would await their return from their dangerous calling and watch over them. This would soon be nearly self-supporting, but funds there are not to found it. Of the numerous Girls' Homes, none is, alas! available. Late hours and doubtful associations are the obstacles. We, however, hope soon to see that the young actress is not "shut out in the cold," and that, in addition to the reading rooms, children's rooms, special bi-weekly teas, addresses, Scripture union, learning-by-heart union, sewing class, temperance meetings, and library, a "home" may be added, in which these, our sisters, may be shielded from the awful dangers to which they are subjected, body and soul.

The children's rooms—or "parlour," as they like to call it—are below the basement of our mission house; but we have not time for them to-day. Should our "travelling companions," however, not be tired of us and our wandering troupes, we will visit them at the earliest opportunity, and see what is done for the little pantomimists by the Christian philanthropists who cater for their good.

We close this sketch with two extracts from a pile of letters written by "girls of the ballet and chorus." "Many thanks for all your loving kindness. My heart is with you in your—the kindest of all missions." "I can never speak of what the rooms, and our dear friends who work there, have been to me. God grant they may cheer and brighten many another lonely life as they have mine." The Mission motto is, "All is not gold that glitters."

