

## From Clown to Preacher

(Christian Herald.)

One evening a strange visitor called to see me, who stated that he had been to our services sometimes, and wished to converse with me on what he had heard on those occasions.

'Well, I shall be glad enough to be of any service to you,' I replied. 'It's my business, you know; and my pleasure too.'

'Ah! you're a happy man,' he said, with a sigh. 'Your business is your pleasure. I wish I could say the same. My business, or I should say my profession, to be strictly correct, is my misery, my bondage, my trial and temptation, my anything you please' (here he rose from his chair, struck a tragic attitude, and fell into a melo-dramatic tone), 'my anything and everything you please, sir, that is cruel and hateful!'

'Indeed,' I said, 'I am truly sorry to hear it. Who and what are you?'

'I am a fool, sir,' he said, 'a fool—a fool by profession, sir. A clown, if you like. When I'm dressed for action I wear the "cap and bells," and don the motley, and chalk my face and dab it with red and blue paint in stars and stripes and crescents and crosses. Why, the last time I did myself up, and took a final look in the glass, I was so sick and sad about the whole miserable business, and to think that a man with my feelings should be obliged to make such a pitiful ass of himself, I burst into tears; and they ran down my cheeks and made ugly gutters in the chalk and color, so that I had to do it over again, and came on to the stage long after the prompter's call, and the guv'nor swore at me like a trooper. For the first time in my life I didn't swear back.'

Here his self-command forsook him. He sat down and buried his face in his hands.

### THERE WAS NO ACTING NOW.

All was natural and unrestrained as the trouble of a child.

After a little questioning, my visitor said: 'I paid a stray visit to your chapel, sir, one Sunday evening, just to while away the time; and when I'd been once I wanted to come again.' Then, in answer to some natural question as to the reason of this desire to repeat his visit, he said; 'No; it was not anything I heard that particularly impressed me and drew me there a second time, and a third. Oh, no; you preachers make a great mistake if you imagine that talking does all the business. I was too anxious to hide myself, and too busy with my own thoughts and feelings. No, it wasn't that made me come again. It was the air of the place—so different from what I'd been used to for twenty years in common lodgings, and public-houses, and "green rooms," and on the stage. It almost choked me at first with an excess of oxygen.'

'A what?' I exclaimed. 'Why, my people complain of the bad air, and ask for more ventilation!'

'I speak in tropes and figures; 'tis my wont,' he replied. 'Yet surely tropes may be permitted here. The soul requires its oxygen.'—'Yes,' I rejoined, 'we've something like it in one of our hymns:

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,  
The Christian's native air."

'Just so,' he remarked; 'you sang it the other night, and it gave me pause. I said within myself, "I'm not a Christian; I cannot breathe freely in this heavenly atmosphere." I drew my figure thence.

'Ah, well,' he went on to say in a perfectly natural style and tone, 'I can breathe a little more easily now.

### I'M GETTING USED TO IT.

In fact, I've come to love it, and wish I could be always living in it. It's the other atmosphere that bothers me now. I must get out of it, or it will be the death of me one way or the other; most likely one way and the other—soul and body too. You may try to imagine all that I endure, but you never will. Just think of it for a moment, and you may guess a little of what it means. A clown with a conscience—that's what I am. A fool at a twopenny theatre, capering about the stage and cracking jokes,

'Aye, I could have told him what it was, fast enough. But the time hadn't come.

### IT WILL COME SOON, THOUGH.

It must, or I shall break down altogether. Only two nights ago I went on the stage, and instead of cutting a caper and grinning at the grinning crowd, I stood still for a minute, and actually shut my eyes and began to pray silently. The company was deathly still, waiting for me to do something extraordinary. When I opened my eyes and saw where I was, and bethought me what I'd done, you might have knocked me down with a feather. The company stared at me, and I stared at the company for a moment, until I jerked out something about



### THE CHEERING WAS TREMENDOUS, BUT I HEARD HISSES.

while my heart is sinking within me under its heavy load of sin. I'm often sick and faint when I have to face the crowd of grinning fools who come to laugh at my jokes and applaud my antics. Jokes, indeed! Why, if it were not for my old stock and my wrinkled "chestnuts" I couldn't have a joke to crack or a tale to tell. For I can't invent now. All my timelies and locals are done for. The guv'nor noticed it only last week, and says to me, "What's the matter with you, Perkins?" he says; "we ain't had an echo from town affairs for a week or two. What's the good o' my takin' in the local papers, an' payin' for you to stop at the 'Green Man,' where there's more town gossip to be picked up in a night than you'd get at other places in a week? We ain't had a local hit or a timely bit for at least a fortnight. An' as for yer jokes," he says, "I could get a feller for half the money to work up old stock, as you're doin' now. What's the matter wi' yer? You're as flat as dishwater!"

forgetting my handkerchief, and tripped off the stage to come back again in a few minutes trailing a patchwork bed-cover after me. Oh, the fool I made of myself with that bed-cover, and how the people laughed! The guv'nor, who was looking on, said it was the best thing I'd done this season. And yet my heart was breaking all the time, and my jokes were given with a lump in the throat; and you'd hardly believe it, I dare say, but it's a fact nevertheless, that my head was full of texts of Scripture. They seemed to take turns with my silly jokes. As soon as I had got rid of one of them, a Bible text came into my mind, until I ousted it with another wretched bit of nonsense. At last a voice seemed to thunder in my ears,

### "THOU GOD SEEST ME!"

and I dropped the bed-cover and shot off the stage as if the very devil had me in chase. Fortunately for my relations with the guv'nor, I tripped over something and went sprawling, and got away by rolling over and