

CIRCUS CLOWN A SERIOUS PERSON OUT OF THE RING.

Yet People Refuse to Believe He Is Anything But a Buffoon Even in His Private Life.

DID you ever wonder what a circus clown was like out of the tan-bark ring?

Everybody, of course, is familiar with them as they circulate around the rings of the crowded tents. But few have seen them in private life or know what manner of men they are.

The ordinary idea of them is that without their make-up they are much like what they are with it—that life isn't very serious with them.

In a talk with THE TIMES reporter the famous clown Slivers moralized on the situation in the following words:

"It's funny," said Slivers, his eyes resting thoughtfully on his circus feet: "it's funny how people can't understand that we clowns are fellow-human animals with just about the same outfit of feelings that the rest of 'em have. I suppose it's because people have become so accustomed to seeing the clown always getting the worst end of it in the circus ring that they've come to think that he's built to stand the same kind of a hand-out all along the line.

"Do you see that?" asked Slivers, pointing to a long white scar just below his right eyebrow.

"Now, you'd never guess how I picked that up. It's a little souvenir of my last appearance in Chicago. I was just entering the ring when a young hopeful out with his dad for an afternoon's amusement shied an old can at me. The ragged edges of the tin caught me. As I mopped the blood out of my eye I was comforted by this conversation:

"Say, Pa, did you see me hit that clown?"

"Yes, son."

"It was a corking shot, wasn't it, Pa?"

"It was, my son."

"I couldn't miss my cue to get busy in the ring. Otherwise that young hopeful's trousers would have needed patching."

And the clowns that are now with the circus told the reporter stories—many, many stories—all going to show that

Slivers was drawing no airy picture of the imagination. (a shorter and uglier word might be used.)

Then up spoke Al Olifan, who had just completed, to his own satisfaction, superimposing a comic grease-paint face upon the serious countenance that nature has given him. It's just possible that it wasn't Al Olifan. It may have been Pat Valdo; perhaps it was Fred Egener; or it may have been Bill Scott. It's hard to keep track of names when you're carrying on an intermittent conversation in the midst of the lightning changes that are constantly going on in the clowns' dressing room. You're talking with a Rube policeman. He disappears, and a moment later a voice addresses you from the inside of a colossal papier-mâché head: "Well, as I was just saying—" And then you realize that the Rube policeman has undergone a sartorial transmigraton.

But whether it was Al Olifan or not, somebody with a comic grease paint face said:

"There was one time when I was not able to maintain that stand-offish attitude with the private citizenry. On that occasion I almost played the leading rôle in a lynching bee. Our show struck one of those shake-down towns; it was out in Missouri, I think. The genial citizens had said to themselves: 'The circus is coming. Here's where we get enough to pay the year's salary of the Mayor and the Sheriff.' They demanded some exorbitant sum for a parade license, and we called the parade off. That started a row, and in the mix-up a circus man whom I had the misfortune to resemble hit the Sheriff a fine jolt on the nose.

The Sheriff retired to the town to get recruits to avenge this insult to one of the town's officials.

"Meanwhile I was down in the train, blissfully ignorant of the trouble that had broken loose. I started for the circus grounds, going by way of the town's main street. And I ran plumb into the Sheriff and his crowd.

"That's him!" yelled the Sheriff, and the crowd started at me, crying: "Lynch him! Lynch him!"

"I didn't know what it was all about, but you can take my word I didn't stop to inquire. I ran. Gee, how I did run!

"I dodged into a grocery shop and hid behind a barrel. But the crowd had seen me and hunted me out.

"I dropped on my knees and cried: 'Gentlemen, oh, gentlemen! Please tell me what all the trouble is about.'

"And then some one said: 'What did you paste the Sheriff in the nose for?'

"I didn't. Honest, I didn't. I'm only the circus clown."

"That struck them as funny, and they laughed. And that laugh gave me my cue.

"Wait a minute, gentlemen," said I.

"I opened the make-up bag which I was carrying to the show, and in a couple of minutes I had my clown's face on.

"That hit the crowd on the funnybone, and they laughed harder than ever.

"Do a stunt," the Sheriff commanded.

"Say, I never worked so hard to please an audience. They forgot all about their lynching bee. With me and the Sheriff in the lead, the crowd marched down the town's main street, and every mother's son of them forked out the cash for a ticket and sat in.

"After the show the whole crowd insisted upon setting 'em up for me. Gosh! that was a jamboree!"

And then some one—it may have been Holland or Valdo or Egener or Scott or La Pearl—who was sitting in a toy auto-

mobile, his feet resting on the ground to supply the motive power, said:

"In the street parades a few years ago I used to ride in a small pony cart. Say, you ought to see the lemons that have been handed out to me. 'Oh, here comes the clown,' the Rubes along the sidewalk would say. Then some playful guy would reach out and poke me in the ribs with an umbrella, and another would fellow it up by a good, substantial swat over the back. There's no such thing, you know, as being fresh with a clown, and it makes the little ones laugh.

"What did I do? Why, stand for it, of course. What good is a clown if he doesn't make the people laugh. That's what the manager says, and I guess he knows what he's willing to pay for. But say, you can take it from me, it's just a little heating under the collar to have some fresh duck, who wants to show his best girl how funny he can be, knock your hat off, and then have it up to you to jump out of your cart, pick your hat up, make a low bow to the girl, and throw a funny grin at the fellow, when all the time you're just itching to put a fistful of knuckles in his face.

"And I finally managed to do it, too—by proxy. When we'd strike a town I'd pick out four or five of the toughest-looking kids that were hanging around watching us unload, and I would say:

"Want to go to the circus, boys?"

"You betcher life," in chorus.

"Well, you boys just follow alongside of me in the street parade, and whenever you see any one poke me or hit me, why you just sail in and paste him, paste him good and plenty, see. Then come around after the parade and I'll give you free tickets."

"It did my heart good to see how those kids attended to business.

"Just to show you how kind-hearted people are toward clowns, I'll tell you a little conversation I had a couple of years ago in a little up-State town. After the performance I went across the street with a friend to get a drink. Somebody passed the word, 'There's one of them circus clowns,' and immediately every Rube shifted his glass along the bar to where I was talking with my friend.

"Howdy?" one old Chin Whisker piped up.

"Fine," said I, shifting further along the bar.

"Everybody shifted with me.

"Dandy cut-up, you had," continued old Chin Whisker.

"Thanks," said I.

"Ever break a leg?"

"Nope."

"What! Never hurt yourself?"

"Nope."

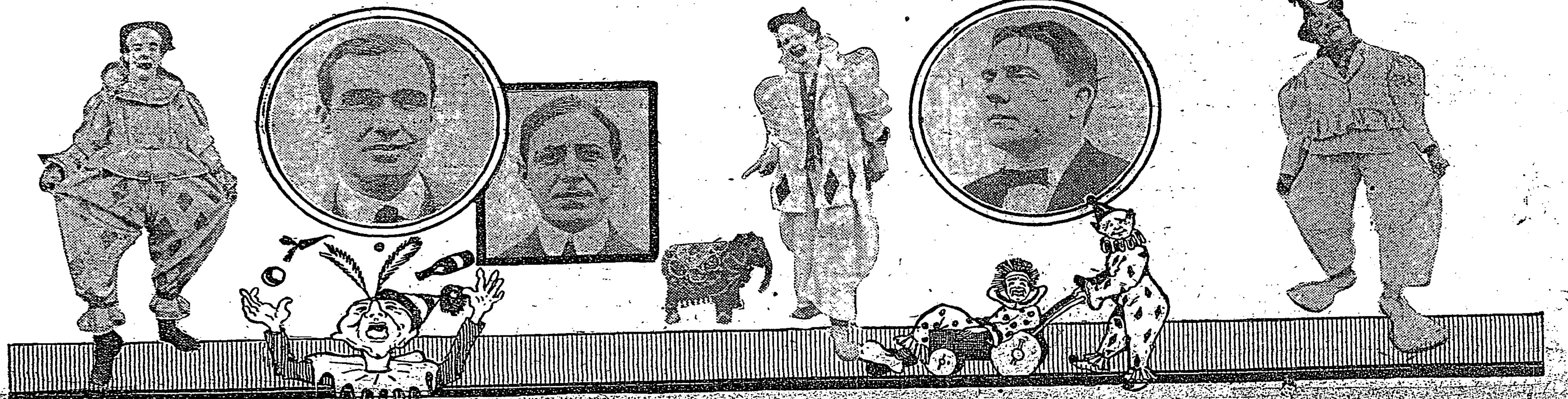
"Best thing I ever see," continued old Chin Whisker cheerfully, "was a clown that fell down and all the horses just stepped all over him. Land sakes, how I did laugh."

"That must have been funny—to look at."

"But with all the slap-sticking and horse play," said THE TIMES reporter, "don't you often get hurt?"

"Hurt? You bet we get hurt. Of course the kicks and slaps are meant to be fakes, but in the hurry-scurry of a circus performance distances are occasionally miscalculated, and—well, for the next week or so we go round looking for the softest place to sit down.

"And that reminds me of an old clown pal I once had. He only got one real good laugh all the time he was in the business, and that was when an elephant stepped on his foot and smashed it flat. He let out a yell that made the tent flap, and the audience roared! And when we carried him out, groaning and biting his fingers, Lordy! how the crowd did laugh!"



Scott as a Clown.

Bill Scott.

Pat Valdo.

Valdo as the Audience Sees Him.

Al Olifan.

This is Olifan's Make-up.