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CHRIST AND ALLY SLOPER

BY THE LATE SAM STANDRING.



WITH PREFATORY NOTE BY GEORGE STANDRING.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

PREFATORY NOTE.

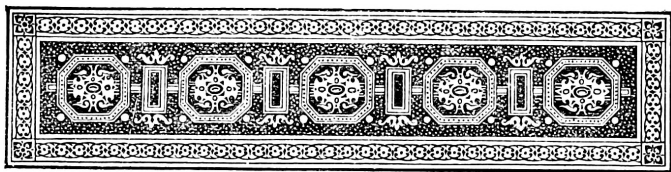
The publishers have asked me to contribute a note to this, the second, edition of my late brother's little pamphlet.

In "Christ and Ally Sloper," Sam added a very suggestive and interesting "line" to Freethought propaganda. The pamphlet—obviously summarized from the materials of a lecture—was in its first edition hastily put together, and I have in this reprint corrected some blemishes in style that he had allowed to pass. But I have not in any way interfered with his treatment of the subject; the alterations made are simply verbal.

In dealing with Ally Sloper in this way, Sam paid a probable unconscious tribute to the profound influence of early mental impressions. When the first volume of Sloper sketches appeared—about thirty years ago—Sam, my sister Kate, and I were about the age when the consumption of sweet-stuff and the daily routine of home-life become merged in the wider interests of the outside world. The Sloper "literature"—his "Book of Beauty," "Sloper at the Paris Exhibition," etc.—were marked, learned, and inwardly digested by us with that absorbing delight which we lose in riper years. I have now upon my shelf Sloper's "Book of Beauty,"—a relic of that far-off time; well-thumbed, toffee-marked, loose and partly in tatters; but it is to me full of tenderest memories of bygone days. Why did Sam, for so many years, bear in mind with an affectionate interest the old rascal Sloper and his associates? Why do I now on occasion turn over the tattered pages of the book, and find each well-remembered stupid picture encircled in a positive halo of sweet memories? To us both, Sloper recalled the days of our childhood, the love and presence of our long-lost mother, the simple joys of our early home-life, gone beyond recall. In this respect, Jesus Christ and Ally Sloper stand to me in much the same relation. I can well remember as a child reading the story of Christ in the gospels; and well also can I remember the feeling of utter desolation that came over me as I read of his death upon the cross. The resurrection I *never* believed in; Jesus, alive, I loved with a childish love; but when he was crucified I felt that he was *dead* once and for all, and the story of his resurrection failed to comfort or convince me.

While priests are permitted to imbue the minds of children with superstition the work of emancipation must ever continue to be necessary. Let us strive to stop the evil at its source by protecting the young from its contaminating influence!

GEORGE STANDRING.



CHRIST AND ALLY SLOPER.

By **SAM STANDRING.**

EVERY Freethought lecturer finds it necessary now and again to answer the crucial question, Did Jesus Christ ever live? Of course his Christian hearers will invariably object that the question is the merest twaddle; that there is no more doubt about Christ having lived than there is about the lecturer's existence; that all history proves that Jesus of Nazareth was a very real person indeed.

What I want to do in this pamphlet is to show that a purely fictitious character may easily become one in whom the many believe. I have no wish whatever to draw any analogy between Jesus and Ally Sloper beyond that of the origin and development of the respective myths. Granted that the characters are fictitious, their characteristics are mere details of no present concern; but in this case the parallel is so clear that one is tempted to run the risk of being called "blasphemous" in order to prove so desirable a point.

Ally Sloper has originated within the memory of all middle-aged readers. It is but some thirty years since he first saw the light of day. *Judy* was his literary mother. One fine morning a page of that comic journal was devoted to some of the eccentric doings of the tall thin man whose crumpled white hat with its conspicuous broad black band, swallow-tailed coat, and the protruding gin bottle were to mark him as a pet of Society. No one called round

on the editor with a pickaxe or pistol, and so it was deemed possible to publish another sketch in safety. This proved no more dangerous than the other. Frequent insertions of the quaint old man's preposterous doings caused him to become familiar to the readers. They not only liked him, they began to look with eagerness for the story of his adventures. Ally was ever welcome, and he grew in favour week by week. As time wore on, it became desirable to add to the original stock. Sloper had a companion, by name Iky Mo, who mainly instigated the major part of our hero's peccadilloes, and reaped the lion's share of the harvest. Ally did the wickedness and got the kicks; when ha'pence came in, Iky Mo held the bag for them. By this means Ally Sloper soon found himself honoured as the best-kicked man in Europe.

After some seventeen years of prosperity in *Judy*, Ally Sloper began to launch out on his own account. Marie Duval's excellent sketches settled his physiognomy; and he who once had been but the actor of cruel jokes had now become the centre, the hero of of every adventure. His Summer Number detached him from his mother; and a Calendar, if I remember rightly, still further weaned him from the Old Lady of Fleet Street. More than aught else, the collections of his sayings and doings in the wonderfully racy "Book of Beauty" gave Sloper an independence he had long deserved.

Now commences the second portion of "The Eminent's" work and fame. Hitherto there had been no material change in him. As Ross and Marie Duval had initiated him so he remained. A few apocryphal data of his boyhood's days had been made manifest to the public; but we knew little of him as a family man. Beyond a glimpse or two in his "Guide to the Paris Exhibition," the public scarcely knew, even, that he had a better half. With the advent of "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday" all this was changed. Sloper assumed a variety of different characters. At the Derby Day or University Boat Race he was indispensable. At dinner with the Queen, or inspecting a review of troops, or playing tricks upon the crowds who sought refreshment at the sea-side, Ally Sloper was equally at home. His gin-blossom nose was there, though the hat, coat, and boots gave way to clothing in keeping with the scene. His wife now became more and more apparent. The sons of his bosom, and Tootsie, the sweet daughter of his heart, grew up round him like the olive branches of Holy Scripture.

Besides these, the Hon. Billy, the Dook Snook, Tottie Goodenough, and the other ladies of the "Friv.," Bill Higgins, and some others, about twenty in all, formed the group of which Ally was necessarily the centre. Week by week their doings are all faithfully recorded. To thousands of persons they are undoubtedly real characters, whose images are to be seen in toy-shop windows; who appear from time to time on the public stage, and ride about at country fairs. What fancy dress ball or ventriloquial exhibition would be complete without the presence of "The Friend of Man"? Nay, the thing has gone even farther than that. In Shoe Lane, London, one sees the large front window of the "Ally Sloper's Half Holiday" offices filled as a museum with old hats, combs, brushes, shoes, and hundreds of other relics alleged to have belonged to Sloper and his family and friends; whilst in certain shops you see framed and glazed diplomas granted by "The Eminent" to particular tradesmen, and in the stage papers a portion of the actors and actresses rejoice in the use of certain initials, F.O.S. to wit, which signify that they are friends of Sloper's. ✓

Now when we remember that a period of less than thirty years has sufficed to bring this character into notoriety such as we have witnessed, and to give it a popularity which does not appear to be decaying, it is not difficult to conceive how many of the myths of history have thus arisen and developed. The only thing is that in this case we are all able to pull the curtain aside and see the origin for ourselves; whereas in others, their origin is lost in the mists of antiquity, and we are compelled to accept, with or without a grain of salt, what ancient men have said about them.

As I have selected Christ for my parallel case, let us now examine the points of likeness in the two histories. The earliest records of Jesus are no wilder in their improbability than the story of Ally Sloper. Run through the apocryphal gospels, those earliest narratives of Christ's boyhood days, and you find him turning children into kids because they hide themselves and refuse to play with him; or, being run against by another lad and knocked over, exclaiming, "As thou hast made me to fall, so shalt thou fall and not rise," immediately causing him to fall down and die. Or, again, when he would show himself superior to the other children, he would make sparrows of the mud in which they were all playing and then cause his own to fly away, leaving theirs in their primitive condition. Innumerable stories of this sort cluster

around the early days of Jesus. We don't believe them now, but they were piously believed in by the Christians of the earliest centuries of our era. Some day, when Ally Sloper shall be numbered amongst the gods of the heathen, a pious writer may select from his various records the less self-evident untruths, get them canonized by the Church of his day, and set down the other absurdities as "apocryphal."

Men ask, "How is it Christ is accepted if he never lived? Have we not the gospels which proclaim his works? Have not contemporaries added their words to those of the sacred writers?" All this may be admitted, *if* we are to accept as true all that has ever been written; but in the case of Christ we must remember that there is no more contemporary evidence of the *reality* of *Christ's* person than there is of the reality of Ally Sloper's. The one is certainly fictitious, and there is every reason for believing that the other is fictitious also. When men like Archdeacon Farrar give away the only possible confirmation, that of Josephus, as an interpolation and forgery, smaller Church-folk need not be over nice in rejecting it as well.

The Ally Sloper myth has lived and grown because the humor of his imaginary doings tickled the people of his day. The ignorant, who are always amongst the religious enthusiasts, seem already to accept him as a human being. Some will gravely tell you that at Fair time they have seen him drive through the town with his lass Tootsie. His character is so little overdrawn that those who delight in tales of booze and feats of drunkenness regard him as a "jolly good fellow." Christ came into popularity in another fashion, but on similar lines. He was made the vehicle for preaching submission to an overweighted and oppressed people. All that was feminine and passive in human nature he was made to glorify, and the sentimental followed his doctrines, whilst their rulers saw how great a help such a religion would be to them in diverting the minds of their conquered people from their sufferings, —so great, indeed, that they eventually professed to embrace the new religion, changing the direction of the worship to suit the ends they had in view. The sword and stake assisted to remove any opposition to the new "faith." To make Jesus the more acceptable he was given a title which men could make into a pun, for "Christus," *anointed*, was often written by the ancients as "Chrestos," the Greek for *a good fellow*. To some, then, he

became the Messiah of the Scriptures, whilst to others he was the embodiment of a good sort of man; and all were equally well pleased.

The more men examine into the early history of Christ, the less they seem willing to believe it. It is the unenquiring who adhere to it so tenaciously. Even many who now believe, laugh at the "true relics" of the cross, the crown of thorns, the Virgin Mary's dress, and so on, of which the Christian Cathedrals have so many. Protestants, like Sloperians, have wearied of the original Christ. Sloper left his tricks and entered the arena of modern life; Christ is no longer the Saviour of the World, the hero of the Atonement, or an emptied God; he is now the King of Labor, the Socialist, the Anarchist, the Leader of Armies, or anything else that suits the palate of the hour. The Christ of our boyhood's theology can be but ill-recognised in the Jesus of the modern up-to-date preacher.

It only remains for the Editor of *Ally Sloper* to found a school, public hall, or other useful institution, and to start a counterpart movement to that set on foot by the earlier Christians to popularise their new deity. Those who appeal so much and so often to the name of Christ in connection with benevolent institutions may yet live to see the name of Sloper over the portals of their like. Be that as it may, it is difficult to see much essential difference between the origin and development of the so-called "histories" of those celebrated figure-heads, Christ and Sloper.



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