

THE COURSE OF BUTLER'S LITERARY FAME

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts.

by

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August, 1953.

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PREFACE

Part One of this thesis deals with the general course of Butler's fame. Part Two considers separately those of his works listed by Jonathan Cape as "the only ones to have sold in quantity." Appendix One has been added because it seems hardly right that any thesis on Butler written in this city should fail to mention "A Psalm of Montreal."

In making this study of the course of Butler's fame, I have tried to estimate the interest of the critics in Butler at any time by considering the amount of discussion of his work in books and periodicals for every year from 1901 to 1951. I have tried to point out which phases of his work have been generally admired by English-speaking critics at any given period, but have not attempted to relate the critical preferences of a period to historical trends or changes in the social environment.

The interest of the general reader has been more difficult to assess. Letters were written to Jonathan Cape Limited, the present publishers of Butler's works, to the Book Information Bureau of the National Book League in London, to the American Book Publishers Council in New York, and to the American

Library Association in Chicago. Although all these groups responded with helpful suggestions, none was able to provide statistics on the sales or circulation of any of Butler's works. As a result it has been necessary to gauge the fluctuations of the general reader's interest in Butler solely on the basis of the number of new editions and reissues of his works appearing in a given year. Except for the Penguin edition of 1951, it was not possible to obtain any information about the number of books printed in any issue.

I should like to acknowledge the kindly criticism and patient helpfulness of the late Professor Noad, the original director of my research. The hours he gave to the discussion of this work were very pleasant ones for me. I am also grateful to Professor Louis Dudek, who assumed the direction of my thesis after Professor Noad's death, to Dr. Duthie, who generously advised me on several matters of detail in Professor Dudek's absence, and to Mr. H. Burton of Longmans Green, Toronto, who wrote at least four letters asking for information on my behalf. For the preparation of the manuscript I am indebted to Miss Dorothy McDonald, who did all the typing, to Miss Eve Rost, and to my husband Mr. Earle Whimster.

E.J.W.

Montreal

July 4, 1953

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART ONE

CHAPTER I	Butler's Reputation during His Life and Immediately after His Death (1872-1906)	1
CHAPTER II	Butler's Fame (1907-1920): the First Surge	15
CHAPTER III	Butler's Fame (1921-1951): Ebb and Flow	40

PART TWO

CHAPTER IV	<u>Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited</u>	67
CHAPTER V	<u>The Notebooks of Samuel Butler</u>	84
CHAPTER VI	<u>The Way of All Flesh</u>	89
APPENDIX I	" A Psalm of Montreal "	116
BIBLIOGRAPHY		118
APPENDIX II	Chart Showing the Course of Butler's Fame	

CHAPTER I

BUTLER'S REPUTATION DURING HIS LIFE AND IMMEDIATELY AFTER
HIS DEATH (1872-1906)

Samuel Butler (1835-1902), the author of Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh, has been dead for more than fifty years. Although he left a comparatively small body of work, he has received nearly as much attention from the critics as his more prolific contemporaries. His fame, however, was not attained during his lifetime. Butler was never a leader with a following, the spokesman for a group. Typically his position was that of the solitary assailant of a theory otherwise unchallenged. In the great struggle of his day between the forces of Darwinism and those of organized religion Butler criticized both factions vigorously with the result that neither was anxious to draw the attention of the public to his work. Neither could claim his support; both found it safer to ignore his existence than to attempt to refute his arguments or engage him in debate. Some hints, however, as to Butler's status among his contemporaries can be drawn from the reception accorded to his books and the stir created by his death. It will be seen that Butler's reputation during his life and immediately after his death

gave little indication of the fame he was later to achieve.

I Reception Accorded Butler's Works

In 1899 at the age of sixty-four Butler inserted in his Note-books a table headed "Analysis of the Sales of My Books."¹ At this date he had little reason to think of himself as a successful writer. All his books had been published at his own expense, and of them all only Erewhon showed a profit. The total accumulated cash loss on November 28, 1899, stood at £ 960 17 6.

Little discussion of his work had appeared in print. The Supplement to Allibone's Critical Dictionary of English Literature, published in 1891, devoted a little more than a column to a list of his writings and brief quotations from reviews,² but other works of the kind ignored his existence. Grant Allen, a writer of popular novels and popular science, did in the preface to his Charles Darwin refer to Butler,

1 H. Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon: a Memoir (London: Macmillan, 1919), II, 311.

2 A Supplement to Allibone's Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1891), I, 265.

but not in such a way as to add to the latter's reputation:

From Mr. Samuel Butler, the author of Evolution Old and New, I have derived many pregnant suggestions with regard to the true position and meaning of Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and the early teleological evolutionists - suggestions which I am all the more anxious to acknowledge since I differ fundamentally from Mr. Butler in his estimate of the worth of Charles Darwin's distinctive discovery of natural selection.³

On the other hand, Professor Marcus Hartog of University College, Cork had only praise for Butler. In a discussion of various theories of heredity in Natural Science he wrote:

The most satisfactory explanation, perhaps, is that put forward by Hering and Samuel Butler, the latter of whom has written with singular freshness and an ingenuity which compensates for the author's avowed lack of biological knowledge.⁴

Apart from these scanty references and the reviews of his books Butler's work had attracted no attention except in Italy, where there was a certain amount of local interest in the theory that Sicily was the scene of the Odyssey.⁵

3 Grant Allen, Charles Darwin (London: Longmans, 1885), p.v.

4 Marcus Hartog, "Fundamental Principles of Heredity," Natural Science, XI (1897), 316.

5 Sugameli, L'Origine Trapanese Dell'Odissea Secondo Samuel Butler (1893).

"La Nuova Quistione Omerica," Quo Vadis (1901).

Il Lambruschini (1892-1894).

Not all the reviews were discouraging. Erewhon, at first published anonymously, fared very well. Although the Saturday Review found its satire "semewhat commonplace and easy" and the allegory "rather too far-fetched and complicated to have the desirable brilliancy of effect," it did concede that there were "a good many ingenious remarks and some caustic hits in the book."⁶ Rattray lists six early reviews of Erewhon, all of them favourable.⁷ The Echo found it "a very clever, striking and original book." The Pall Mall Gazette singled out for comment a passage which has since become one of the best known in Butler's writings:

It is obvious that a change is coming over the whole scope of our laws; and any one who will take the trouble to read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the little book of which we have spoken, and will do all this in a philosophical spirit, will probably come to the conclusion that it is as reasonable, and as desirable for the good of society, to send to prison the man who will take typhus fever, as to send to hospital the woman who couldn't be restrained from murder. ⁸

From the Spectator comes the first of many comparisons of Butler and Swift:

It is obvious that we have amongst us a satirist of very remarkable literary power, as well as of a very cynical turn of mind.

6 Unsigned rev. of Erewhon, Saturday Review, XXXIII (1872), 507-508.

7 R.F. Rattray, Samuel Butler: a Chronicle and an Introduction (London: Duckworth, 1935), pp.55-57.

* 8 Pall Mall Gazette, April 12, 1872.

Since the days of Swift nothing has been abler in its peculiar way, and certainly nothing more thoroughly bitter and contemptuous in its drift, than the little book called Erewhon or Over the Range.⁹

Vanity Fair¹⁰ and the Scotsman¹¹ also drew attention to the satirical merit of Erewhon, and the Examiner praised it for its effect in the moral sphere:

It deserves careful reading; and will probably find its way where a more sermon-like book would only repel. It shakes the dry bones of our moral and religious formulae to some good purpose, let us hope. Not a few who will be drawn to the book for amusement only will find concealed under the mask of comedy not a little wholesome truth and wisdom.¹²

Butler's miscellaneous works met with mixed receptions.

Douglas Freshfield in his review of Alps and Sanctuaries for the Academy remarked, as others have done of other works of Butler's: "He has spoilt his book by thinking too little of his subject and too much of everything else," yet "his descriptions of scenery are clear, bright, and spontaneous; his sketches of his inn or wayside companions lively and

9 Spectator, April 20, 1872.

10 Vanity Fair, May 4, 1872.

11 Scotsman, May 17, 1872.

12 Examiner, April 27, 1872.

* References 8-12 are provided by Rattray.

amusing."¹³ An unnamed reviewer of Ex Voto gave it high praise:

This singular book, with its vivid descriptions, its strange and fascinating illustrations, its startling ideas - amounting often to discoveries and new departures in the world of religious art - its criticism, full of knowledge and originality, if also of a certain mocking spirit which destroys the effect of it for some minds, - this book, with all its peculiarities, is certainly a striking contribution to literature of the kind, and will be an authority on the past and present history of such places as Varallo. ¹⁴

The elaborate irony of The Fair Haven led some reviewers to treat it as a serious defence of the literal accuracy of the Bible. Butler was unable to conceal his delight, but he was repaid in full when the critics retaliated by ignoring The Authoress of the Odyssey and Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered or treating them as jokes. The Classical Review had not noticed The Authoress of the Odyssey when it was published in 1897, but F.M. Cornford, reviewing Butler's translation of the Odyssey in 1901, wrote:

We are not surprised that no one has thought it worth while to dispute with Mr. Butler. We incline, however, to the view that the whole theory

13 Douglas W. Freshfield, rev. of Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and the Canton Ticino, Academy, January 21, 1882, p.39.

14 Unsigned rev. of Ex Voto, Spectator, LXI (1888), 1065.

of female authorship is intended as a joke, a satire upon the sex.¹⁵

It was when he entered the field of biology that Butler was most sharply attacked. His first venture, Life and Habit, was, however, received with courtesy. The Saturday Review was neither harsh nor enthusiastic, and suggested that there might be some affinity between Butler's views and Von Hartmann's Philosophy of the Unconscious.¹⁶ Alfred Russel Wallace, reviewing the book for Nature, found it "full of curious facts and subtle reasoning" and praised it for "originality and logical completeness." "It is more amusing than most novels," he wrote, "while it contains more material for thought than is to be found in most books of double the size However wild and improbable the theory may seem, it receives, strange to say, considerable support from the views of Haeckel and other German physiologists of the most advanced school Though we can at present only consider the work as a most ingenious and paradoxical speculation, it may yet afford a clue to some of the deepest mysteries of the organic world."¹⁷

15 F.M. Cornford, "Butler's Translation of the Odyssey," Classical Review, XV (1901), 221.

16 Unsigned rev. of Life and Habit, Saturday Review, XLV (1878), 119-121.

17 Alfred Russel Wallace, "Organization and Intelligence," Nature, XIX (1879), 479-480.

In Evolution Old and New Butler accused Charles Darwin of claiming the theory of evolution as his own discovery and of deliberately concealing the work of Buffon, Lamarck, and his grandfather Erasmus Darwin. Wallace's review of this book, while still courteous in tone, charged the author with verbal quibbling, alleging that his views on evolution were not in agreement with the facts and that he had produced no evidence in support of them. Wallace then produced a little evidence of his own which appeared to cut the ground from under Butler's feet.¹⁸ The Saturday Review, nettled by Butler's criticism of Darwin, did not bother to refute his arguments, but displayed contempt for Butler's knowledge of science:

Not professing to have any particular competence in biology, natural history, or the scientific study of evidence in any shape whatever, and indeed rather glorying in his freedom from any such superfluities, he undertakes to assure the overwhelming majority of men of science and the educated public who have followed their lead that, while they have done well to be converted to the doctrine of the evolution and transmutation of species, they have been converted on entirely wrong grounds When a writer who has not given as many weeks to the subject as Mr. Darwin has given years is not content to air his own crude, though clever, fallacies, but assumes to criticize Mr. Darwin with the superciliousness of a young schoolmaster looking over a boy's

¹⁸ Alfred Russel Wallace, rev. of Evolution Old and New, Nature, XX (1879), 141-144.

theme, it is difficult not to take him more seriously than he deserves, and perhaps than he desires. One would think that Mr. Butler was the pert speculator who takes all his facts at second hand.¹⁹

There was no pretence at courtesy in the reception of Unconscious Memory. Another leading evolutionist, George J. Romanes, reviewing the book for Nature, referred to Butler as "an upstart ignoramus . . . in no way adapted, either by mental stature or mental equipment" to the arena of philosophical discussion. "Unconscious Memory is bad in philosophy, bad in judgment, bad in taste, and, in fact, the only good thing in it is the writer's own opinion of himself."²⁰

In comparison with this, reviews of Luck or Cunning seem to be wildly enthusiastic. The Athenaeum admitted that Butler was "an acute thinker" and that more justice was being done to Buffon, Lamarck, and Erasmus Darwin since Evolution Old and New, but regretted that Butler spent his time in attacking Darwin's position rather than in stating his own.²¹ Grant Allen in the Academy called the book "a most valuable, original, and suggestive contribution to current evolutionary thought. The author of Erewhon has at bottom something to say, and the something has been overlooked."²²

19 Unsigned rev. of Evolution Old and New, Saturday Review, XLVII (1879), 682.

20 George J. Romanes, rev. of Unconscious Memory, Nature, XXIII, (1881), 285.

21 Unsigned rev. of Luck or Cunning, Athenaeum, No. 3091 (January 22, 1887), pp. 131-132.

22 Grant Allen, rev. of Luck or Cunning, Academy, December 18, 1886, pp. 112-113.

In 1901 George Bernard Shaw introduced Butler to Grant Richards, and arrangements were made for the publication of Erewhon Revisited and a new and revised edition of Erewhon. For the first time in his career Butler had found a publisher who was willing to assume at least a part of the financial risk involved.²³ Reviews were favourable. The Athenaeum termed Erewhon Revisited "a good story, well told, full of incident and development of character, marked by the personal touch which has made "Erewhon" a delight to the discerning for thirty years past."²⁴ The Times remarked on its vivid narrative, its lifelike verisimilitude, its irony, its satire, its quaint and whimsical humour, and considered it "a worthy sequel to Erewhon."²⁵ The new book was successful.

Butler's comment is interesting. To a friend in New Zealand he wrote:

The fact is that I have never written on any subject unless I believed that the authorities on it were hopelessly wrong. If I thought them sound, why write? The consequence is that I have throughout, I am profoundly thankful to say, been in a very solitary Ishmaelitish position, and I heartily trust

23 Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, II, 341.

24 Unsigned rev. of Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited, Athenaeum, No. 3860 (October 19, 1901), p. 518.

25 Unsigned rev. of Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited, Times (London), October 9, 1901, p.5, col. 1.

that the temporary success of this last book may not tempt me to abandon the attitude which for so many years I have maintained, on the whole greatly to the satisfaction of my conscience. 26

Nevertheless, Butler longed for fame, and more than once stated his firm conviction that he would be famous after death. In a letter to Robert Bridges he wrote:

Who can appraise contemporary literature? It is most certain that neither you nor I can form even an approximate idea of what our respective literary positions will be fifty years after we are dead; For it would be mere affectation on the part of either of us to doubt that a position of some sort will be awarded to us - to you as a poet, to me as a prose writer. 27

Since Butler died in 1902 he has now completed the fiftieth year of that life after death during which he believed a man to be most truly alive, when his books and ideas are being actively discussed and their influence persists.

II Obituaries and Memorials

An observer in 1902 would hardly have dared to predict for Butler the fame which he has since achieved. The notice of his death in the Athenaeum referred to "his kindness and his strong sense, his old-fashioned courtesy and his humour," and concluded: "We who knew him shall not

26 Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, II, 382.

27 Ibid, II, 321.

see his like again, and shall not soon forget him."²⁸ The writer of the Times obituary considered him "a remarkably gifted man . . . a scholar and a thinker, as well as a master of a brilliant style." He praised "the striking and picturesque narration" of Erewhon, "a work which comes nearest to Gulliver's Travels in mordant irony and startling paradox of all that has been written in that vein since the death of Swift." He noted Butler's "combative spirit," and felt "a sense of disappointment at the inadequacy of what is left of permanent work to represent the man," who "dissipated his strength in grappling with so many diverse subjects that he left a lasting mark on none."²⁹

During the years 1902-1906 no interest was shown in Butler's life or work except by his personal friends. In September, 1902, R.A. Streatfeild, a friend who was also his literary executor, wrote an appreciation of Butler for the Monthly Review, in which he acclaimed Butler as "a thinker of singular independence and originality, . . . versatile without being superficial, and minute without being narrow, . . .

28 "Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, No. 3896 (June 28, 1902), pp. 819-820.

29 "Mr. Samuel Butler," Times (London), June 20, 1902, p.5, col. 6.

his methods of thought singularly untainted by academic convention."³⁰ In December of the same year Festing Jones wrote an obituary for Butler's college magazine, the Eagle. During the next year Streatfeild collected obituaries and other tributes to Butler under the title Records and Memorials, and Jones contributed another article to the Eagle. But the significant event of the year, although it made little stir at the time was the publication of The Way of All Flesh.³¹ In 1904 Festing Jones had printed for private circulation a fifty-six page pamphlet entitled Diary of a Journey Through North Italy to Sicily in 1903, for the Purpose of Leaving the Manuscripts of Three Books by Samuel Butler at Varallo-Sesia, Aci-Reale and Trapani.³² More important in the growth of Butler's fame was an article by his friend Desmond MacCarthy in the Independent Review, the first to consider his work as a whole and to suggest that everything he did illustrated an important philosophy of life.³³ At this point Butler's friends appear to have been discouraged.

30 R.A. Streatfeild, "Samuel Butler," Monthly Review, VIII (September 1902), 137-138.

31 See Chapter Six.

32 Printed by Metcalfe and Company, Limited, Trinity Street, Cambridge.

33 Lee Elbert Holt, "Samuel Butler's Rise to Fame," PMLA, LVII (1942), 870.

During 1905 and 1906 they wrote nothing about him, and no new editions of his works were published. Except for the inclusion of his name in the 1906 edition of Chambers' Cyclopaedia interest in Butler seemed to have died completely.

CHAPTER II

BUTLER'S FAME (1907-1920): THE FIRST SURGE

I 1907-1912

So matters stood in 1907 when Bernard Shaw fanned Butler's flickering fame to vigorous life. With a few words in "First Aid to Critics," the preface to Major Barbara, he stated his indebtedness to Butler's "extraordinarily fresh, free and future-piercing suggestions," and drew attention to The Way of All Flesh.¹ Lee Elbert Holt, an American student of Butler, states that this tribute "has rightly been credited with doing more than any other single thing to increase Butler's popularity."² In the following year Arthur Clutton-Brock in the Times Literary Supplement³ presented "the first full-dress portrayal of the whole of Butler's available works in bright and engaging colours."⁴ A.C. Fifield, the publisher of Butler's works at the time, is inclined to consider this article an even more important contribution to Butler's

1 G.B. Shaw, The Collected Works of George Bernard Shaw (New York: William H. Wise, 1930), II, 221.

2 Lee Elbert Holt, "Samuel Butler's Rise to Fame," PMLA, LXI (1942), 870.

3 A. Clutton-Brock, "Samuel Butler" Times Literary Supplement, October 8, 1908, pp. 329-330.

4 A.C. Fifield, "Clutton-Brock and Samuel Butler," Times Literary Supplement, January 17, 1924, p.40.

fame. "From that day the Press of the world developed a new orientation of respect towards Samuel Butler," and orders for his books come in from all over the world.⁵ Whatever the relative merits of these two factors in furthering Butler's renown, his reputation was now assured. A second edition of The Way of All Flesh was called for in 1908. It was reissued in England and in America in 1910. Although none of Butler's works had been published during the previous three year period, the years 1908 to 1910 saw the publication of the first edition of God the Known and twenty reissues of earlier works.⁶

Butler's name was seen in print more and more frequently. The 1910 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica included a short article, less than half a column, which referred to him as "a man of great versatility, who pursued his investigations in classical scholarship, in Shakespearian criticism, biology and art with equal independence and originality." In the Supplement to the Dictionary of National Biography issued in 1912, Thomas Seccombe devoted

5 Ibid., p.40.

6 Jonathan Cape in a letter to Mr. H. Burton of Longmans Green, January 3, 1952, says that these works were "re-printed with the backing of Mrs. Bernard Shaw."

three pages to an account of Butler's life. Favourable comments on his scientific theories made their appearance. Professor Hartog contributed "The Biological Writings of Samuel Butler" to Scientific Progress in the Twentieth Century.⁷ An article by Felix Ledanteq in La Revue Scientifique contained several references to Butler's theory of heredity,⁸ and Professor William Bateson of Cambridge in Darwin and Modern Science hailed him as "the most brilliant and by far the most interesting of Darwin's opponents - whose works are at length emerging from oblivion."⁹ The first general discussion in French of Butler's work appeared in the Mercure de France in 1910.¹⁰ In the same year Israel Zangwill wrote of him as "the super-subtle satirist, . . . perhaps the subtlest wit since Swift."¹¹ Essays on Two Moderns: Euripides, Samuel Butler by W.H. Salter¹² was

7 M. Hartog, "The Biological Writings of Samuel Butler," Scientific Progress in the Twentieth Century, V (1910), 15-37.

8 F. Ledanteq, "Les deux tendances biologiques," La Revue Scientifique, February 6, 1909.

9 William Bateson, "Heredity and Variation in Modern Lights," in Darwin and Modern Science, ed. A.C. Seward (Cambridge; C.U.P., 1909), p. 88.

10 J.F. Blum, "Samuel Butler," Mercure de France, XXXVI (July 1910), 267-281.

11 Israel Zangwill, Italian Fantasies (London: Heineman, 1910), pp. 201-202.

12 W.H. Salter, Essays on Two Moderns: Euripides, Samuel Butler (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1911).

published in 1911, followed in 1912 by Robert B. Booth's Five Years in New Zealand, 1859-1864.¹³ Encouraged by all these signs of interest, Festing Jones took heart again. He attempted a reconciliation of the dispute between Butler and Darwin.¹⁴ Accounts of the Italian holidays shared with his friend appeared in 1909 and 1911.¹⁵ In 1908 he had instituted the Erewhon Dinners in Butler's honour. These functions were held annually through 1914, the number of guests increasing steadily from thirty-two to one hundred and sixty.¹⁶ The fact that Sir Edmund Gosse was the speaker at the 1912 dinner is for Hugh Kingsmill proof that "by this date Butler may be held to have arrived."¹⁷

II The First Edition of the Notebooks (1912-1913)

The Notebooks of Smauel Butler was first published near the end of 1912. It was received with a chorus of praise.

13 R.B. Booth, Five Years in New Zealand, 1859-1864 (London: printed for private circulation, 1912). Booth had worked for Butler on his sheeprun.

14 Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler, 1911.

15 Diversions in Sicily, 1909.
' Castellinaria and Other Sicilian Diversions, 1911.

16 Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, II, 417-430.

17 Hugh Kingsmill, After Puritanism, 1850-1900 (London: Duckworth, 1929), p.59.

Walter de la Mare referred to it as "a well-stocked aquarium of thoughts and whims and fancies" and "an appetizing if peculiar dish":

Butler's humour plays everywhere - nowhere more lightly than over his deepest gravity. . . . Imagination . . . here and there lifts his prose into a region not far removed from that of poetry. . . . The Notebooks defy summary or analysis, crammed as they are with speculation and wisdom, irony, satire, pranks, quips, and stories. Any page will set the wits to work, amuse, arrest, provoke. ¹⁸

A. St. John Adcock, writing in the Bookman, praised it even more highly:

His thoughts and opinions are shrewd and penetrating and often wonderfully illuminating . . . His sketches and anecdotes are admirable and full of his own quiet, dry, satirical, ironical humour. . . . I could not send you to any book of recent years that contains more wisdom, more wit, or a larger, saner philosophy of life crowded into four hundred pages, without a dull page to them all. ¹⁹

The Contemporary Review suggested that the book might prove to be "the great monument of his unusual mind and his still more potent personality - a personality that is stamped on every line that he wrote, irradiating it with shrewdness, with kindly cynicism, with the soundest of sound common-sense We fancy this book is going to be very famous, for it reveals a personality as strange as that of Robert

¹⁸ Walter de la Mare, "Current Literature," Edinburgh Review, January 1913, pp. 194-196.

¹⁹ A. St. John Adcock, "Butler's Notebooks," Bookman, XLIII (March, 1913), 326.

Burton."²⁰ Only the Athenaeum registered a dissenting vote, justly remarking that the Notebooks contained "a certain amount of trivial matter," but even the Athenaeum admitted that "nearly every page has an arresting comment, perhaps, something which the whole world is thinking, but is too timid or conventional to utter."²¹

III 1914-1918

After 1914 none of Butler's works was reissued in England until 1920, but the years 1916-1918 saw six of his books published in America, among them an edition of The Way of All Flesh with an introduction by William Lyon Phelps. Gilbert Cannan and John F. Harris wrote full length studies of Butler in 1915 and 1916 respectively.²² Meanwhile his scientific theories received respectful attention in books and periodicals.²³ The Cambridge History of English Literature devoted twenty-three pages to a discussion of his work.²⁴ Novelist May Sinclair discussed his philosophy of the

20 "The Notebooks of Samuel Butler," Contemporary Review, CIII (June 1913), 894.

21 "Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, November 23, 1912, p. 617.

22 Gilbert Cannan, Samuel Butler: a Critical Study (London: Secker, 1915).
John F. Harris, Samuel Butler: the Man and His Work (London: Grant Richards, 1916).

23 See appendix. II

24 W.T. Young, "George Meredith, Samuel Butler, George Gissing," in Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. Sir A.W. Ward and A.R. Waller (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1922), XIII, Ch. xiv.

Unconscious in Chapter I of her Defence of Idealism.²⁵ Orlo Williams praised him as an essayist.²⁶ Reminiscences of Butler began to appear in the writings of his friends - Clodd's Memories,²⁷ J.B. Yeats' Essays Irish and American,²⁸ and MacCarthy's Remnants.²⁹ English periodicals contained many articles about him, their authors including MacCarthy and Shaw and Harris, Rattray and Sampson and Holbrook Jackson. American interest in Butler was just beginning to make its appearance in this period. In 1917 Horace Bridges delivered a paper before a Chicago literary club on "Samuel Butler's Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited." In the same year Jefferson Fletcher of Columbia University wrote a comprehensive article as an introduction to selections from Butler's works in Warner's Library of the World's Best Literature.³⁰

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- 25 May Sinclair, A Defence of Idealism (London: Macmillan, 1917), pp. 3-47.
- 26 Orlo Williams, The Essay (London: Secker, 1915), pp. 17, 18.
- 27 Edward Clodd, Memories (London: Chapman and Hall, 1916), pp. 254-263.
- 28 John Butler Yeats, Essays Irish and American (London: Unwin, 1918), pp. 9-21.
- 29 Desmond MacCarthy, Remnants (London: Constable, 1918), pp. 62-68.
- 30 Jefferson Fletcher, "Samuel Butler, 1835-1902," in Warner's Library of the World's Best Literature (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1917), V, 2934a-2934m.

William Lyon Phelps discussed The Way of All Flesh at some length in his Advance of the English Novel.³¹ Francis Hackett included two essays on Butler in Horizons.³² Ten articles appeared in such periodicals as the Dial, Current Opinion, the New Republic and the North American Review. Their authors included Mrs. Stillman, Moreby Acklom, and J.B. Yeats. A German doctoral thesis, Samuel Butler der Jüngere, was written by Gerold Pestalozzi³³ and Italian interest was shown by Attilio Sella in Un Inglese Fervido Amico dell'Italia, Samuel Butler (Novaro: Miglio, 1916).

Some critics, notably Hugh Kingsmill³⁴ and St. John Ervine,³⁵ have stated that the first World War checked the spread of Butler's renown. At first glance there might seem to be some support for this view. In 1913 six of Butler's works were reissued and this number was not equalled in any year before 1922. In 1913 thirteen articles on Butler appeared

31 William Lyon Phelps, The Advance of the English Novel (New York: Dodd Mead, 1916).

32 Francis Hackett, Horizons (New York: Huebsch, 1918), pp. 92-98.

33 Gerold Pestalozzi, Samuel Butler der Jüngere, 1835-1902 (Zurich: J. Ruegg, 1914).

34 Kingsmill, p.58.

35 St. John Ervine, "The Centenary of Samuel Butler," Fortnightly Review, CXLIV (December 1935), 708.

in periodicals. In 1919 there were sixteen. None of the war years can boast of more than six. But, when we allow for the fact that eight of the 1913 articles were reviews of the Notebooks and nine of those written in 1919 were also reviews, and when we recall that Cannan and Harris published their books in 1915 and 1916, it seems truer to say that interest in Butler was not interrupted by the war, but remained steady at about the 1910 level. Indeed, the graph of Butler's fame appears to support the claim of Henry Seidel Canby that "the year 1914 marks no dividing line in our imagination, and no more than an intensification in the nature of our thinking."³⁶ In Canby's opinion, "Western civilization began to seek new realities even before the World War upset all complacency," and he cites 1910 as the year when the English reading public began to turn from Stevenson and Kipling to more "serious" writers.³⁷ Professor William York Tindall of Columbia agrees that 1910 marked a change in reading habits, a change which he attributes to the influence of Freud:

From 1910, when Freud's doctrines were first received in England, new conceptions of personality and of the motives of conduct,

36 Henry Seidel Canby, Definitions: Essays in Contemporary Criticism, 2nd Ser. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1924), p. 298.

37 Ibid., pp. 291-297.

new ideas of good and evil, gave the novel a character that filled the conservative with discomfort and sometimes alarm. ³⁸

Certainly the introduction of Freud's concept of the Unconscious should have tended to reinforce an interest in Butler's work, where the Unconscious is given such an important role. And the shock provided by the war to conventional ways of thought must have made Butler's attacks on education, on religion, and on family life more palatable to the general reader. We should not expect to find interest in Butler diminished by the war.

IV 1919-1920

In the years 1919 to 1920 Butler's fame reached its first and highest peak. The publication of Festing Jones's Memoir towards the end of 1919 was the signal for a flood of reviews in which Butler's work, rather than Jones's was evaluated. These, together with other articles on Butler, comprised a total of thirty-seven articles in periodicals during this two-year period. Erehon, Luck or Cunning and Unconscious Memory were reprinted in England. Erehon Revisited was published in America with an introduction by Moreby Acklom. Oliver Elton's Survey of English Literature ³⁹

38 William York Tindall, Forces in Modern British Literature (New York: Knopf, 1947), p. 319.

39 Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature (London: Edward Arnold, 1912-20), III, 307-310.

and J.W. Cunliffe's English Literature During the Last Half Century⁴⁰ discussed Butler's work at some length. Essays on Butler were included in books by such critics as Maurice Hewlett⁴¹ and Middleton Murry.⁴² In America interest had never been so high, and would not be again until 1932. In France, where Butler had been ignored except for J.F. Blum's account of his work in 1910, he attracted the attention of Louis Cazamian,⁴³ Abel Chevalley⁴⁴ and Valéry Larbaud.⁴⁵ Larbaud's translation of Erewhon was published in 1920.

V Jones's Memoir

The two large volumes by Henry Festing Jones published in 1919 under the title Samuel Butler, Author of

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- 40 Jefferson B. Fletcher, "Samuel Butler," in English Literature During the Last Half Century, by J.W. Cunliffe (New York: Macmillan, 1919), ch. iv, pp. 59-81.
 - 41 Maurice Hewlett, In a Green Shade; a Country Commentary (London: G. Bell, 1920), pp. 156-163.
 - 42 Middleton Murry, Aspects of Literature (London: Collins, 1920), pp. 107-120.
 - 43 Louis Cazamian, L'évolution psychologique et la littérature en Angleterre (1660-1914) (Paris: Alcan, 1920).
 - 44 Abel Chevalley, Le roman anglais de notre temps (London, 1921), ch. iv.
 - 45 Valéry Larbaud, Samuel Butler: Conférence faite le 3 novembre 1920 à la Maison des Amis des Livres (Paris, 1920), 36 pp.

Erewhon: a Memoir may be regarded both as evidence of Butler's growing fame and as a great contribution to it. Festing Jones, who was Butler's closest friend for more than twenty years, was well equipped to write a life of Butler, and he made the fullest use of his material. The biography records the most trifling details of the hero's uneventful life, even to the fact that he brushed his hair nightly, allowing fifty strokes to each side of his head. Some critics have found this uncritical heaping up of facts overpowering. Morley Roberts in a letter to W.H. Hudson in 1919 referred to the volumes as "two more heavy stones on the grave of a notable man," and added: "Jones, though he was a friend of Butler, is no Boswell."⁴⁶ Malcolm Muggeridge, no friend to either Jones or Butler, considered the work "shapeless, yet impressive, a huge, shapeless monument to Jones's egotism," but admitted that in matters of detail the author "was meticulously accurate"⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Memoir has been unreservedly praised by very competent judges. Clutton-Brock, reviewing it for the Times Literary Supplement, called it "one of the best

⁴⁶ See W.H. Hudson, Men, Books and Birds (London: Jonathan Cape, 1925), p. 216.

⁴⁷ Malcolm Muggeridge, The Earnest Atheist: a Study of Samuel Butler (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1936), p. 157.

biographies in the language,"⁴⁸ and St. John Ervine, writing in 1935 on the occasion of Butler's centenary, termed it "one of the most brilliant lives in English."⁴⁹ Hugh Kingsmill, while he admitted that its "extraordinary merits have been obscured by its length," considered Jones's tribute to be "the most singlehearted labour of love, supported by insight and considerable humour, in the list of English biographies," and commented further: "Butler is, perhaps, more fully revealed in this life than in all his own writings."⁵⁰ Those who believe that Butler will survive as a "character" long after his works have been forgotten - and there are a considerable number of people who do believe this - would share Kingsmill's view. For them at least Jones's Memoir would be the greatest of all contributions to Butler's fame.

VI Butler's Fame up to 1920

We have noted Butler's inconsiderable reputation at his death and its subsequent growth, slow at first, assisted by the efforts of his friends, by Bernard Shaw, by Clutton-Brock, to its highest

⁴⁸ A. Clutton-Brock, "The Life of Samuel Butler," TLS, October 16, 1919, p. 553.

⁴⁹ Ervine, p. 703.

⁵⁰ Kingsmill, p. 99.

peak in 1920. This phenomenon did not escape the notice of the critics. Speculation as to the possible permanence of his fame began as early as 1910.

Most observers were willing to concede that Butler's position was secure. Frank Jewett Mather, writing in the Nation gave his opinion hesitantly:

Yet his rugged scepticism and placid faith may stand when many of the prophets have vanished. So Attic is the man's intelligence, so akin to the temper of Socrates, so genuinely Aristophanic his wit that I cannot believe the world will let him die utterly. ⁵¹

The Athenaeum in 1912 remarked: "The books which he had to publish at a loss are now widely applauded; and he is, we fully believe, destined to the continuance of life in them on which he insisted as true immortality."⁵² Sydney Waterlow in the International Journal of Ethics expressed his judgment forthrightly:

Butler's position is now secure among the few men of letters who have left their imprint on our age. . . . The temper of Butler's mind, while it made him an isolated crank in his own generation, preëminently fits him to be the guide, philosopher and friend of every âme bien née in the present day. . . . He represents all that is best and soundest in modern tendencies. ⁵³

51 Frank Jewett Mather, "Samuel Butler of Erewhon," Nation, XCI (December 29, 1910), 629.

52 "Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, No. 4439 (November 23, 1912), p. 617.

53 Sydney Waterlow, rev. of The Notebooks of Samuel Butler, International Journal of Ethics, XXIII (July 1913), 497.

A. St. John Adcock in reviewing the Notebooks observed:

"Butler's fame has been a slow growth, but his niche in the Temple is secure, and if it is in a dim corner one cannot but see that the sunlight is slowly travelling his way."⁵⁴

By 1914 Desmond MacCarthy, one of Butler's earliest admirers was more firmly convinced than ever of the value of his friend's ideas. "Every year," he wrote in the Quarterly Review, "Butler emerges more clearly as one of the rare incontestable personalities in literature, who affect permanently the thought and temper of all predisposed to their influence."⁵⁵

An American writer in Current Opinion for July 1915 noted the "immense popularity" of The Way of All Flesh and Erewhon.⁵⁶

To Gilbert Cannan, whose book has been described as the acme of Butler worship, he was only "a minor writer with an almost major position":

So far posterity has not been very grateful, but it will surely acknowledge its debt to him both for his capital novel and for his good influence at a difficult time, even though it discard every thing else he ever did.⁵⁷ . . . His spirit is, in spite of his perversity, invaluable in these times of fashionable perturbation. The literary historian will have a fascinating task

⁵⁴ A. St. John Adcock, "Butler's Notebooks," Bookman, XLIII (March 1913), 326.

⁵⁵ Desmond MacCarthy, "The Author of Erewhon," Quarterly Review, CCXX (January 1914), 152.

⁵⁶ "Samuel Butler - a Man of Genius or Merely an Amiable Potterer?", Current Opinion, LIX (July 1915), 53.

⁵⁷ Cannan, pp. 192-193.

in tracing the appearance and effect of the curious imperturbable figure as so many of his applauded contemporaries begin to fade away.⁵⁸

To William Lyon Phelps in 1916 the slow growth of Butler's fame seemed to indicate permanence.⁵⁹ Current Opinion credited William James with introducing Butler to American readers, and commented: "His reputation has grown far and wide. Even those of his books which had been considered too shocking or too restricted in interest to be published have established themselves in numerous editions."⁶⁰ Mrs. Clara Gruening Stillman, who was later to write an enthusiastic biographical and critical study of Butler, observed:

He is now barely beginning the slow conquest of his rightful place as a bold and subtle thinker, one of the most original and creative minds of his time.⁶¹ . . . His reputation is in the ascendant not only as a scientist among scientists, but as novelist, satirist, sociologist, with the general public as well.⁶²

In 1920 the British critic, S.P.B. Mais, noted Butler's "ever-

58 Ibid., p. 167.

59 Phelps, p. 233.

60 "Samuel Butler - the Most Successful Failure Among Victorian Writers," Current Opinion, LXI (October 1916), 268.

61 Clara Gruening Stillman, "Samuel Butler," North American Review, CCIV (August 1916), 270.

62 Ibid., p. 278.

increasing multitude of devout believers,"⁶³ and the more conservative and scholarly Oliver Elton admitted: "Certainly, after his disappearance, he is having his share of life."⁶⁴

There were, however, some critics who were not convinced of Butler's importance, and a few who actively disliked him. A writer discussing the Notebooks in the Contemporary Review showed his awareness that "the cult associated with the name of Mr. Samuel Butler grows apace."⁶⁵ "Certainly this slow but irresistible growth of fame," he conceded, "is a fact of real interest in the history of literature," but he was not prepared to admit its permanence:

The extraordinary interest, the penetrating note, of Erewhon may or may not be sufficient to create permanent literary reputation; the philosophical outlook, the range of observation, the vast scope of knowledge, the endless doubt that broods over the world that he reveals, may or may not justify a new shrine in the Temple of Literature. ⁶⁶

The Athenaeum expressed the same uncertainty:

Although he is very good, we doubt if he is good enough to secure the immortality

63 S.P.B. Mais, "A Pre-eminent Victorian," Bookman LVII (January 1920), 153.

64 Elton, Survey of English Literature, III, 307.

65 Unsigned rev. of The Notebooks of Samuel Butler, Contemporary Review, CIII (June 1913), 892.

66 Ibid., p. 893.

en bloc which he so strongly coveted. ⁶⁷

George Sampson refused to apply the term "greatness" to "men on the slight scale of Butler."⁶⁸ Butler is not one of the great beacons of human progress," he insisted, "and it is stupid to pretend that he is. Yet, though he is a lesser luminary, he casts a very clear light in some very dim places."⁶⁹ By 1919 Butler's fame was so widespread that A.B. Clifton could write in the Athenaeum, "The Samuel Butler cult is becoming almost as great a bore as was the Omar-Fitzgerald madness a few years ago."⁷⁰ Even Bernard Shaw felt it necessary to protest against the uncritical and wholesale acceptance of Butler's beliefs:

From idiotic underestimate and neglect of him we are already turning to deify him, in spite of his own warnings, as one who could do no wrong. The reviews of Mr. Jones's memoirs are as shameless in this matter as the memoir itself. ⁷¹

67 Unsigned rev. of The Notebooks of Samuel Butler, Athenaeum, No. 4661 (August 29, 1919), p. 809.

68 George Sampson, "Samuel Butler, 1835-1902," Bookman, XLVIII (August 1915), 129.

69 Ibid., p. 133.

70 A.B. Clifton, letter to the editor, Athenaeum, No. 4659 (August 15, 1919), p. 759.

71 Shaw, Works, XXIX, 61, reprinted from Manchester Guardian, November 1, 1919.

Between 1910 and 1920 Butler's work was admired rather than attacked, even by those critics who could not award him a place among the great. A few writers praised him for his iconoclasm, but he was chiefly valued as an original and constructive thinker.

The few who belittled his achievements revived the old charge that Butler was not equipped to build up or demolish scientific theories. The Athenaeum in 1919 condemned him as "an eccentric and original amateur."⁷² Robert Morse Lovett, writing in the Nation in 1920, asserted that he lacked training and technical knowledge.⁷³ But the sharpest attack made on Butler during this period came from Samuel Chew, the biographer of Byron. Chew had no use for Butler. As a man, he found him "narrow-minded" and "conceited," as a biologist, worthless. In reviewing Jones's Memoir for Modern Language Notes, he wrote:

His speculations are by no means deserving of all the belated fame that has overtaken them. . . . It has helped Butler's fame immensely that the progress of research has brought evolutionary doctrine in some particulars into harmony with his theories; but beyond doubt the same position would have been reached had

72 "Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, No. 4661 (August 29, 1919), p. 809.

73 Robert Morss Lovett, "Butler at Length," Nation, CX. (February 28, 1920), 264-265.

Butler never lived.⁷⁴

In some quarters Butler was valued as the great iconoclast and liberator from convention. John F. Harris, author of the full-length study of Butler published in 1916, wrote; "Butler, with cleansing force, has shown up the Victorian system as it actually was, and the falsities on which the nineteenth century built itself."⁷⁵ . . . From the first rather puzzled pages of Erewhon to the triumphant convictions of The Way of All Flesh he attacked English shams, hyprocrisies and humbugs."⁷⁶ Francis Hackett commended Butler's liberating genius, remarking: "It cannot but open the doors for those who have felt orthodoxies stifle them in their own attempt to think for themselves."⁷⁷ "D.H.", writing in the Athenaeum, described Butler as "the man who after Darwin himself did more than anyone else to loosen from our backs the burdens which our fathers had borne and bound in their turn on us."⁷⁸ Arthur Waugh regarded him as

74 Samuel C. Chew, rev. of Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, Modern Language Notes, XXXV (1920), 435.

75 John F. Harris, p. 109.

76 Ibid., p. 259.

77 Hackett, p. 98.

78 "D.H.", "The Home of Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, No. 4657 (August 1, 1919), p. 679.

"a most wholesome exploder of ignorance and prejudice."⁷⁹

Butler's admirers found various reasons for praising him. Many vague references were made to his genius, his wisdom and his originality, but the more specific tributes refer to his contribution to biological theory, to moral philosophy or to satire.

"J.A.H.", reviewing nine of Butler's books for Nature in 1913, attested "the whimsical genius of Samuel Butler, . . . a serious thinker, of scientific methods, but with a spiritual and teleological view of evolution, in which he was in advance of his time."⁸⁰ For Bernard Shaw, Butler's insistence on mind and purpose in the universe was the proof of his greatness. In Shaw's view, the result of popular acceptance of the theory of natural selection "was half a century of bedevilment, folly, pessimism, despair, and cowardice, of which we are now reaping the fruits in Flanders; and against this Butler stood for years alone for science against the purblind naturalists and biologists, with their following of miracle mongers, experiment

79 Arthur Waugh, Tradition and Change, (London: Chapman and Hall, 1919), p. 232.

80 "J.A.H.", "Philosophy and Psychology," Nature, XC (February 27, 1913), p. 696.

jobbers and witch doctors all absurdly claiming to be the men of science."⁸¹ Before 1920 some of the men of science whom Shaw denounced so roundly had ranged themselves on Butler's side. Besides Professor Hartog and Professor Bateson, who have been mentioned before, there was A.D. Darbishire, the young biologist who introduced Butler's work to Bergson. Darbishire had been so forcibly impressed by Butler's insistence that biology is rightly the study of the living organism that he made it the central tenet of his work.⁸² Had Darbishire lived, it is almost certain that Butler's fame as a scientific thinker would be wider today. The great naturalist, W.H. Hudson, admired Butler's "acute reasoning and splendid independence" and considered that he had "influenced thought more than any other writer of the last half of the nineteenth century."⁸³ . . . It was he and not Herbert Spencer or any one else who smashed the Darwin idol and finally compelled the angels of science to creep cautiously in where the jeered fool had rushed - and led the

81 Shaw, Works, XXIX, 74, reprinted from New Statesman, May 8, 1915.

82 A.D. Darbishire, An Introduction to a Biology and Other Papers (London: Cassell, 1917).

83 Hudson, p. 207

way. Darwin's glory is that he compelled the world to listen to the doctrine of transition - Butler's that he brought the Darwin cult to an end." ⁸⁴

Those critics whose interests have been restricted to other fields have ignored Butler's biological theories or dismissed them in a few words. In their eyes his long dispute with Darwin was a regrettable and ill-mannered diversion of his talent from its rightful path. Edmund Gosse found Butler's scientific works unreadable. ⁸⁵ Cannan disliked them. ⁸⁶ Some of these men, however, have been interested in Butler as a moralist or moral philosopher. In Gilbert Cannan's opinion "it is impossible to insist too much on Butler's moral importance. He aimed at influencing men and women and converting them to the New Reason, Darwinized Voltaire and Rousseau, much more than at leaving them works of art of a permanent and impersonal value." ⁸⁷ To Sydney Waterlow Butler was "all unknowingly the father of pragmatism." ⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Hudson, p. 219.

⁸⁵ Edmund Gosse, "Samuel Butler," Edinburgh Review, CCXXXI (January 1920), 60.

⁸⁶ Cannan, p. 59.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 189.

⁸⁸ Waterlow, p. 499.

Desmond MacCarthy drew attention to one of Butler's special interests in this field:

The importance of money as the means to a good life is a theme which Butler constantly and vehemently emphasized. The emphasis he laid on it is one of the characteristics which made him so original a moralist and so acute a commentator on life. ⁸⁹

Friend and foe united to praise Butler as humorist and satirist. Gilbert Cannan valued him chiefly as a humorist. "His nonsense is more precious than his sense," he declared, "a more palatable and a richer food for the mind."⁹⁰

According to Harris Butler's greatest importance lay in his general position as a satirist and ironist.⁹¹ Current Opinion, reviewing Harris' study, agreed:

Satire was Samuel Butler's perfect weapon, but his was a creative satire, not a destructive. . . . Butler's satire was designed to help the age rehabilitate itself, by getting into honest relations with its own motives and purposes. ⁹²

89 Desmond MacCarthy, "The Author of Erewhon," Quarterly Review, CCXX (January 1914), p. 157.

90 Cannan, p. 88.

91 John F. Harris, p. 15.

92 "Samuel Butler - the Most Successful Failure Among Victorian Writers," Current Opinion, LXI (October 1916), 268.

Even Samuel Chew, Butler's sternest critic up to 1920, conceded that Butler would be remembered as a satirist, if for nothing else.⁹³

93 Chew, p. 437.

CHAPTER III

Butler's Fame (1921-1951): Ebb and Flow

I 1921-1927

Between 1921 and 1927 interest in Butler continued to be high, if not quite at the 1920 level. There was no falling-off of his fame in England. On the continent he received more attention than ever before, - in France, Germany and Holland. American periodicals, however, gave less space to articles on Butler and much American comment during this period was sharply hostile.

Publication of Butler's books, interrupted by the war, had been resumed in 1920. The Shrewsbury Edition of his works was issued at intervals between 1923 and 1926. The Traveller's Library, the Modern Readers Series, the Modern Library and Everyman included Butler titles for the first time, a significant indication of the growth of Butler's renown. In France Valéry Larbaud published his translations of The Way of All Flesh, Life and Habit and Erewhon Revisited.

Festing Jones and A.T. Bartholomew catalogued the Butler collection at St. John's College, Cambridge. A.J. Hoppe made a careful bibliography of his works and of works written about him.¹ Three students, two Hollanders and an American,

¹ A.J. Hoppe, A Bibliography of the Writings of Samuel Butler (Author of "Erewhon") and of Writings About Him (London: Office of the Bookman's Journal, 1925).

wrote theses on Butler.² His cousin Mrs. Garnett in Samuel Butler and His Family Relations³ attempted to defend Butler's parents and sisters in a book declared by one critic to be the best possible vindication of The Way of All Flesh. But the most important book-length contribution to Butler's fame during this period was C.E.M. Joad's enthusiastic Samuel Butler,⁴ which lauded its subject as an exploder of Victorian prejudice. Many references to Butler appeared in surveys of literature, works of criticism, collections of essays and reviews, memoirs and scientific treatises.⁵ Among English writers who showed their interest in Butler in this way were George Sampson, Hugh Walker and Orlo Williams, Quiller-Couch, Sir Edmund Gosse and J.C. Squire, Forbes-Robertson and W.B. Yeats, and the biologists Semon and Reinheimer. American critics included Paul Elmer More, Stuart Pratt Sherman and Henry Seidel Canby. Careful estimates of Butler's work were written in France by such competent judges as L  gouis and

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- 2 Willem Gerard Bekker, An Historical and Critical Review of Samuel Butler's Literary Works (Rotterdam, 1925), 258 pp.
 Petronella Jacoba de Lange, Samuel Butler: Critic and Philosopher (Zutphen, 1925), 174 pp.
 Brenton Wallace Stevenson, Samuel Butler, Author of The Way of All Flesh: a Study of His Leading Ideas (New York, 1925).
- 3 Martha Garnett, Samuel Butler and His Family Relations (London: Dent, 1926).
- 4 C.E.M. Joad, Samuel Butler, 1835-1902 (London: Leonard Parsons, 1924).
- 5 See Appendix II.

Cazamian, Madeleine Cazamian and Abel Chevalley. During this seven year period at least fifty-six articles on Butler appeared in periodicals, thirty in Britain, nine in France, eight in the United States, four in Germany, two in Canada, and one each in Holland, Italy and Argentina. Among the contributors could be listed many whose names have been mentioned above, as well as Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, Robert Graves and the Canadian Butlerite, Carleton W. Stanley.

The rapid growth of Butler's reputation was still a matter for comment. To Edward Shanks it was "like the plant grown from the Indian enchanter's bean."⁶ Carleton Stanley, writing in the Queen's Quarterly in 1921, remarked: "Four or five years ago it was possible to lecture to a Canadian audience of some culture, and discover later that many of the literate had come supposing from the title, 'Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon,' that the lecturer had come upon a hitherto unknown work by the author of Hudibras, or perhaps, even, by the author of the Analogy."⁷ Four years later in the Dalhousie

6 Edward Shanks, First Essays On Literature (London: Collins, 1923), p. 12.

7 Carleton Stanley, "The Author of Erewhon," Queen's Quarterly, XXIX (October 1921), 114.

Review he observed: "Nowadays of course . . . there are very few people who do not claim to have read Samuel Butler."⁸ In England critics had begun as early as 1920 to assert that Butler was over-rated. First to make the charge was Maurice Hewlett.⁹ Shanks and Sherman and Paul Jordan-Smith concurred. Said Jordan-Smith:

He who was rejected by his own age is apt to be too much accepted by ours. We are fated to have too many novels after the manner of The Way of All Flesh, too many essays in the Butlerian manner, and too wholesale an acceptance of his philosophy of life. ¹⁰

George Sampson, reviewing Erewhon Revisited for the Bookman in the same year, expressed what is perhaps a juster estimate of the course of Butler's fame:

On the whole it seems fairly certain that Butler has at last attained the rank of a classic. Butler languished for a time in the limbo of the unread, was suddenly rediscovered and fanatically boomed and has now subsided into the ranks, the noble exclusive ranks of the steady sellers. ¹¹

It was during this period that Butler's "influence" was first discussed. Stuart Sherman, convinced as he was that Butler's influence was far from good was forced to admit that

8 Carleton Stanley, "The Originality of Samuel Butler," Dalhousie Review, V (July 1925), 229.

9 Hewlett, p. 156.

10 Paul Jordan-Smith, On Strange Altars (London: Brentano's, 1923), p. 198.

11 George Sampson, rev. of Erewhon Revisited, Bookman, LXV (November 1923), 86.

it was strong. "Butler is now more than a man," he wrote. "He is a spiritual ancestor, leader of a movement, moulder of young minds, founder of a faith."¹² The poet Robert Graves, who as a schoolboy had promptly spent his prize money on Butler's books, asserted eleven years later: "The beginnings of most contemporary movements toward freedom of opinion on religion, aesthetics, or philosophy, can be traced to Butler."¹³ Paul Jordan-Smith was more specific:

One cannot turn many pages of modern fiction without finding the very patent effects of Samuel Butler on contemporary thought and style. A glance at the work of such men as Gilbert Cannan, J.D. Beresford, Somerset Maugham and many another of the younger English novelists would show just how profound a change Butler has wrought.¹⁴

In the opinion of Abel Chevalley, "a portion of the philosophy and literature in contemporary England, and even elsewhere should be labelled: 'After Butler.'¹⁵ . . . Literary youth, between 1905 and 1915 has fed on Butler."¹⁶

12 Stuart Sherman, "Samuel Butler: Diogenes of the Victorians," in Modern Essays, sel. by Christopher Morley (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1921), p. 192.

13 Robert Graves, "The Galileo of Mare's Nests," Living Age, CCCXX (January 26, 1924), 183.

14 Jordan-Smith, On Strange Altars, p. 177.

15 Abel Chevalley, The Modern English Novel, trans. Ben Ray Redman (New York: Knopf, 1925), p. 101.

16 Ibid., p. 105.

In the nineteen-twenties Butler was more highly esteemed for his destructive attacks on conventional institutions than for any of his positive contributions to thought. An elementary textbook published by the University Tutorial Press in the course of its survey of modern English literature gave seven lines to Butler. He was "comparable with Swift in his mastery of lucid and powerful English." He was remarkable for his "profound insight" and for his "subtle criticism of the weakness of English social and religious conventions."¹⁷ His constructive ideas were not mentioned. Joad by no means ignored Butler's constructive ideas, but he thoroughly approved of the attack on Victorian institutions:

It was Samuel Butler who first laughed at the gods of Victorian England; it was Samuel Butler who thawed that first tiny hole in the icy crust of Victorian morality, through which were soon to pour the floods of Shavian invective; it was Samuel Butler who first took the portentous lay figure of Victorian complacency by the throat and shook it until the stuffing came out. Butler, then, was a satirist, a mocker, a jester, not savage like Swift, but irreverent like a school-boy who laughs his masters out of countenance.¹⁸

Sampson and Shanks and Chevalley recognized the value of Butler's indictment of social hypocrisy, but Stuart Sherman, as might be

17 A.J. Wyatt and Henry Clay, Modern English Literature (London: University Tutorial Press, 1927), p. 163.

18 C.E.M. Joad, Samuel Butler, p. 16.

expected, tried to account for Butler's popularity on a theory all his own:

Ultimately Butler's vogue is due to the fact that he is a friend of the Georgian revolution in the very citadel of the enemy; the extraordinary acclaim with which he is now received is his reward for having long ago prepared to betray the Victorians into the hands of a ruthless posterity. He was a traitor to his own times. 19

Some critics looked on Butler's scientific views as unfounded impertinence.²⁰ Others, such as Joad, considered them of the greatest importance:

Butler's fortune was nothing more nor less than an original contribution to the theory of Creative Evolution on the biological side, the inspired audacity of which places him second to none, not even to Darwin himself, among the pioneers of the nineteenth century. Twentieth century developments in the philosophy of evolution have borne out and justified Butler no less remarkably than twentieth century developments of morality, or rather, the lack of it, and it is high time today, . . . that attention should be paid to the more constructive side of his work. 21

Leonard Woolf, reviewing Joad's book, argued that here Butler was being given more than his due:

He left his own theory in the air, one of those clever improvisations which obviously contain much which is not true, but which may contain a vague adumbration of subsequently discovered truths. That may be inspired

19 Sherman, p. 193.

20 C.E. Ayres, "Hush! It's Butler," New Republic, XL (September 10, 1924), 48.

21 Joad, Samuel Butler, p. 18.

audacity, but it does not entitle Butler to the first place among scientific pioneers of the nineteenth century.²²

French critics, on the whole, gave more serious consideration to Butler as a thinker than did their English colleagues. To Madeleine Cazamian he was the precursor of Bergson²³ and Nietzsche.²⁴ Valéry Larbaud compared him with Goethe.²⁵

II 1928-1931

If the number of words about him appearing in print be taken as a measure of man's fame, then the years 1928-1931 mark a definite slump in Butler's. On the other hand the fact that eight of his works were offered in popular editions during this period is a sure indication of the publishers' belief that the general reader was still curious about his ideas. The critics, however, had moved on to fresher fields. Except in Germany there was almost no general discussion of Butler either as iconoclast or constructive philosopher.

22 Leonard Woolf, "The World of Books: Samuel Butler Again," Nation and Athenaeum, XXXVI (December 6, 1924), 364.

23 Madeleine Cazamian, Le roman et les idées en Angleterre: L'influence de la science (1860-1890) (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), p. 237.

24 Ibid., p. 223.

25 Valéry Larbaud, "Samuel Butler," Revue de Paris, XXX (August 15, 1923), 748.

German translations of Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh were published in 1928. In the following year appeared a treatise by R. Stoff, Die Philosophie des Organischen bei Samuel Butler. Paul Meissner's Samuel Butler, der Jüngere, according to Lee Elbert Holt one of the best general discussions of Butler and his work, was completed in 1931. Seven articles on Butler were printed in German periodicals between 1928 and 1930. In fact, it is safe to say that what was in other countries a period of decline for Butler's fame in Germany marked its highest point.

In other countries interest in Butler was confined to special aspects of his work. Farrington's defence of Butler's Homeric theories in Samuel Butler and the Odyssey (1929) called forth articles in the Classical Weekly (1930) and the Revue des Etudes Homériques (1931). New Zealanders recalled Butler's five year residence in their country in National History of Canterbury, (New Zealand) (1928) and Early Canterbury Runs (1930). English and American critics shifted their attention from Butler's philosophy to his personality, using a new approach. Festing Jones had been content to build up a picture of Butler by listing his habits and quoting his remarks. He observed carefully, he recorded minutely, but he explained nothing. Kingsmill and Sherman used the new tool of psychological analysis

to probe beneath the surface incidents. Their problem was to show "what makes Sammy run."

III 1932-1937

Except for the peak years 1919 and 1920 Butler's fame was never higher than it was between 1932 and 1937. Three new works were issued during this period. Butleriana²⁶ contains Butler's account of his relations with his father, Pauli, Festing Jones and Miss Savage, and some racy quotations from his cousin's housekeeper, Mrs. Boss, the original of the celebrated Mrs. Jupp. Further Extracts from the Notebooks of Samuel Butler was published by Jonathan Cape in 1934. But perhaps most interesting to the casual reader is the third. Butler, who always kept a pressed copy of his own letters, had carefully preserved those received from Miss Savage after 1871. In 1935 this correspondence was published.²⁷ Miss Savage's letters are full of good things, from which Butler borrowed unashamedly for his books in accordance with his theory that "appropriate passages are meant to be appropriated." In

26 Samuel Butler, Butleriana, ed. A.T. Bartholomew (London: Nonesuch, 1932).

27 Letters Between Samuel Butler and Miss E.M.A. Savage (London: Cape, 1935).

addition to the new works there were during these six years twenty-four separate editions of older ones, chiefly of Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh. The man in the street, if he was interested, could buy Erewhon for sixpence. For the collector the Limited Editions Club added an introduction by Aldous Huxley (New York, 1936).

No other six year period can boast of so many book-length studies of Butler. Un romanziere e biologo inglese, Samuel Butler by Elena Carlo Seregui was published in Athens (1933). Jugo-Slavia contributed Böttger's Samuel Butlers satirische Romane (Marburg, 1936). In France J.B. Fort completed an exhaustive two volume analysis - Tome I, Samuel Butler, Etude d'un caractère et d'une intelligence and Tome II, Samuel Butler, l'écrivain, Etude d'un style (Bordeaux, 1935). In reviewing this work the Times Literary Supplement remarked:

Recognition may have been late in coming [to Butler], as it was to Stendhal, but in the last thirty years it has grown in volume, until now, with the publication of Dr. J.B. Fort's study, the debt has been paid in full. ²⁸

In 1932 an American, Mrs. Clara Gruening Stillman, a wholehearted admirer of Butler, wrote Samuel Butler: a Mid-Victorian Modern,²⁹ one of the best and most readable accounts of his

²⁸ "Erewhon Butler," TLS, August 22, 1936, p. 676, col. 4.

²⁹ C.G. Stillman, Samuel Butler: a Mid-Victorian Modern (New York: Viking Press, 1932).

life and works. Four years later in England Eyre and Spottiswoode published The Earnest Atheist, Malcolm Muggeridge's devastating psychological attack on Butler's personality, a book universally condemned by the critics as unfair and inaccurate. R.F. Rattray's Samuel Butler: a Chronicle and an Introduction³⁰ has more in common with Mrs. Stillman's study than with The Earnest Atheist.

Reviews of these books as well as other articles in periodicals, some of them in 1935 celebrating the centenary of his birth, kept Butler's name before the public. At least thirty-one appeared in Britain, twenty-two in America, nine in France and two in Germany, and this list does not claim to be exhaustive. Their authors include Joad and MacCarthy and Jordan-Smith, all veteran Butlerites, but other names appear for the first time - Graham Greene and Edmund Wilson and Catherine Carswell. Butler was mentioned in memoirs. His books were discussed in collections of critical essays and histories of the novel.³¹ H.C. O'Neill wrote a biographical sketch for Great Victorians.³²

30 R.F. Rattray, Samuel Butler: a Chronicle and an Introduction (London: Duckworth, 1935).

31 See Appendix II.

32 H.C. O'Neill, "Samuel Butler," in Great Victorians, ed. H.J. Massingham and Hugh Massingham (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1932), pp. 107-120.

During this period critics again turned their attention to Butler's fame, trying to account for its growth, to assess its current vitality, and to predict its future. Their conclusions were by no means unanimous. Horace Gregory, writing in 1932, seems to have been completely unaware that Butler was about to enter into his second life after death:

These times are bad for Butler, almost as bad as the Victorian half century in which he lived, but for a different reason. With the first wave of reaction against Victorian morality Butler was absorbed, accepted at once and then taken for granted. The process of assimilation was so rapid that Butler's aims were but half realized, and he is now dismissed as another Shavian platitude. ³³

Babette Deutsch dated the rise of Butler's fame from the publication of The Way of All Flesh: "If it has declined somewhat of late, there is reason to believe that its bones will rise again."³⁴ St. John Ervine three years later also ascribed Butler's fame to The Way of All Flesh, assisted by Jones's Memoir and the Notebooks. In estimating Butler's position on the centenary of his birth, Ervine found "his renown less wide than it was soon after his death," but "his reputation as a thinker more assured."³⁵ . . . Butler is still

³³ Horace Gregory, "The Perfect Interpretation," New York Herald Tribune Books, October 2, 1932, p. 3.

³⁴ Babette Deutsch, rev. of C.G. Stillman, Samuel Butler: a Mid-Victorian Modern, New Republic, LXXIII (December 14, 1932), 136.

³⁵ St. John Ervine, "The Centenary of Samuel Butler," Fortnightly Review, CXLIV (December 1935), 698.

an author in search of a public.³⁶ . . . Butler himself will not take a place among Englishmen of supreme genius, nor even among the men of great genius, but he fills a high place among ordinary men of genius. . . . That place will, as time goes on, become increasingly apparent to his countrymen."³⁷ Why Ervine considered Butler's renown less wide than it had been is not clear. This was not the general opinion. Paul Jordan-Smith declared that he was "increasingly well-remembered."³⁸ Fred T. Marsh referred to his "constantly growing reputation,"³⁹ and Moreby Acklom concurred.⁴⁰

Even critics so widely separated in their views as Malcolm Muggeridge and Mrs. Stillman agreed that Butler had profoundly influenced the ways of thought of succeeding generations. In fact Butler's detractors were more insistent on this point than his admirers. Muggeridge blamed Butler for all the evils of the Western world. "We are sprung from Butler's loins,"

36 Ibid., 708.

37 Ibid., 710.

38 Paul Jordan-Smith, "Samuel Butler - the First Century," Colophon, I, N.S. (October 1935), 272.

39 Fred T. Marsh, "A Victorian Modern," Nation, CXXXV (November 9, 1932), 462.

40 Moreby Acklom, "Recrudescent Samuel Butler," Saturday Review of Literature, November 26, 1932, p. 267.

he wrote in the preface to his book, "and watching him is watching our begetting."⁴¹ Miriam Colgate was no friend to Butler, but she was conscious of his influence, and tended to exaggerate rather than minimize it:

Few literary men are destined to have such an effect on the generations which immediately follow them as Samuel Butler has had. . . . There is hardly an English-speaking person alive today whose life is not in some way altered - and in most cases warped - by the fact that Samuel Butler lived, despised his family, nursed his childish pain throughout his life, and wrote "The Way of All Flesh."⁴²

Mrs. Stillman too discussed Butler's influence, but from a widely different point of view. In her eyes it was good in every aspect:

Butler lives profoundly and widely in the intellectual consciousness of today. His relation to contemporary thought is remarkably complex and subtle. His immense posthumous influence is amply recognized in its more obvious manifestations. Superficially he lives first of all because he is so amusing, and so intellectually exciting. The delightful wit, the entrancing irony with which he presented the corrosive social criticism of The Way of All Flesh and Erewhon, the pithy aphoristic style of the Notebooks, his excellence as a storyteller, the bravura of his paradoxes have repeatedly forced the admiration of readers who were shocked by his point of view. But his point of view endeared him to thousands, for they recognized in his iconoclasms the exuberant justification of their own feeble revolt, the personal struggle lifted out of its self-

⁴¹ Muggeridge, Earnest Atheist, p. xx.

⁴² Miriam Colgate, "The Infant Samuel," American Review, VIII (March 1937), 622.

devouring isolation into the great current of social and literary history, become a thing of beauty and power having the validity of connexion with a great social movement, expressible in letters and art. He became a great force for personal rebellion first of all through fiction and his influence on fiction. The quality of his wit, satiric with zest, profoundly honest and dealing with great issues, cannot really be separated from the subject matter. The element of personal experience in the subject matter of Butler's wit is one of the elements of its greatness and vitality. For to distil wit from one's pain and extract from the corrosion of suffering universal views and philosophic ironies is one of the great achievements and most singular satisfactions of life and letters. ⁴³

The first world war and the consequent social upheavals resulted in changed moral standards. The old values disintegrated. Open indifference to the established forms of religion became general. The historical accuracy of the Bible was a question that no longer mattered. Most men tacitly decided against it and turned their attention to problems which had never existed for their parents. As more and more young people became economically independent, the old authority of the home fell in shreds. Many of Butler's objectives were so thoroughly accomplished that critics were no longer interested in him chiefly as an iconoclast. Robert Morss Lovett and his collaborator Helen Sard Hughes were exceptions. In their opinion: "Butler owes his eminence in the twentieth century, as Swift in the

⁴³ Stillman, Samuel Butler, p. 301.

eighteenth to his inveterate practice of attacking and exposing the shams of intellectual and social life in his time."⁴⁴ Mrs. Stillman's rebuttal of Muggeridge's attack implies that by 1937 interest in this side of Butler's work was purely historical. She contended that The Earnest Atheist gives "a distorted view of Butler and of his relation to his own generation and later ones to whom he actually was, like it or not, a fresh wind blowing, a breeze of liberation."⁴⁵ Granville Hicks' comment is interesting. It is one of the first indications of a fundamental shift in the critics' appraisal of Butler. To Sir Edmund Gosse and C.E.M. Joad, writing in the early 'twenties, he was the earliest anti-Victorian. After the mid-'thirties he is seen as a part of the pattern of his own time:

Butler's role in the breakdown of the Victorian synthesis was an important one, and his career is significant for the student of ideas because it indicates how far the forces that destroyed Victorianism grew out of the very conditions that had shaped its growth. ⁴⁶

Opinion of Butler's more constructive ideas was sharply divided, Edward Kingsbury in the New York Times Book

⁴⁴ Robert Morss Lovett and Helen Sard Hughes, The History of the Novel in England (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1932), p. 381.

⁴⁵ Stillman, "With Unutterable Horror," New York Herald Tribune Books, March 14, 1937, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Granville Hicks, "The Victorian Villain," New Republic, XC (May 5, 1937), 394.

Review disagreed violently with Mrs. Stillman's estimate of his importance, referred to him slightly as "the god of a cult," and disparaged his achievements in every field.⁴⁷ The reviewer of Further Extracts for Life and Letters was equally emphatic in his distaste:

Butler has for long enough been the object of a fairly intensive cult, which in so far as it claims for him the title of a profound or original thinker, ought to be discouraged. . . . His metaphysics were shallow, his biology guess-work, his painting dilettante and his music monomaniac: while his literary criticism, like all his other activities, was inspired by the single eagerness of exposing shams.⁴⁸

Butler's supporters, however, outnumbered his attackers and were just as whole-hearted in their views. During this period they showed a tendency to stress what they called "the prophetic aspects of his incursions into varied fields of criticism, literature, philosophy and science."⁴⁹ In 1935 Joad reiterated the judgment expressed eleven years earlier: "Samuel Butler was one of the most original thinkers of any age, and quite the most original of

⁴⁷ Edward Kingsbury, "A Modern Among the Victorians," New York Times Book Review, November 13, 1932, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Unsigned rev. of Further Extracts, Life and Letters, X (1934), pp. 113, 114.

⁴⁹ C.A. Kofoid, rev. of C.G. Stillman, Samuel Butler, Isis, XX (1933), 294.

his own."⁵⁰ He supported his statement by crediting Butler with the doctrine of Creative Evolution, and drew attention to his quick perception of the dangers that lurk in mechanization: "No nineteenth century writer before Butler had seriously doubted the unmixed blessedness of machines. Butler was the first to strike the note of alarm which sounds ever more persistently through all the disharmonies of modern literature."⁵¹ For Mrs. Stillman this aspect of Butler's thought had wider connotations:

What he wrote about the machines suggests the mystic germ of modern art and its philosophic implications, the acceptance of the machine as part of a new vision of the physical and spiritual universe; in which, in eternally shifting and recombining configurations of beauty and horror, man and the machine are forever mutually assimilated and opposed. ⁵²

IV 1938-1951

Since 1937 there has been a sharp falling-off of interest in Butler. A catalogue of the Butler collection

50 C.E.M. Joad, rev. of R.F. Rattray, Samuel Butler, Fortnightly Review, ~~CXCVII~~ (May 1935), 636.
CXLVIII

51 Ibid., p. 636.

52 Stillman, Samuel Butler, p. 303.

at Williams College was printed in 1945.⁵³ In 1947 Home and Van Thal published Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh, a book of 113 pages by G.D.H. Cole, which Time described as "like Butler himself, full of pig-headed notions, but clear, brisk and never dull,"⁵⁴ while Notes and Queries considered it "a careful appreciation of Butler's life and books."⁵⁵ P.N. Furbank's Samuel Butler, the LeBas Prize essay, published by the Cambridge University Press in 1948, was a successful attempt to refute Muggeridge's portrayal of Butler as a divided personality in which the two halves were perpetually at war. Surveys such as Baker's History of the English Novel⁵⁶ and Sampson's Concise Cambridge History of English Literature⁵⁷ gave careful estimates of Butler's work and his influence on later thinkers and writers. The Triple Thinkers by Edmund Wilson⁵⁸ and Figures

53 Catalogue of the Collection of Samuel Butler of Erehon in the Chapin Library, Williams College, Williamstown, Mass. (Portland, Me.: Southworth-Anthoensen, 1945).

54 "Timidity and Temerity," Time, LII (December 6, 1948), 71.

55 Unsigned rev. of G.D.H. Cole, Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh, Notes and Queries, CXCII (October 18, 1947), p. 461.

56 Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel: Yesterday (London: Witherby, 1939), pp. 244-287.

57 George Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1944).

58 Edmund Wilson, The Triple Thinkers (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1938), pp. 210-219.

of Transition by Granville Hicks⁵⁹ contained essays on Butler. Periodicals paid less attention to him than ever before. Articles, including reviews of Cole and Furbank, average barely two a year. They include two by E.M. Forster, two by Betty Miller in Nineteenth Century, one by V.S. Pritchett, and five by Lee Elbert Holt, an American student of Butler.

Despite the increasing neglect of the critics the reading public still showed interest in Butler's works, chiefly in The Way of All Flesh. His name appears on the publishers' lists for every year but 1943. The Fair Haven was reprinted in 1938, Erewhon and Selected Essays in 1940, Further Extracts and Selections From the Notebooks in 1941, Letters Between Samuel Butler and Miss Savage in 1944, and Erewhon Revisited in 1949. The Iliad was reissued in 1941 and 1942, and the Odyssey in 1944. The Way of All Flesh is listed seventeen times between 1939 and 1951. In addition, there were an Italian translation published in 1939 and reprinted in 1946, and a Spanish translation in 1944. The following extract from a letter written by Jonathan Cape, publisher of Butler's works since 1922, to Mr. H. Burton of

59 Granville Hicks, Figures of Transition: a Study of British Literature at the End of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Macmillan, 1939), pp. 115-176.

Longmans Green, Toronto, on January 3, 1952 gives some indication of Butler's popularity:

The only books of Butler's that have sold in quantity are Erewhon, Erewhon Revisited, The Way of All Flesh and The Notebooks. The other titles, his translations from the Greek and his evolutionary books, had only a trickle of sale over many years. Their re-publication was made possible by ploughing back the profits from the quick-selling into reprints of all the other titles. But now, as a result of the war, the bulk of Butler titles are not in print.

Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh are in cheap paper editions. We have just published an entirely new volume of Selections From the Notebooks. For the general reader we published last year The Essential Samuel Butler.

There was not much discussion during this period either of the growth of Butler's fame or of its current height. Ernest Baker noted "a boom in Butlerism in the years following his death," and declared that his influence had been powerful and lasting.⁶⁰ Elizabeth Bowen in English Novelists commented: "His reputation, however, has been cumulative, and his importance continues to grow today."⁶¹ P.N. Furbank was thinking only of the effect of The Earnest Atheist on Butler's fame when he wrote:

The position is, therefore, that the last word upon Butler is at present a wholesale slaughter of his reputation as a character and writer.⁶²

⁶⁰ Baker, p. 259.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Bowen, English Novelists (London: Collins, 1942) p. 39.

⁶² P.N. Furbank, Samuel Butler, 1835-1902 (Cambridge: C.U.P. 1948), p. 5.

The Times Literary Supplement showed an appreciation of the over-all pattern, remarking: "There have been two or three revivals of popularity during the past fifty years. They occur and they fade."⁶³

Years of argument have failed to settle all the disputes provoked by Butler's actions and ideas. Although their differences may not be so bitter, and neither faction is so whole-hearted as it was, there are still those who are for him and those who are against him. Among the latter we must list George Sampson, who once described himself as a Butlerian. By 1944 Sampson had decided that Butler was "an acrimonious and curiously provincial character":

That Butler had genius is not to be denied; but it was a sterile genius. It encouraged the would-be clever to look for the defects of great men and to laugh at their greatness. Butler never had the least hesitation in proclaiming the worthlessness of writers whose works he had no intention of reading. As a humorist and satirist, expressing himself in lucid, personal prose, he takes high place; but for the more richly creative qualities of a writer one looks to Samuel Butler in vain. ⁶⁴

63 "The Church Rationalist: Butler's Own Musical Bank," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 161.

64 Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 808.

Two sentences from Forces in Modern British Literature will serve to show that Professor Tindall's opinion was hardly more favourable than Sampson's:

Converted to Butler, Shaw, a master of publicity, converted others. . . . His assurance that Butler was 'advanced' kept diners (at the Erewhon Dinners) from perceiving his middle-class conservatism and enabled them to confuse personal revenge with criticism. ⁶⁵

An anonymous reviewer in the Times Literary Supplement added another negative vote, arguing that Butler was "the cleverest man of the nineteenth century, and, for that reason, perhaps, there was a lack of grandeur in his work and in his life. He knew too much, his genius clashed with and was diverted by that devastating cleverness."⁶⁶

Ernest Baker can definitely be counted as one of Butler's friends. In his discussion of the separate works there is only one bit of criticism that might be considered adverse. In evaluating The Way of All Flesh he wrote: "Butler knew nothing of the scrupulous technique of modern realism and cared less. There is a frank disregard for any artistic niceties in his ingenuous procedure."⁶⁷ Of Butler's influence on literature he said:

⁶⁵ Tindall, p. 192.

⁶⁶ "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 161.

⁶⁷ Baker, p. 267.

It was Butler's fearlessness and cheerful irreverence, and his telling combination of unorthodoxy and common sense in Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited, with The Way of All Flesh revealing further possibilities, that as much as anything gave its impetus to the revival [of satire] which began almost simultaneously with the new century. 68

On the whole Edward Wagenknecht, author of Cavalcade of the English Novel, may be reckoned a friend, if it is understood that friendliness does not imply unqualified approval.

Although he objected to the formlessness of The Way of All Flesh, he gave Butler credit for the virtues of his style and summed up the reasons for his fame:

Butler's vogue has been due to his wit, his gift for satire, and his aphoristic style, to his ideas, and to the fact that he was felt to have described a man's life honestly, in terms free from moral humbug. He struck note after note that sounded in the ears of his followers with insistent charm. He was an unbeliever. He championed sexual freedom. He anticipated Freud in perceiving the importance of the subconscious, and he skirted the fringe of the stream-of-consciousness novel. He was a Vitalist, roughly in the manner of Bergson; he foresaw the Gestaltist reply to Behaviorism. 69

Lee Elbert Holt is unreservedly on Butler's side. He defends his hero at every point with all the enthusiasm of Mrs. Stillman. This passage from one of his more recent tributes is typical:

68 Ibid., p. 250.

69 Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York: Holt, 1943), p. 420.

When being a rebel was no longer popular
 Butler fell from idolization amid the shouts
 of those who thought that they had discovered
 his hollowness, but in reality only
 discovered that they had not understood him.
 His artistic imagination, honesty, originality
 and versatility give the true Butler every
 right to an enduring position in English
 literature. 70

In a time of general neglect Samuel Butler had at least one
 firm friend.

V Summary

Throughout his life Butler's fame was slight. Of
 the books published before his death only Erewhon and Erewhon
Revisited can be considered successful. After his death his
 reputation grew, slowly until 1908, and then rapidly to its
 first peak in 1920. Among the factors contributing to the
 rise were the early efforts of his friends, Festing Jones and
 Streatfeild and MacCarthy, Shaw's preface to Major Barbara,
 Clutton-Brock's general discussion of his work in the Times
Literary Supplement in 1908, the introduction of Freud's
 theories to England, the breakdown of old standards under the
 impact of the war, and Jones's Memoir. Interest in Butler
 continued at a high level through 1927. There was a period
 of comparative neglect in England and America between 1928 and
 1931. Three book-length studies of Butler by Mrs. Stillman,

70 Lee Elbert Holt, "The Notebooks of Samuel Butler,"
PMLA, LX (1945), 1179.

Rattray, and Muggeridge, published in 1932, 1935, and 1936 respectively, led to widespread discussion never exceeded except in 1920. Since the last reviews of The Earnest Atheist in 1937 there has been little active interest in Butler except for a mild flurry in 1947-48. The Way of All Flesh, however, continues to sell. A Penguin edition of 50,000 copies was issued in the fall of 1951.

CHAPTER IV

EREWTHON AND EREWHON REVISITEDI EREWTHON: A Survey of Critical Comment

Samuel Butler had some difficulty in finding a publisher for the book that was later to make a name for itself and him. George Meredith, as reader for Chapman and Hall, refused the manuscript on the ground that it appeared to be a philosophical treatise.¹ Trübner and Company returned it unread, believing it to be a work on contagious diseases.² When it was finally published (by Trübner's) at Butler's expense, it was well received. Reviews, on the whole, were favourable,³ and sales were sufficiently good to produce a profit for the author. With the possible exception of Erewhon Revisited, no other book of Butler's was to meet with such success during his lifetime. Butler himself believed that this initially favourable reception was due at least in part to a misconception. Erewhon had been published anonymously just a few months later than Bulwer-Lytton's The Coming Race (1871).

1 Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, I, 148.

2 Leo J. Henkin, Darwinism in the English Novel (New York: Corporate Press, 1940), p. 94.

3 See pp. 4,5.

Both books were satires on contemporary England, and they had in addition certain minor points of resemblance. Rumour had it that the two books came from the same hand. When Butler's authorship was announced, the sales of Erewhon were already beginning to dwindle by a natural process as the date of publication receded,⁴ but it was characteristic of Butler, unconsciously dominated by feelings of inferiority, to provide his own interpretation of the connections between events.

Many critics have called Butler "a man of one book." Some were referring to Erewhon, others to The Way of All Flesh. For the individual the preference must always remain a matter of taste. For the general reader the question has been settled. Judging by the number of editions of each book printed since 1910, we conclude that up to the end of 1934 Erewhon led in popularity, and after 1935 it was far outstripped by The Way of All Flesh. The 1910 edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica cited Erewhon as Butler's best-known work. The 1929 edition considered The Way of All Flesh "by far his most important work." In a lecture published in 1931, but probably delivered soon after

⁴ Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, I. 155.

1919, Herbert M. Vaughan gave his decision: "Of his literary works the most popular is, and probably always will be his Erewhon or Over the Range."⁵ H.C. O'Neill in his essay on Butler in Great Victorians, published in 1932, referred to Erewhon as "still his best-known work."⁶ As late as 1936 British Authors of the Nineteenth Century declared Erewhon "the most famous of all his books."⁷ By 1939 Erewhon had been so completely outdistanced that Granville Hicks could write: "The Way of All Flesh has helped to keep Erewhon alive."⁸

From the time of its first appearance critics have commented on the excellence of the satire in Erewhon. Even before Butler's death it had become something of a classic. In 1902 his friend Harry Quilter, editor of the Universal Review, termed it "the best imaginative satire on the Coming Race, and incidentally, on existing institutions, which has

5 Herbert M. Vaughan, From Anne to Victoria (London: Methuen, 1931), p. 183.

6 O'Neill, p. 113.

7 Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, British Authors of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Wilson, 1936), p. 102.

8 Hicks, Figures of Transition, p. 173.

yet been written."⁹ From the perspective of 1915 Gilbert Cannan saw it as "the one enduring satire of the nineteenth century in England."¹⁰ Arthur Waugh in Tradition and Change stressed the constructive nature of Butler's criticism of his times, insisting that "satire was Butler's perfect weapon, but it was a creative satire, not a destructive. It was designed to help the age to rehabilitate itself by getting into honest relations with its own motives and purposes."¹¹ Edward Shanks considered the satire of Erewhon "extraordinarily easy, ingenious and penetrating."¹² In her Touring Utopia Frances Theresa Russell mentioned Erewhon as "the most complete and adequate example of the inverted Utopia, with its covert irony turning a dry devastating light on a whole civilization."¹³

From the beginning the accepted device for praising Erewhon has been to compare it with Gulliver's Travels. No one

9 Harry Quilter, What's What: a Guide for To-day to Life as It Is and Things as They Are (London: Sonnenschein, 1902), p. 308.

10 Cannan, p. 31.

11 Waugh, p. 235.

12 Shanks, p. 20.

13 Frances Theresa Russell, Touring Utopia (New York: Dial Press, 1932), p. 83.

has dared to assert the superiority of Erewhon. A few critics have hinted that the two works are on a par. Louis Cazamian says: "Le premier Erewhon est une série de scènes et de dissertations, supérieure par l'ironie, et qui support la comparaison avec Gulliver."¹⁴ Helen Thomas Follett and Wilson Follett in discussing H.G. Wells's When the Sleeper Wakes, indirectly suggested equality when they wrote: "It is not preposterous to rank the book as a whole with Swift's Gulliver or Samuel Butler's Erewhon."¹⁵ A commoner practice has been to say, like S.P.B. Mais, that Butler's satiric power was greater than any in our language except Swift's,¹⁶ or like Ernest Baker, that there has been no satire in English so devastating as Erewhon since Gulliver's Travels.¹⁷ Arnold Bennett¹⁸ and V.S. Pritchett,¹⁹ although they admired Erewhon considered it

14 L  gouis et Cazamian, Histoire de la litt  rature anglaise (Paris: Hachette, 1924), p. 1164.

15 Helen Thomas Follett and Wilson Follett, Some Modern Novelists (New York: Holt, 1918), p. 249.

16 Mais, Bookman, LVII, 153.

17 Baker, p. 248.

18 Arnold Bennett, The Journals of Arnold Bennett, ed. Newman Flower (London: Cassell, 1932), II, 272.

19 V.S. Pritchett, "Books in General," New Stateman and Nation, XXIV (December 12, 1942), 392.

the poorer of the two books. P.N. Furbank²⁰ refused to consider Butler as a rival of Swift, insisting: "There is here all the difference between a major and a minor writer."²¹

Two thorough-going detractors of Butler were not impressed by the satire of Erewhon. Cornelius Weygandt found it "not very notable"²² and Muggeridge considered the book "too earnest quite to succeed as satire."²³ Other more friendly critics complained that it was puzzling. Frank Jewett Mather, reviewing Erewhon along with other Fifield reissues for the Nation, grumbled: "With all the ingredients of a perfect satire, inferior in penetration and phrase to none of its illustrious predecessors, we never quite know where to find the author."²⁴ Paul Elmer More was equally uncertain:

No one, I think, can read this "Book of the Machines" without feeling that it is the work of a powerful and original intellect, but one is likely also to lay it down with a sense of bewilderment. There is insight here, the insight of a mind brooding on the

20 See p. 59.

21 Furbank, p. 7.

22 Cornelius Weygandt, A Century of the English Novel (New York: Century, 1925), p. 340.

23 Muggeridge, Earnest Atheist, p. 210.

24 Mather, Nation, XCI, 627.

course of human history and speaking with apparent sincerity of a terrible danger to be avoided. Yet there is withal a note of biting irony; and what precisely the object of this irony may be, or how this irony is to be reconciled with the tone of sincerity, the book itself gives one no clue to determine. 25

Professor Tindall's comment suggests that Butler had been just as puzzled as his readers:

This book with its excellent introductory narrative, its direct style, its effective satire against church, university and criminal code, is imperfect only because Butler, unable to decide where he stood, could not maintain a tone. 26

Even the greatest admirers of Erewhon have conceded that the construction of the book is patchy. John F. Harris described it as "rather incoherent in form, rather rambling in its manner, a book of ideas rather than an adventurous narrative."²⁷ Arnold Bennett complained that the form of the book was "very clumsy" and that "the philosophic theories ought to have been worked more ingeniously into a narrative of picturesque events."²⁸ To Edward Shanks it was "not so much

25 Paul Elmer More, A New England Group and Others: Shelburne Essays, 11th Ser. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 188.

26 Tindall, p. 187.

27 Harris, p. 67.

28 Bennett, II, 272.

a novel as a collection of essays roughly pressed into a common mould."²⁹ Oliver Elton commented: "Each of its main ideas is fairly distinct, but they do not dovetail well together."³⁰

There has been some difference of opinion about the excellence of the characterization in Erehwon. Many critics have not considered it worthy of notice. Most of those who did mention it dismissed it in a few words as "very slight" or negligible. To Streatfeild, however, the Erehwonians were "as different as possible from the pasteboard figures which masquerade as human beings in most satires of this kind,"³¹ and Ernest Baker corroborated this verdict: "Mr. and Mrs. Nosnibor are delectable creatures, quite apart from their satirical value, and Arowhena would do credit to any select gallery of heroines."³²

Although early reviewers failed to note their beauty, since 1916 the descriptive passages in the introductory chapters

29 Shanks, p. 20.

30 Elton, p. 307.

31 R.A. Streatfeild, "Samuel Butler," Monthly Review, No. 24 (September 1902), p. 140.

32 Baker, p. 259.

of Erewhon have been widely praised. Among the first to comment was Oliver Elton,³³ whose opinion was supported by such able judges as E.M. Forster³⁴ and Ernest Baker.³⁵ For many critics - for instance, J.F. Harris, Canby, Shanks, Weygandt and H.M. Vaughan - the opening chapters constitute the best part of the book.

Perhaps the style of Erewhon has been best described by Abel Chevalley: "A direct style that is always urbane, an irony which cuts noiselessly to the roots; not epithets, no eloquence, no big words."³⁶ Several critics, among them Jefferson Fletcher³⁷ and Henry Seidel Canby,³⁸ have compared Butler's style with Defoe's. The Times praised Erewhon for keeping up "the illusion of verisimilitude with a felicity almost worthy of Gulliver himself."³⁹ and John F. Harris

33 Elton, p. 307.

34 E.M. Forster, "Books in General," New Statesman and Nation, XXVIII (July 15, 1944), 43.

35 Baker, p. 260.

36 Chevalley, p. 100.

37 Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934c.

38 Henry Seidel Canby, Definitions, 1st Ser. (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1922), p. 283.

39 Unsigned rev. of Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited, The Times (London), October 9, 1901, p. 5, col. 1.

declared that its realistic narrative was one of its chief charms.⁴⁰ Later critics liked the book for its high spirits. Even Malcolm Muggeridge, who liked so little else in Butler, admitted: "In Erewhon there is little of the personal bitterness and animosity which spoils Butler's later books. It is light-hearted and genuinely fanciful."⁴¹ Edmund Wilson, too, was no friend to Butler, but he admired Erewhon for "the freshness and bravado of Butler's first defiance of the rectory and of his escape from his father and from England" and considered it "his most attractive, though not perhaps his greatest book."⁴²

There has been some dispute between those who regard Butler's thought as an active influence on future developments and those for whom he was merely a spectator with uncanny foresight, an embryologist, who observing the society of his day, could predict its pattern of growth unerringly. Evidence for both views can be found in Erewhon. It could be argued that the trial of the consumptive has had its effect on modern

⁴⁰ Harris, p. 73.

⁴¹ Muggeridge, Earnest Atheist, p. 205.

⁴² Wilson, p. 212.

penology. Festing Jones believed it had. In 1900 the Dean of Bristol, "thinking that Butler would be the best judge, sent him a copy of a paper he had read 'On the Relation of Disease to Crime' in which he had referred to Erewhon. Butler's views on the analogy between crime and disease, as set forth in Erewhon, were still being treated for the most part as fantastic paradox; nevertheless there were some even then, and there are more every year, who understand and agree with him seriously."⁴³ The Cambridge History of English Literature observed in 1916 that a modern humanitarian "would acknowledge a deep intellectual debt to Butler."⁴⁴ Though it can hardly be claimed that the "Book of the Machines" influenced the course of civilization, the passage has proved to be prophetic. No other section of Butler's work is of more interest to present-day critics. Edward Wagenknecht in Cavalcade of the English Novel (1943) noted: "The chapters on the tyranny of the machine were strangely prescient of the twentieth century."⁴⁵ The Times Literary Supplement added its comment in 1950:

⁴³ Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, II, 331.

⁴⁴ Young, XIII, 451.

⁴⁵ Wagenknecht, p. 421.

Whether Butler was looking ahead and foresaw our own dilemma we cannot be certain, but it does look like that. We have special reason for taking heed of what seemed to his contemporaries as mere whimsy: the decision of the Erewhonians to make a clean sweep of machinery less than three centuries old lest it should ultimately supplant the race of men.⁴⁶

II Erewhon Revisited: Critical Comment

Although Erewhon Revisited was first published in 1901, nearly thirty years after Erewhon itself, reviewers of the second book were, naturally enough, reminded of its predecessor and attempted to solve their problem by comparing the sequel with the original work. Later critics have followed the same procedure. All, with one exception, have considered Erewhon Revisited more coherent and superior in structure. Said Gilbert Cannan: "Butler knew better now how to write a book, to compose a novel and conduct a story than he did when he wrote Erewhon."⁴⁷ Jefferson Fletcher considered Erewhon Revisited "far more" of an "artistic piece."⁴⁸ George Sampson disagreed:

⁴⁶ "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 162.

⁴⁷ Cannan, p. 138.

⁴⁸ Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934f.

Erewhon itself is certainly not all of a piece; but its parts at least are all high in quality. Erewhon Revisited is just as patchy and its parts are sometimes very poor in quality. ⁴⁹

For characterization, too, the sequel has been more widely praised. Frank Jewett Mather termed it "shrewd and plausible,"⁵⁰ Jefferson Fletcher "clearcut and original,"⁵¹ Baker singled out Hanky and Panky, "a couple of vitriolic caricatures of pharisaic humbug."⁵²

Some critics have found Erewhon Revisited unforgivably sentimental. To others it is "touching" and "pathetic." Opinion on this point appears to be about evenly divided, and the decision seems to be determined by the personal response of the critic rather than by the fashion of the time. For Clutton-Brock in 1919 the book was "made beautiful and moving by the hero's hunger for affection."⁵³ Muggeridge in 1936 declared that in his last book Butler "fell back into the morass of

⁴⁹ Sampson, Bookman, XLVIII, 132.

⁵⁰ Mather, p. 628.

⁵¹ Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934k.

⁵² Baker, p. 265.

⁵³ Clutton-Brock, TLS, October 16, 1919, p. 553.

sentimentality he had been struggling without success all his life to get out of."⁵⁴ Ernest Baker three years later registered a vote on the other side, declaring: "There is beauty as well as pathos in the parting of father and son at the statues."⁵⁵ Edward Wagenknecht in his Cavalcade of the English Novel (1943) took the same view, supporting his conclusion by quoting from Aldous Huxley's preface to the Limited Editions Club edition of Erewhon (1934):

'The sense and honesty of Chaucer' - such is Aldous Huxley's great tribute - 'these he had always displayed. In this last book he reveals something of the delicate sensibility and emotional depth of his greater predecessor.' ⁵⁶

Professor Tindall of Columbia belongs to the opposite school. In his Forces in Modern British Literature, (1947) he wrote: "Attempting wickedness again, Butler succeeded in being more tiresome and much more sentimental."⁵⁷

On the whole, critics, except for Sydney Waterlow, have preferred Erewhon to its successor. As Gilbert Cannan

⁵⁴ Muggeridge, Earnest Atheist, p. 249.

⁵⁵ Baker, p. 264.

⁵⁶ Wagenknecht, p. 421.

⁵⁷ Tindall, p. 188.

put it: "Satires are heaven-sent, and rarely do they descend upon the same mind twice."⁵⁸ Cannan considered Erewhon Revisited "already in 1901 out of date and beside the mark."⁵⁹ George Sampson commented in the Bookman in 1915: "The original satire is a masterpiece of economy; the sequel fails to recapture the first fine careful rapture of its predecessor. . . . Erewhon might have been modelled on the best of Swift; Erewhon Revisited seems copied from bad imitations of Lewis Carroll."⁶⁰ In his Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (1944) he expressed substantially the same opinion, referring to Erewhon Revisited as "an ill-advised sequel."⁶¹ Jefferson Fletcher praised the book for its striking situations and its piquant ideas, but complained that it lacked "the vision, the surprise of Erewhon."⁶²

58 Cannan, p. 138.

59 Ibid., p. 138.

60 Sampson, Bookman, XLVIII, 132.

61 Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 808.

62 Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934k.

III The Decline of Popular Interest

Erewhon, when it was first published in 1872, made such a name for itself that its author was known thereafter as "Erewhon Butler." By 1901 when the revised edition was issued along with Erewhon Revisited, its reputation was sufficiently well established for the Athenaeum reviewer to write: "We suppose in this notice that readers are already acquainted with 'Erewhon.' If not, they should be."⁶³ Both books were reissued in 1910, and each was reprinted once during World War I. Between 1920 and 1935 there were sixteen editions of Erewhon. Since 1935 there has been only one, the Nelson Classics edition in 1940. It may be that Gilbert Cannan's prophecy in this connection is in process of fulfilment:

The logic of Erewhon is defective, so that the book is almost unintelligible without reference to the common world which it attacks with ingenious paradox. When that world has faded from memory (and it is fading fast) it will be impossible to read Erewhon.⁶⁴

On the other hand it may be that the book is no longer read because its ideas have lost their power to startle and have even become commonplace. The concept of the criminal as a

⁶³ Unsigned rev. of Erewhon and Erewhon Revisited, Athenaeum, No. 3860 (October 19, 1901), p. 518.

⁶⁴ Cannan, p. 151.

diseased personality is not challenged today. The attack on the church has been so widespread and so successful that until recently the intelligence of a man who would attempt to defend the church's dogmas was under suspicion. And no modern reader needs to be reminded that technological advances may not in the end benefit civilization. Erewhon Revisited was never so popular as its predecessor. After being reprinted in 1920 and 1923, it was issued by the Traveller's Library in 1926. In combination with Erewhon it was published by Dent in the Everyman series in 1932 and by Random House in the Modern Library in 1933. As recently as 1949 a five shilling edition of the sequel alone was issued by Jonathan Cape. On the whole, however, it has not been true to say as Sir Edmund Gosse did in 1920:

The most valuable of Butler's imaginative writings, and indeed the most important from almost every point of view, are the two romances which stand respectively at the opening and at the close of his career, like two golden pillars supporting the roof of his reputation. ⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Gosse, Edinburgh Review, CCXXXI, 49.

CHAPTER V

THE NOTEBOOKS OF SAMUEL BUTLER

When the first selection from his notebooks was published in 1912, ten years after his death, Butler's fame had already begun the steady climb which was to reach a peak in 1920. Reviewers hailed the Notebooks with a fervour that would have astonished their author. The Athenaeum detected "a certain amount of trivial matter," but insisted that "nearly every page has an arresting comment, perhaps, something which the whole world is thinking, but is too timid or conventional to utter."¹ The Contemporary Review was more emphatic:

It may be that they will prove in the form now published the great monument of his unusual mind and his still more potent personality - a personality that is stamped on every line that he wrote, irradiating it with shrewdness, with kindly cynicism, with the soundest of sound common-sense. . . . We fancy this book is going to be very famous, for it reveals a personality as strange as that of Robert Burton. ²

During World War I British critics had nothing to say about the Notebooks, but two Americans continued the stream of praise. Jefferson Fletcher pointed out the fact that in

1 "Samuel Butler," Athenaeum, No. 4439 (November 23, 1912), p. 617.

2 Unsigned rev. of The Notebooks of Samuel Butler, Contemporary Review, CIII (June 1913), 894.

this type of work Butler did not "betray his imperfect powers of construction":

His genius is happiest in the 'happy thought', the pithy epigram, the paradox that is not merely paradoxical, the graphic thumbnail sketch, sudden illuminations of dark places in men and things. It is a book for the understanding, but only the understanding to live by. ³

Francis Byrne Hackett, who wrote the introduction to an American edition of the Notebooks published in 1918, regarded Butler's carefully phrased jottings as "memoranda in his endless discovery of wisdom."⁴ He argued that Butler's unsparing pragmatism preserved him from being a crank, making him "a priceless critic. . . of 'first and last things' and declared that "the freshest of his discriminations, the most unexpected and the most unqualified," were to be found in the Notebooks.⁵

When the war was over, British critics added further tributes. Clutton-Brock and Edward Shanks hazarded the opinion that the Notebooks might come to be considered Butler's greatest

³ Fletcher, Warner's Library, p. 2934n.

⁴ Hackett, p. 95.

⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

work.⁶ Sir Edmund Gosse believed it to be exactly that.⁷ Even Bernard Shaw who by 1919 was amusing himself by deflating the reputation he had done so much to create, was still recommending the Notebooks:

His genius was always flashing through the fog and illuminating those wonderful notebooks, with their queer strings of over-rated trivialities, profound reflections, witty comments, humorous parables, and family jokes and gibes to please Gogin and Jones or annoy the Butlers.⁸

By 1934 when Further Extracts from the Notebooks of Samuel Butler was published, the reaction initiated by Shaw had become more general. Some critics could see no good in this book, while those who praised it took pains to qualify their approval. One reviewer, writing in Life and Letters, found it "intelligent" and "exhilarating," but went on to say: "Thus the total impression that Butler's notebooks leave is one of a deliberate and consistent superficiality - or, to put it more fairly, a refusal to face the responsibilities of his gifts."⁹ Graham Greene, who could hardly be expected to be sympathetic

6 A. Clutton-Brock, Essays on Books (London: Methuen, 1920), p. 141.

Shanks, p. 21.

7 Gosse, Aspects and Impressions, p. 57.

8 Shaw, Works, XXIX, 66.

9 Unsigned rev. of Further Extracts, Life and Letters, X (1934), 116.

to Butler, found some notes "trivial," others "cheaply smart," still others "meaningless," and complained of "a great many exhibitions of rather cocky conceit in his own smartness, . . . many superficial half-truths in the form of paradoxes."¹⁰ To G.W. Stonier, who considered the Notebooks of 1912 "nearer to being a masterpiece than anything else Butler ever wrote,"¹¹ Further Extracts was "more entertaining than profound" and its cleverness sometimes thin.¹²

Within recent years George Sampson has referred to the Notebooks as "in many respects the most attractive and rewarding" of Butler's writings.¹³ Although Lee Elbert Holt, an American student of Butler, observed in 1945 that they were "no longer so much read as they once were,"¹⁴ Jonathan Cape found it worth while to bring out Samuel Butler's Notebooks in 1951. This book of 327 pages combines some of the best

10 Graham Greene, "Samuel Butler," Spectator, CLIII (February 9, 1934), 205.

11 G.W. Stonier, "Samuel Butler," New Statesman and Nation, VII (May 12, 1934), 720.

12 Ibid., p. 722.

13 Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 807.

14 Lee Elbert Holt, "The Notebooks of Samuel Butler," PMLA, LX (1945), 1178.

things from the Notebooks of 1912 and Further Extracts with a small amount of material previously unpublished or otherwise not easily accessible. On the whole, the book has been well received both in England and America. In England V.S. Pritchett in the New Statesman and Nation¹⁵ and the anonymous reviewer of the Times Literary Supplement¹⁶ agree that the Notebooks, since they preserve Butler as a "character", will outlive Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh. American estimates of the book vary from that of Ernest Jones, who found it "by turns entertaining, boring, and . . . shocking,"¹⁷ to that of the New York Times, which gave it high praise.¹⁸

Between 1912 and 1951 there have been, all told, eleven issues or reissues of selections from Butler's notebooks and these have made a considerable contribution to Butler's fame. While the common reader today values Butler chiefly as the author of The Way of All Flesh, the professional critic awards first place among his works to the Notebooks.

15 V.S. Pritchett, rev. of Samuel Butler's Notebooks, New Statesman and Nation, XLI (May 12, 1951), 537.

16 "More of Samuel Butler," TLS, June 8, 1951, p. 350.

17 Ernest Jones, rev. of Samuel Butler's Notebooks, Nation, CLXXIII (October 13, 1951), 311.

18 Unsigned rev. of Samuel Butler's Notebooks, Times (New York), October 7, 1951, p. 43.

CHAPTER VI

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH

I A Survey of Critical Comment

When The Way of All Flesh was first published in 1903 not long after Butler's death, it created little stir. Although the Athenaeum reviewed it favourably,¹ the Times Literary Supplement ignored it. Until Shaw in 1907 and Clutton-Brock in 1908 attracted public attention to it,² the book had circulated slowly, assisted only by the personal recommendation of one reader to another. After this unpromising début, however, The Way of All Flesh, far from being ignored, became the centre of a great mass of controversy as to whether it is or is not one of the great novels of English literature. In numerical strength the champions of the book are about equal to its detractors; in the weight of critical authority and prestige they may be somewhat outdone. But in the fifty years since the book was first published no consensus has been reached. The position remains much as it was in 1919 when the Spectator declared: "Critical opinion is greatly

1 Unsigned rev. of The Way of All Flesh, Athenaeum, No. 3944, May 30, 1903, p. 683.

2 See pp. 15, 16.

divided over The Way of All Flesh. Some regard it as a great novel; others, neither squeamish nor prejudiced, find it hard to read."³ Arnold Bennett read the book in 1904, re-read it in 1913, and found it very good.⁴ Gilbert Cannan considered it "the connecting link between the period in the history of the English novel which ended with Jude the Obscure and the period which is now enjoying the confused and excited days of its youth."⁵ John F. Harris termed it "Butler's most brilliant work, . . . one of the real novels in English."⁶ To Paul Jordan-Smith it was "one of the big English novels, taking rank with Tom Jones, Henry Esmond, and Jude the Obscure."⁷ Catherine Carswell noted its "peculiar and delightful flavour"⁸ and remarked that there is no other English novel which amuses

3 Unsigned rev. of Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, Spectator, CXXIII (November 29, 1919), 730.

4 Bennett, I. 193 and II, 76.

5 Cannan, p. 157.

6 J.F. Harris, p. 242.

7 Jordan-Smith, On Strange Altars, p. 180.

8 Catherine Carswell, "Samuel Butler," in The English Novelists, ed. Derek Verschoyle (London: Chatto and Windus, 1936), p. 212.

on so many planes.⁹ Professor H.J. Davis of Cornell University called it "a Victorian Pilgrim's Progress."¹⁰ As recently as 1947 G.D.H. Cole in his Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh described it as "a novel in the traditional English manner - discursive, episodic, moralistic, and written in open defiance of all the niceties, . . . one of the great novels in this mode."¹¹

Most American critics and a few British ones would dispute this verdict. In 1920 when Butler's fame was at its height, Middleton Murry wrote of The Way of All Flesh: "Whatever it may be instead, it is not a great novel, nor even a good one."¹² George Sampson, writing in 1944, saw no reason to disagree:

The book has been highly praised by certain writers and it has influenced some of them, not altogether for their good. It has never taken a place in the affection or esteem of the common reader. Neither in vision nor in execution has it the qualities of a great creative novel. It is a literary man's performance and its success lies in its personal essayistic touches, in its casual satire and in its humorous asides. ¹³

9 Ibid., p. 204.

10 H.J. Davis, "The Duplicity of Samuel Butler," Canadian Forum, XVI (March 1937), 24.

11 G.D.H. Cole, Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh (London: Home and Van Thal, 1947), p. 21.

12 Murry, Aspects of Literature, p. 111.

13 Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 808.

In America critical opinion of The Way of All Flesh offers an interesting example of evolutionary development. Earlier critics hated the book, but were prepared to concede it a sort of greatness. William Lyon Phelps, for instance, termed it an "amazingly clever, original, brilliant, diabolical novel,"¹⁴ and Paul Elmer More commented: "It is a powerful book, even a great book in a way; but it is bitter, malignant, base, dishonourable, and dishonest."¹⁵ Cornelius Weygandt, writing a few years later, made no such concession, but the very force of his attack implies a certain respect for its object:

The Way of All Flesh, praised as it has been, and still is in some quarters, is hardly more than a careful scientific report in the process of being outmoded by fresh scientific research. . . . The Way of All Flesh still passes in some places for a novel, but it is now on the defensive, claiming rank for its historical value. When historical value is the only value argued for what has pretended to be literature you may be sure that book is at the beginning of its end as art. ¹⁶

By 1943 Professor Wagenknecht of the University of Minnesota felt safe in dismissing the question with the remark that Butler's one novel was "not a particularly good one,"¹⁷ and in 1947 Professor Tindall of Columbia even denied The Way of All Flesh

¹⁴ Phelps, p. 236.

¹⁵ More, p. 199.

¹⁶ Weygandt, p. 343.

¹⁷ Wagenknecht, p. 416.

a place among the best novels of the early twentieth century.¹⁸

From the beginning a major complaint against the book has been that its structure is weak. The Athenaeum reviewer, who admired the book as a whole, noted its lack of form,¹⁹ and Clutton-Brock admitted its "shapelessness, its top-heavy diffuseness, its awkward chronology."²⁰ Both Middleton Murry²¹ and Edward Shanks²² cited Ernest's misadventure with Miss Maitland as the point where faulty construction is most apparent. Catherine Carswell objected that the story was "primarily a device by which to communicate the distillations of Butler's thought"²³, and Professor Wagenknecht concurred:

The vogue of The Way of All Flesh has not been due to enthusiasm for the art of fiction. It has not enriched the art of fiction. On the contrary, it has tended to encourage novelists to make their works a carry-all for whatever ideas they could thrust into them. Thus Butler has been as strong an influence toward formlessness as Henry James was toward form. ²⁴

18 Tindall, p. 177.

19 Unsigned rev. of The Way of All Flesh, Athenaeum, No. 3944 (May 30, 1903), 683.

20 Clutton-Brock, TLS, October 8, 1908, p. 330.

21 Murry, p. 111.

22 Shanks, p. 21.

23 Carswell, p. 204.

24 Wagenknecht, p. 420.

The semi-autobiographical nature of The Way of All Flesh has provided the ground for some heated critical skirmishing. All the disputing factions agree that Christina and Theobald are not lovable characters. Most critics agree that they are intended to be portraits of Butler's own parents. Of these about half contend that nothing could justify Butler's exposure of his family to public ridicule. Only Mrs. Garnett attempts to prove that The Way of All Flesh misrepresents the facts, arguing that Canon Butler and his wife were actually kind, lovable and generally well liked.

Mrs. Garnett's book provides a convenient point of reference for a discussion of the critical attitude toward The Way of All Flesh. Before the publication of Samuel Butler and His Family Relations it was the accepted thing to denounce Butler's conduct as ungentlemanly and inexcusable on any grounds.²⁵ The Spectator, reviewing Jones's Memoir in 1919, commented: "Butler exacted a terrible revenge on those who were nearest to him."²⁶ Maurice Hewlett in 1920 called The Way of All Flesh

²⁵ Robert Graves recalled that a master at his school had spoken of The Way of All Flesh in 1913 as "a book that no gentleman would read." (Living Age, CCCXX, 181).

²⁶ Unsigned rev. of Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, Spectator, CXXIII (November 29, 1919), 730.

"a witty and malicious novel," and added: "For those who admire that sort of thing [caricaturing one's father and mother] I doubt if they will find it better done anywhere, with more gusto or more point."²⁷ Among others who found Butler's attack on his parents distasteful were Quiller-Couch²⁸ and Virginia Woolf, who remarked: "No sooner had the Victorians departed than Samuel Butler, who had lived below stairs, came out, like an observant bootboy, with the family secrets in The Way of All Flesh."²⁹

After the publication of Samuel Butler and His Family Relations in 1926, although not necessarily because of it, critical comment in this regard is usually tolerant, often approving. Ernest Baker frankly defended Butler:

Both the father and the mother of Ernest Pontifex are drawn in the exact likeness of Butler's own parents If the Reverend Theobald was the least shade worse than Canon Butler, there was no conscious misrepresentation; the son honestly did his best to keep down his resentment and see his father as he truly was. Nor is it for the reader

27 Hewlett, p. 156.

28 Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and Other Victorians (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1925), p. 86.

29 Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown," Living Age, CCCXX (February 2, 1924), 230.

interested in all types of humanity, unless he is a confirmed sentimentalist, to brand such conduct as unfilial. . . . This is a book that had to be written, call it confession, self-defence, exposure, what you will. ³⁰

Granville Hicks, an American student who included a study of Butler in his Figures of Transition, considered Mrs. Garnett's book "the best possible defence of The Way of All Flesh,³¹ and the Times Literary Supplement of March 17, 1950 conceded: "The branding of his father in this frankly autobiographical novel can be defended in the particular. There is convincing truth in the picture."³²

A few anomalous opinions remain to be considered. As early as 1919 Bernard Shaw was vigorously championing The Way of All Flesh on the grounds that Butler's attack on his parents needed no further justification than its wit:

Butler is the only man known to history who has immortalized and actually endeared himself by parricide and matricide long drawn out. He slew the good name (and it was such a very good name.) of his father and mother so reasonably, so wittily, so humorously, and even in a ghastly way so charitably, that he convinced us that he was engaged in an execution and not in a murder. ³³

30 Baker, p. 268.

31 Hicks, Figures of Transition, p. 172.

32 "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 162.

33 Shaw, Works, XXIX, 55.

As late as 1944 in his Concise Cambridge History of English Literature George Sampson expressed his adherence to the older view. Of The Way of All Flesh he wrote: "Its criticism of the relations between parents and children is deep and searching; but like some other novels of revolt, it is itself revolting. The spectacle of a son enjoying the exposure of his parents was distasteful even in the days of Noah."³⁴ At least two critics attempted to free Butler from the charge of unfilial conduct by denying that his book was autobiographical. Sir Edmund Gosse asserted that The Way of All Flesh was "not an autobiography, but a romance founded on recollection."³⁵ Herbert Vaughan was unable to believe that any son would caricature his parents. "The book, in my opinion," he wrote, "contains rather less of either biography or autobiography than one is apt to find in many of George Gissing's novels. If you regard The Way of All Flesh in this light, as a modern romance, it is a brilliant and original study of great human interest;

34 Sampson, Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, p. 808.

35 Gosse, Aspects and Impressions (London, New York: Cassell, 1922), p. 63.

if it were truly an autobiography (which I hold it is not), then it ought to be burned by the hangman, however clever its contents."³⁶

The characters of The Way of All Flesh have provided another subject of controversy. To many critics they are triumphant creations; others have denied that they are creations at all. To the Spectator's reviewer of Jones's Memoir most of the characters were photographs,³⁷ and Cornelius Weygandt remarked: "There is no character creation of moment in The Way of All Flesh."³⁸ Mrs. Garnett, who because of her relationship to the Butler family was in a position to know, gave strong support to this view:

He [Butler] hardly deserves to take rank as a novelist, for he could not have written another [novel], unless he had given us the same characters in other combinations with real incidents that he had not used in the first tale. His power was limited, in novel writing as in other fields, to the lines that he had himself followed. He had nothing of the dramatist's art of creating new people. He could imagine no incidents, no passions, no interests, but what had touched himself.³⁹

36 Vaughan, p. 190.

37 Unsigned rev. of Festing Jones, Samuel Butler, Spectator, CXXIII, 730.

38 Weygandt, p. 342.

39 Garnett, p. 174.

Differences and similarities of opinion on the subject of Butler's characters seem to be determined by personal predilection rather than by any general trends of critical thought. V.S. Pritchett was merely echoing Gilbert Cannan's comment of 1915⁴⁰ when he wrote in 1942: "It is the great weakness of The Way of All Flesh that the characters are dwarfed and burned dry by Butler's argument. They are often very tedious. He chose them for their mediocrity and then accused them of it."⁴¹ Jefferson Fletcher's comment of 1917 to the effect that "The Way of All Flesh is an interesting story about interesting people, though hardly for the most part people one would care to meet"⁴² implies roughly the same point of view as that of the Times Literary Supplement of March 17, 1950, which held that "the characters, mostly unattractive, are characters. They do inhabit the earth, although the earth might be better without them."⁴³

Almost every critic has his favourite character, and here too the choice is personal. No chronological trend is

⁴⁰ Cannan, p. 105.

⁴¹ Pritchett, New Statesman and Nation, XXIV, 392.

⁴² Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 293lm.

⁴³ "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 162.

discernible except that Theobald seems to be more appreciated now than he used to be. In popularity the minor characters more than hold their own, with Mrs. Jupp vying for first place with Christina of the "exquisite maunderings"⁴⁴ and "ruthless daydreams,"⁴⁵ and Dr. Skinner receiving as many plaudits as Theobald, whose formidable "moral clamminess" was given due recognition.⁴⁶ Ernest and Alethea have attracted only unfavourable comment and not very much even of that. Middleton Murry, who admired Christina and Mrs. Jupp, Theobald and Dr. Skinner, and even Pryer and George Pontifex, considered Alethea a bluff and made the observation that Ernest as a man had "an intense non-existence."⁴⁷ On the whole, however, few critics would care to disagree with Jefferson Fletcher's dictum that The Way of All Flesh has provided "real additions to the world of the best fictitious characters."⁴⁸

⁴⁴ M.P. Willcocks, "Samuel Butler: of The Way of All Flesh," English Review, XXXIX (October 1924), 539.

⁴⁵ Pritchett, New Statesman and Nation, XXIV, 392.

⁴⁶ Mather, p. 628.

⁴⁷ Murry, Aspects of Literature, p. 111.

⁴⁸ Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934m.

While The Way of All Flesh has always been admired for its style, early critics tended to stress its humour and irony, ignoring the straightforwardness and simplicity so highly regarded today. A notable exception is the Athenaeum reviewer of the first edition, who, after paying due respect to humour and irony, remarked that the "admirably simple style" was "more effective than much heavy rhetoric."⁴⁹ Gilbert Cannan noted that Butler's method of presentation kept "even the most blistering sarcasms within the urbane."⁵⁰

Two critics writing in the 'thirties, one American, one English, took almost identical views of The Way of All Flesh. Professor Herbert Davis of Cornell, writing in the University of Toronto Quarterly in 1935, said of the book:

It is a full-length study of Butler the humorist, made with real enjoyment of the subject. The sting of satire, the strength of malice are there, but they are almost lost in the gaiety of his humour and in the full sense of satisfaction with which he records and accepts his own experience of life. Even his sufferings at the hands of his parents are finally made to serve the purpose of pure comedy. ⁵¹

⁴⁹ Unsigned rev. of The Way of All Flesh, Athenaeum, No. 3944 (May 30, 1903), p. 683.

⁵⁰ Cannan, p. 109.

⁵¹ H.J. Davis, "Samuel Butler, 1835-1902," University of Toronto Quarterly, V (1935-36), 35.

Ernest Baker's comment was:

Though his subsequent novel was largely an account of what he had suffered at the hands of a stupid and spiteful father, his mode of retaliation was to turn it all into ironical comedy, which gave himself and his readers the same sort of fun. Saeva indignatio was never the motive or the key-note of Butler's satires. 52

Two more recent comments are interesting. Paul Bloomfield, reviewing G.D.H. Cole's Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh for the New Statesman and Nation in 1947, noted the bracing quality of Butler's style:

The book lives and qualifies for immortality, chiefly by its tomic acidity. . . . It has other remarkable features - reading as if it really had happened, which a great deal it had, and being addressed to the reader in an unaffected, personal way, in contrast to the contemporary Meredith's brilliant but how much more dating rhetoric. The acidity is the thing: not the bitterness of cynicism, which in its literary distillations is usually velvety, and relaxing rather than bracing. 53

The Times Literary Supplement of March 17, 1950 selected Butler's downrightness for comment:

His imagination was not of the kind that finds magic casements opening on fairylands. Nor does it deal in exaggeration. It reveals the world of every day in a cold, dry unrelenting light that in its startling effects can claim kinship to the poet's. 54

52 Baker, p. 251.

53 Paul Bloomfield, "Samuel Butler," New Statesman and Nation, XXXIV (November 22, 1947), 416.

54 "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 162.

It was soon recognized that The Way of All Flesh had not been intended as pure entertainment. As early as 1915 George Sampson described it as "an important tractate imperfectly disguised as a story, . . . autobiography with a purpose and criticism with a vengeance."⁵⁵ Oliver Elton, while he admitted that every line bore the print of experience, considered it "a pamphlet in novel form, ex parte," giving Butler's own case against his early environment with absolute sincerity and expressiveness."⁵⁶ In 1943 Edward Wagenknecht noted that no novel was ever "more successful in dramatizing a creed."⁵⁷

In writing his novel Butler accomplished two objectives. First, he provided an illustration for his theories on heredity, a fact first noticed by Gilbert Cannan,⁵⁸ but not generally recognized until the 'thirties by H.V. Routh,⁵⁹ Ernest Baker⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Sampson, Bookman, XLVIII, 132.

⁵⁶ Elton, p. 309.

⁵⁷ Wagenknecht, p. 419.

⁵⁸ Cannan, p. 108.

⁵⁹ H.V. Routh, Money, Morals and Manners, as Revealed in Modern Literature (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, 1935), p. 152.

⁶⁰ Baker, p. 267.

and others.⁶¹ More important, however, from the point of view of the literary critic as well as the common reader was the "masterly arraignment of the defects of the Victorian qualities, . . . a mordant commentary on the perennial frailties of human nature."⁶² This is the aspect of The Way of All Flesh that has been discussed from its date of publication up to the present. The objects of Butler's attack were the personal relationships among the members of a typical Victorian family, the educational system, and the religiosity engendered by a typical Victorian upbringing. The Athenaeum reviewer of 1903 observed that the book was a lesson to parents.⁶³ George Sampson, writing in the Bookman in 1915, called it "a telling and unforgettable indictment" of "the stupid repression in a strict religious home and the wasteful inutile education at a big public school."⁶⁴ To John F. Harris Butler's book was "a merciless exposé of some of the foibles of his own day, and more directly of the cruelties and ugliness which so often surround the life

61 See Hicks, Figures of Transition, p. 172, and "The Church Rationalist," TLS, March 17, 1950, p. 161.

62 Fletcher, Warner's Library, V, 2934m.

63 Unsigned review of The Way of All Flesh, Athenaeum, No. 3944 (May 30, 1903), p. 683.

64 Sampson, Bookman, XLVIII, 132.

of children in a narrow evangelical family."⁶⁵ The Folletts wrote of it in 1918 as "Samuel Butler's more and more influential satire of the tyranny, dullness, and narrow obscurantism which so often go with domestic responsibility."⁶⁶ H.V. Routh considered it "the classic exposure of all that was unprogressive in the family tradition."⁶⁷ British Authors of the Nineteenth Century referred to it as "a blistering indictment of the worst kind of Victorian religiosity."⁶⁸ Ernest Baker's comment stressed the attack on the school system:

It is the typical bad example of a child's nature perverted and his life ruined by an unenlightened system of education, the main object of which is to reduce individuality to an approved pattern by the facile method of stereotyping in a mould. It was, in short, an exposure of the modes of parental upbringing consecrated by usage. ⁶⁹

Novelist Elizabeth Bowen, on the other hand, was more impressed with the "hate-charged and scientific analysis of English middle-class family life,"⁷⁰ ^wWhile Time, reviewing Samuel Butler and

⁶⁵ J.F. Harris, p. 242.

⁶⁶ Follett and Follett, p. 354.

⁶⁷ Routh, Money, Morals and Manners, p. 152.

⁶⁸ Kunitz and Haycraft, p. 103.

⁶⁹ Baker, p. 246.

⁷⁰ Bowen, p. 40.

The Way of All Flesh in 1948, referred to Butler's novel as a unique period-study of Victorian home life."⁷¹

Even those critics who deplored Butler's attack on the social structure of his day and to whom Butler's methods were distasteful agreed with his supporters that there was truth in what he said. Thomas Seecombe in the Dictionary of National Biography described The Way of All Flesh as "imperishably graven out of the flint of life." Edward Shanks, who knew Butler and disliked him, conceded: "We can very well continue to admire the inimitable accuracy and vividness with which these real scenes are described, while we suffer from the painful bitterness of this exhaustive improvisation on the old theme of parents and children."⁷² Even Mrs. Garnett, who wrote her book to discredit Butler's attack on his family, referred to The Way of All Flesh as a "living spring of truth, . . . one of the stoutest blows for liberty, the most powerful onslaughts against cant and cowardice of the new day."⁷³ Ford

⁷¹ "Timidity and Temerity," Time, LII (December 6, 1948), p. 72.

⁷² Shanks, p. 21.

⁷³ Garnett, p. 3.

Madox Ford, although he disliked Butler more than anyone else he knew,⁷⁴ considered The Way of All Flesh and The Playboy of the Western World "the two great milestones on the road of purely English letters between Gulliver's Travels and Joyce's Ulysses,"⁷⁵ and declared that Butler's novel could not be superseded "because it is a record of humanity."⁷⁶

From the date of publication of The Way of All Flesh right up to the present it has been recognized that much of the popularity of the book is due to Butler's attack on Victorian institutions. The Athenaeum, reviewing it in 1903, commended the author for his "unerring frankness" in "saying boldly, but sometimes too fiercely, what many are thinking."⁷⁷ Malcolm Muggeridge attributed the sudden rise in the curve of Butler's literary reputation after his death to the fact that his novel "said what a large number of people wanted said."⁷⁸ Professor Tindall of Columbia, discussing the "tremendous success" of the book in his Forces in Modern British Literature published in 1947, noted that "the age, prepared by Ibsen and Shaw, was ready

74 Ford Madox Ford, Return to Yesterday (New York: Liveright, 1932), p. 170.

75 Ibid., p. 171.

76 Ibid., p. 178.

77 Unsigned rev. of The Way of All Flesh, Athenaeum, No. 3944 (May 30, 1903), p. 683.

78 Muggeridge, Earnest Atheist, p. 242.

for another attack on the Victorian family."⁷⁹

For a few critics, however, The Way of All Flesh had other merits than that of exposing hypocrisies to ridicule. Two American critics in The History of the Novel in England declared "the positive element in Butler's novel, the theme of making good through freedom from social prejudice and superstition" an equally important source of influence.⁸⁰ For Clara Gruening Stillman, a thorough-going Butlerite, the iconoclasm of the book was less worthy of consideration than the originality of Butler's approach to the problem of writing it:

The question of personality, which so profoundly occupies present-day psychology, was apprehended by Butler in advance of his generation, and is here for the first time expressed in fiction in a typically modern manner. It is the first modern novel in which family relations are treated with psychological insight, and growth to maturity is seen as the process of freeing oneself from one's parents. It is the first novel in which the unconscious self is clearly recognized. It might indeed be said that not Ernest, but Ernest's unconscious self is the hero of this novel. ⁸¹

⁷⁹ Tindall, p. 178.

⁸⁰ Lovett and Hughes, p. 381.

⁸¹ Stillman, Samuel Butler, p. 194

Many critics gave Butler credit for establishing a new genre - the genealogical novel. Said Abel Chevalley: "The Way of All Flesh shares with Jean Christophe the responsibility for a host of interesting works in which ancestors, environment and racial influence play a preponderant role."⁸² Said Elizabeth Drew in The Modern Novel: "Since the publication of The Way of All Flesh, the father of the new type of autobiographical novel, the problems of heredity and environment, of the individual in conflict with society, have been the most popular and powerful elements in English fiction."⁸³ St. John Ervine pointed out that "the literary revolt of the child against its parents began on the day The Way of All Flesh appeared."⁸⁴

These new elements in Butler's novel were not apparent to the critics only. Younger writers read, approved, and followed Butler's lead. As early as 1916 John F. Harris commented on the influence of The Way of All Flesh.⁸⁵ In 1922 W.T. Young in the Cambridge History of English Literature remarked: "The

82 Chevalley, p. 107.

83 Elizabeth Drew, The Modern Novel (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1926), p. 92.

See also:

A.E. Zucker, "The Genealogical Novel," PMLA, XLIII (1928), 551-560.

84 Ervine, p. 708.

85 Harris, p. 243.

Way of All Flesh owes practically nothing to any tradition; though its prodigality of idea and suggestion and wit has enabled later authors to quarry from it books, novels and essays ever since its publication."⁸⁶ Among later writers whose work "shows markedly the influence of Butler" the Folletts list Gilbert Cannan, J.D. Beresford, Compton Mackenzie, W.L. George, Elinor Mordaunt, W.B. Maxwell, St. John G. Ervine, Rose Macaulay, Stephen McKenna, and "perhaps D.H. Lawrence."⁸⁷ H.V. Routh suggests that probably "such writers as T.S. Eliot, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, D.H. Lawrence and Charles Morgan . . . have been influenced, directly or indirectly by Samuel Butler (1835-1902)."⁸⁸ Ernest Baker lists D.H. Lawrence, H.G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, J.D. Beresford, Oliver Onions, Frank Swinnerton, Gilbert Caman, Sir Hugh Walpole, May Sinclair, "Rebecca West," Clemence Dane, E.M. Delafield, Dorothy Richardson, Virginia Woolf, and comments: "It would be taking too much for granted to call them Butler's school; but at any rate they have followed his lead in a direction that has given

86 Young, p. 453.

87 Follett and Follett, p. 319.

88 Routh, Money Morals and Manners, p. 249.

new vitality to realistic fiction."⁸⁹ In the opinion of Lee Elbert Holt, E.M. Forster should be ranked second only to Bernard Shaw as a disciple of Butler.⁹⁰

By 1928 The Way of All Flesh was generally acknowledged as one of the landmarks of English literature. Annie Russell Marble in her Study of the Modern Novel bracketed The Way of All Flesh with George Moore's Esther Waters, two books which "exerted pioneer influence of a dynamic kind."⁹¹ Ford Madox Ford referred to The Way of All Flesh and Babbitt as "those two English national monuments,"⁹² and complained that no worth-while English novel had appeared "from the death of Swift to the publication of The Way of All Flesh."⁹³ Virginia

89 Baker, p. 247.

90 Lee Elbert Holt, "E.M. Forster and Samuel Butler," PMLA, LXI (1946), 804-819.

Holt's view was confirmed by Forster himself in the Listener, XLVII (June 12, 1952), 955:

Samuel Butler influenced me a great deal. . . .
He, Jane Austen and Marcel Proust are the three
authors who have helped me most over my writing,
and he did more than either of the other two to
help me look at life the way I do.

91 Annie Russell Marble, A Study of the Modern Novel (New York: Appleton, 1928), p. 134.

92 Ford Madox Ford, The English Novel (Philadelphia and London: Lippincott, 1929), p. 72.

93 Ford, The English Novel, p. 72.

Woolf, arguing that in 1910 human nature had suffered a change, detected the first signs of it in the books of Samuel Butler, in The Way of All Flesh in particular.⁹⁴

None of his books has made a greater contribution to Butler's fame than The Way of All Flesh. Universally condemned for the weakness of its structure, universally admired for the terse straightforwardness of its style, Butler's novel has been in other respects a focus of controversy. Although its influence on later writers has been generally recognized, the critics have not yet agreed to call it great.

II An Analysis of Popular Interest

The first edition of The Way of All Flesh was published in 1903, a year after Butler's death. Although the Athenaeum reviewed it favourably, for the most part the book was ignored by the critics at this time. Lee Elbert Holt has described it

⁹⁴ André Maurois, Aspects of Biography, trans. S.C. Roberts (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1929), p. 11.

See also:

Q.D. Leavis, Fiction and the Reading Public (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), pp. 71, 254, 326.

Compton Mackenzie, Literature in My Time (London: Rich and Cowan, 1933), p. 113.

as "a good example of a book which won its way because readers liked it and because several important authors discovered its value, rather than through any praise from reviews."⁹⁵ A second edition, published in 1908 after Shaw had drawn attention to Butler's novel in the preface to Major Barbara, was discussed along with Butler's other works by Clutton-Brock in the Times Literary Supplement. By 1910 a third edition was necessary, and in the same year the first American edition appeared. There was a second American edition in 1913, and a further English one in 1914. The first World War brought publication in Britain to a halt, but in America two editions were brought out during this period, one boasting an introduction by William Lyon Phelps.

After the war there was no edition in English of The Way of All Flesh until 1925, when the popular libraries began to include it on their lists. Since that date there have been thirty-five editions of the book in English. No period of two years has been without at least one; there were five in 1936 alone. The Modern Readers Series included it

⁹⁵ Lee Elbert Holt, "Samuel Butler's Rise to Fame," PMLA, LVII (1942), 869.

in 1925, the Traveller's Library in 1926, Everyman in 1927, and the Great Novels Library in 1928. It appeared in the American University Library and the Modern Library in 1930, and in the Florin Library in 1932. Everyman reissued it in England (1933) and in America (1934). Collins Library and Half-crown Fiction joined the ranks of its publishers in 1934, Pocket Classics in 1935, and the Oxford University Press and the Limited Editions Club in 1936. The modern Library reissued it in 1937 and again in 1950. During 1941 and 1942 there were five American editions, ranging in price from thirty-five cents to fifty-nine cents. A Penguin edition of 50,000 copies was brought out in 1951.

The privilege of reading The Way of All Flesh has not been confined to those who understand English. In 1921 the book was translated into French by Valéry Larbaud, the most prominent French champion of Butler. A German translation was made in 1928. An Italian translation first published in 1939 was reissued in 1946. A Spanish translation appeared in 1944.

Butler's popularity today rests entirely on The Way of All Flesh. Since 1940 Erewhon has been reissued only once,

the Notebooks twice, while The Way of All Flesh has been reissued seventeen times. The ideas ^{BUTLER} expressed in Erewhon are no longer of immediate concern to the man in the street. Some of them, like his attitude to the criminal, have been generally accepted. Others, like his criticism of the church, have lost their power to shock. With The Way of All Flesh the situation is different. Present interest in the book does not depend on its position as the first of the genealogical novels. These are common enough today. The man in the street is not concerned with Butler's caricature of his parents, and may be completely unaware that the novel is autobiographical. Children are no longer repressed as they were in the Victorian home. But young adults still face the problem of freeing themselves from parental domination. Ernest's struggle for the mastery of his soul is by no means a dead issue. The truthfulness of the book, the slow process of the action with its arresting philosophical digressions, the paradoxical ideas so matter-of-factly expressed, continue to attract readers by the thousand.

APPENDIX I

A PSALM OF MONTREAL

Certainly it cannot be denied that "A Psalm of Montreal" is widely known. On the other hand, how much it has contributed to Butler's reputation is difficult to assess, since many of those who instantly recognize the poem's refrain have no idea who its author was.

This bit of satirical verse, which originally appeared anonymously in the Spectator on May 18, 1878, has been as great a favourite with the critics as with the general public. George Sampson wrote in the Bookman in 1915: "No praise can be too high for the 'Psalm of Montreal', a poem really unique in the power of invective concealed beneath its apparently harmless humour."¹ The Cambridge History of English Literature called it Butler's masterpiece and drew attention to the opposition of spirit and letter so often set forth in Butler's work:

The Discobolus, the emblem of pagan grace, is thrust aside in deference to a person who boasts of his second-hand morality and thrives by a craft which simulates life. ²

XLVIII

1 Sampson, Bookman, p. 132.

2 Young, p. 452.

The popularity of the poem in 1932 is attested by H.C. O'Neill in his article on Butler in Great Victorians, in which he referred to it as still Butler's "sole passport to the hospitality of many."³ William York Tindall, writing in 1947, considered it Butler's most successful work.⁴

Nothing Butler wrote has been more widely admired by the critics or more thoroughly enjoyed by the public than these few lines of verse.

3 O'Neill, p. 127.

4 Tindall, p. 190, footnote.

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