SAMUEL BUTLER AND THE VICTORIAN COMPROMISE

by

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If, as Freud has argued in *The Future of An Illusion*, religious doctrines are illusions, even delusions, quite incompatible with reality, Samuel Butler inherited a very unreal world. His immediate ancestry boasted a grandfather, a father, and two uncles all devoted to preaching the faith of the "high and dry" branch of the Church of England.

The Reverend Thomas Butler was a "kind of human Sunday", such as Ernest, in *The Way of All Flesh*, thought all clergymen were expected to be. And a peculiarly Victorian Sunday at that. "Lest the Sabbath should be profaned by walking in the sunshine, the Macaulay children had been forbidden to worship at churches more than a certain distance from the parental abode." And lest the young Samuel should be profaned by worldly pursuits, he was taught to kneel before he could well crawl, and to say the Lord's prayer before he could do more than lisp. Thomas kept by him a book of precepts for everyday use; his God-fearing fingers could easily turn to

"Break your child's will early, or he will break yours later on", 4

So the father argued

"if his attention flagged or his memory failed him, here was an ill weed which would grow apace, unless it were plucked out immediately, and the only way to pluck it out was to whip him, or shut him up in a cupboard, or dock him some of the small pleasures of childhood." 5

Of course there was scriptural permission for this sadism. Habakkuk had described how the Father is omnipresent and omnipotent. In fact, there is much evidence to show that the Rev. Thomas Butler conceived of himself as an Old Testament god. He was vindictive; he was a jealous god; he would brook no resistance; he exacted tribute from his worshippers and dispensed favors to those who had no other gods before him.

It is tempting to trace all of Butler's mental complexity back to his relations with his father. But to recall the boyhood of Charles Darwin puts less strain on one particular school of psychology. Charles's father lived a useful, extrovert life as a country doctor; unlike the Reverend Thomas Butler, he never had to seek compensation in his household for the sham of his profession. So Charles lived a healthy, effortless boyhood, collecting plants, muddling through school, and finally giving up all thought of entering the Church. No rancour, no fanaticism, remained to prejudice a mind that was to devote itself for forty years to the patient collection of scientific data.

The young Samuel knew no such peace of mind, no such equilibrium of spirit; his disposition became contorted and inconsistent. Constantly dominated by his father, his mind came to deride authority even while this very derision had to seek compensation in herd-worship. He castigated the vested interests of the scientists and sneered at the smugness of the clergy; but upon Handel and Homer and Pauli he fawned. His mind never grew to maturity, because it could never rid itself of early theological training.

1. Habakkuk. ch. 3.
Though he smashed more idols probably than any other nineteenth century figure, it was "by putting fire-crackers under their pedestals" and not by seeking to understand and cope with the force that created the idols. This he was fundamentally unable to do; the religionism of the Butler home, with its Yahwehistic father, prevented it.

Butler began his jousting at religion in 1855 when at Cambridge. He wrote two parodies on the Simeonites, the "Gloomy, seedy-looking confrérie" of Evangelicals at St. Johns. Like Ernest,¹ he was at this time "something of a Saul and took pleasure in persecuting the elect, not --- that he had any hankering after skepticism, but because, like the farmers in his father's village, though he would not stand seeing the Christian religion made light of, he was not going to see it taken seriously."

Butler, however, did not cast much doubt upon the theology which he was assimilating in preparation for holy orders. His tutors never suggested that there was another side to Christian evidences. So he decided to investigate for himself; he started work upon a careful reading and re-reading of the Greek testament. Jones comments² that Butler had no interest at this stage in proving whether Christianity was, or was not, the true faith; he was merely looking for ground to form an opinion as to whether it was true or not.

The first breach with Christian dogma reveals the curious literal working of Butler's mind. Part of his parochial work as a lay assistant was that of teacher to a night class of boys. He made enquiries as to which of the boys had been baptized. He was "seriously and painfully

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1. The Way. ch. 47.
3. ibid. p. 60.
shocked" to find

"that no one, merely judging by their conduct and character, would ever have been able to separate the sheep from the goats." 1

So shocked in fact was Butler, that he declined ordination, and set sail for New Zealand. On the voyage out he suddenly stopped saying his prayers, age twenty-four. This constitutes the second of his "heresies", acts of sloughing off some of the external parts of his belief. It is remarkable how free of passion was Butler's "revolt". There is none of the melodramatic wagers with the Almighty so vividly described by Edmund Gosse, 2 nor any of the prurient blasphemy of the younger Dreisers. 3 Butler's development was so cerebral that I question whether the real core of religious feelings was ever touched. He put in two years as a New Zealand grazier, and boasts in a letter to his cousin, Philip Worsley, of a "gradual change from my old narrow bigoted tenets to my far happier present latitudinarianism." 4

But this change in his spiritual life was as fundamental as the disappearance of acne pimples in the maturing youth. He could still write in 1861,

"I believe Jesus Christ to have been the Son of God as much now as ever." 5

A year and a half later, August 14th, 1862, Butler writes

"I came to see that the death of Jesus Christ was not real. .... For the present I renounce Christianity altogether. You say people must have something to believe in. I can only say that I have not found my digestion impeded since I have left off believing in what does not appear to be supported by sufficient evidence." 6

2. Gosse, E. Father and Son. ch.2.
5. ibid. quoted p. 96.
6. ibid. p. 96.
The underlined clause is the crux of the matter here. Butler is not strictly accurate in saying that he had renounced Christianity altogether. What he had renounced was the gospel version of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

In *The Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as given by the Four Evangelists critically examined*, a pamphlet printed anonymously, Butler advanced his own version of the resurrection. In it, he came to the conclusion that Christ did not die upon the cross, but that he swooned and recovered consciousness after his body had passed into the keeping of Joseph of Arimathea. 1

In other words, Butler sought for and obtained a certain lowest common denominator among the discrepancies of the four gospel accounts. And from his body of agreement the crucial miracle of Christian teaching is transformed into a very natural phenomenon. I wonder just how "critically examined" was the evidence. Jones says "those were not the days of comparative religion." 2

But they were for some men. Max Muller had published his *Essay on Comparative Mythology* in 1856, and Ruskin can assert in 1867 that "for the last half-century, the soundest scholars and thinkers of Europe" held to this theory:

"that the mass of religious Scripture contains merely the best efforts which we know hitherto to have been made by any of the races of men towards the discovery of some relations with the spiritual world; that they are only trustworthy as expressions of the enthusiastic visions or beliefs of earnest men oppressed by the world's darkness, and have no more authoritative claim on our faith than the religious speculations and histories of the Egyptians, Greeks, Persians, and Indians." 3

1. Jones, F. *Memoir*. p.119. (the Evidence is not available in the University library).
2. Jones, F. "Memoir. (c) p.120
The urge to bring comparative evidence to bear on the dogmas of Christianity was in the air in the sixties. But Butler’s probing mind was pot-bound by his early training. He was kept from stretching out into the thorough-going infidelity of Roger Wendover in Robert Elsmere. He was content to reject a paramount doctrine of Christianity, and yet to remain a Christian.¹ Butler never passed on to investigate the possibility of Christ’s resurrection in the body as a pagan myth, or to question the historical evidence for the existence of any such person as Jesus. This hesitancy of mind is an important phase in Butler’s mental development. He still could not unlearn the long apprenticeship to his father in the Langar rectory.

The Fair Haven is but an extension of the arguments set down in The Evidence. Butler, in the character of John Pickard Owen plans to enter sympathetically and thoroughly into the difficulties of the unbeliever. The proper method of defending the faith, he decided, was not to dismiss airily all objections to the truth of Christianity. Rather these objections should be scientifically examined and reasonably refuted; only then would the foundations of belief be sound. Under cover of irony, and guided by Candour (the pilot that is to lead men into the Fair Havem), Butler concludes:

"What remains as the most reasonable view to be taken concerning His disappearance? Surely the one that was taken --- namely, that He had ascended bodily into Heaven and was sitting at the right hand of God the Father. Where else could He be?" ²

The pitiless, unanswerable irony of this final query marks Butler's religious coming-of-age. He had taken in the stupid and left the clever people a good deal in doubt, just as he wished to do.¹ Up to this point in his career, Butler had attacked the supernatural in Christianity, content to batter down its miraculous features. From now on, the greater part of his life is given over to putting a new superstructure upon the old foundation. He had laid the ghost of Jesus Christ,² but was now determined to prove that His Father was very much alive. And here Butler's religion becomes hardly distinguishable from his science; his biology becomes compatible with his continuing belief in God. The final compromise will be discussed and criticised later in this essay. It is necessary now to follow the scientific development of Butler's mind.

Butler had read the Origin of Species while he was in New Zealand, and was so greatly attracted to the book that he undertook to defend it against a "contemptuous rejoinder" of the Bishop of Wellington.³ This correspondence developed into the Book of the Machines in Erewhon. The protagonist for the destruction of the Erewhonian machines writes:

"Reflect upon the extraordinary advance which machines have made during the last few hundred years, and note how slowly the animal and vegetable kingdoms are advancing. The more highly organised machines are creatures not so much of yesterday, as of the last five minutes, so to speak, in comparison with past time. Assume for the sake of argument that conscious beings have existed for some twenty million years; see what strides machines have made in the last thousand." ⁴

This is the language of the convert to Darwinism, arguing that machines

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¹. Letters between Samuel Butler and Miss Savage, c. p.74.
². Jones, F. Memoir. ch.27.
³. ibid. pp. 100-1
constitute a new species, rapidly becoming better equipped for survival in the struggle with man for life.

Some of the reviewers of *Erewhon* thought Butler was poking fun at Darwin.¹ Butler wrote to tell Darwin that his theory of the machines only a fantastic theory. Yet within a year, he was using this playful fantasy as a petard with which to hoist Darwinism. Why? The more Butler thought, the more he questioned natural selection as a means of variation. He seemed to care not a whit that Darwin had pointed out at length that natural selection was the "main but not the exclusive" means of modification.² Butler's religiously-trained mind saw that Darwin's theory gave no "cause" for variations. In his summing-up of the work of the earlier evolutionists such as Lamarck, Erasmus Darwin et al., he says:

"the causes that have led to one's being born fitter --- are more noteworthy factors of modification than the factor that an animal, if born fitter for its conditions, will commonly survive longer in the struggle for existence."³

If all change was simply left to the fortuitous survival of infinitesimal variations, where did mind come in? Darwin would have said, "I don't know; here are my observed data, and here is a theory, natural selection, which seems to give a clear, systematic account of their workings. Take it or leave it." Butler, the son of the rectory, could not leave the implication of such a dispassionate study, namely, that Darwin had left the universe quite mindless, quite devoid of intelligence. The divine mind of Christianity had directed Butler's universe up till this time; now that It

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2. Massingham, op.cit. p. 120.
had become inadequate, a substitute must be found.

"He could not return to the Jewish and Christian idea of a God designing his creatures from outside; he saw, however, no reason why the intelligence should not be inside."  

Every molecule of matter now becomes full of will and consciousness for Butler. The line between animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic, disappears and even the stones become our poor relations.

God the Known and God the Unknown is the most extended discussion of this pantheism of Butler's. By nature an "eirenicon" (Butler's own significant word), this essay tries with great plausibility to bridge the gap between the mindless universe of Darwinism and the God-controlled world of the theologians. It is a subtle and ticklish document to come at. The arguments are seemingly logical, but the words on which the arguments proceed are slippery to a degree. It is a masterpiece of dialectic, worthy of Newman.

The Known God in this book is the animal and vegetable world, a Person whose evolution is the Mystery of his Incarnation. For proof of the common ancestry of everything: the common soul of this Person is the memories which all living forms prove by their actions that they possess; its body (an impersonal person!) is the "many-membered outgrowth of protoplasm, the ensemble of animal and vegetable life." A feature of this Credo is that it can offer immortality without troublesome resurrection from the dead. Everyone, the just and the unjust, continue to live in God, that is,

3. Butler, S. God the Known and God the Unknown, pp.62-88; the summary given here is essentially in Butler's own words.
the animal and vegetable world, because of the effect they have produced upon the universal life. This Known God knew beforehand the "kind of thing" he required; moreover, he could take the necessary steps to bring the various forms of life into being, because he recollected having passed through the same stages himself. (A variation on the biological statement: "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny").

What of the Unknown God? This is another personality much vaster than our known God; it is composed of Gods

"as our God is composed of all the living forms on earth and as all these living forms are composed of cells. --- Beyond this second God we cannot at present go, nor should we wish to do so, if we are wise." 1

(A variation on the astronomical concept of infinite systems beyond our solar system).

The production of this eirenicon was not simply an academic exercise for Butler. At the time he was trying to bring about a rapprochement between Science and the Church. He carried on a long intercourse with the Rosminian Fathers, 2 and even toyed with the idea of joining the Roman Catholic Church.

"If the Church of Rome would only develop some doctrine or, I know not how, provide some means by which men like myself, who cannot pretend to believe in the miraculous element of Christianity, could yet join her as a conservative stronghold, I for one should do so." 3

This flirtation with Rome continued in correspondence which Butler had with Professor St. George Mivart.

2. Butler, S. Evolution Old and New. Appendix to 2nd Ed.
3. Ibid. Ch. 2, quoted p. 370, Memoir.
There is not much to add to Butler's declared philosophy as outlined above. In *Luck or Cunning? as the Main Means of Organic Cunning*, he expands the two principal points which he has already made in *Life and Habit and Evolution, Old and New*:

(a) that heredity can be explained by the use of memory, and

(b) that evolution must proceed under the control of an intelligence, must respond to, a designing will.

Embryologists knew that a human foetus passed through the more rudimentary stages of animal life before it came to maturity. Once it was only a mass of cells. As differentiation proceeded, these cells became successively fish, reptile, bird, in the embryo. Butler explained this recapitulation as remembering by the individual of the evolution of the race. Further, at birth, certain functions, e.g., digestion and circulation, come "naturally" to the child. These are "memories" that man and countless earlier evolved forms have recalled and acted upon so often in the aeons of time, that they can now do them "unconsciously." The memory of other acts, such as walking on two legs, playing the piano, is comparatively recent; in these, man has little "race consciousness" to fall back upon, so he must "take thought" before attempting them, and so frequently makes mistakes.

It is in the handling of these new situations that variations occur. When the organism encounters unfamiliar conditions, that is, conditions towards which it cannot make an instinctive or "unconscious" response, the will or intelligence is brought into play. The individual's "sense of need" to cope with the unfamiliar produces a variation, perhaps
infinitesimal, and by a succession of such, new species evolve.

And so a new God, streamlined to comply with the principles of evolution, is put into circulation. The very essence of Luck or Cunning?

"is to insist on the omnipresence of a mind and intelligence throughout the universe to which no name can be so fittingly applied as God. Orthodox the book is not, religious. I do verily believe and hope it is; the whole scope is directed against the present mindless, mechanical, materialistic view of nature." ¹

Such is the mature synthesis which Butler arrived at in 1887. Before we pass on to an examination of this philosophy, it may be useful to tabulate the elements which it derives from its two parents, religion and science.

**Religion.**

1. acceptance of a god.
2. belief in immortality.
3. a designed universe.
4. acceptance of certain questions upon faith.
5. a mystical feeling towards Nature, coupled with a readiness to personify it.

**Science**

1. acceptance of the principles of evolution, and some of the implications of this doctrine.
2. use of certain features of "the scientific method", e.g.,
   (a) observation of natural phenomena, such as inherited traits.
   (b) a distrust about proceeding upon evidence that is not verifiable - which implies distrust of writings that churchmen accept because they are "inspired."
   (c) formulation of theories based upon this observation, that is, a desire to proceed from the known to the unknown.

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¹ Butler A. Luck or Cunning?, quoted in the Memoir, p. 41 (Vol. I.)
An Evaluation of Butler's Compromise.

This section of the essay will discuss the limitations and weaknesses of the original compromise reached by Butler, as described in Part 1. Some of the relevant implications of this compromise will then be related to Butler's thought and work, in particular, to

(a) his belief in instinct rather than reason
(b) his distrust of genius
(c) his appeal to the average
(d) the formation of his opinions

In Part 1, Butler's early life was sketched and the conclusion reached that the mature Butler had not outgrown the religious training of his youth. It was shown that he remained essentially a religious person, though unorthodox, and, at times, impious. He discarded prayers, belief in the inspiration of the Bible, and dependence upon the miraculous in Christianity. These, the outward and visible signs of an inward faith, stood condemned by his reason, which simply found them incredible and unnecessary. The inward faith, the product of Butler's early youth, remained, however, and gained a new outward aspect when Darwin and his work confronted him.

When this happened, Butler found that he must choose between a world operating solely on the laws of natural causation, and a world controlled by a supernatural Mind. On pages 8-10 it was indicated what Butler decided to do. Instead of making a clearly defined choice, he effected a conciliation of the two alternatives. This took the form of a theism which
postulated a mind in the organism, to the sum working of which mind Butler
gave the name of God.

This was the fundamental compromise of Butler's life. I wish to
argue here that a compromise such as this between orthodox religion on the
one hand, and science on the other, is an impossibility, on rational
grounds. He who attempts it does so at the risk of blunting, so to speak,
the tools of his mind. The resulting "philosophy", or body of ideas that
came from Butler's mind, illustrates, as I hope to show, the confusion
which arises when these blunted intellectual tools are used to weld two
irreconcilable ways of thinking.

To recapitulate slightly. The God of Butler's childhood had absolute
control of the universe; he was omnipotent and omnipresent. The believer
in Him had no doubt the Divine Will brought the best of all possible order
into the world. At the other pole, the scientist, the man who believed
in only what his intellect told him could be constantly tested and verified,
paid no attention to any final control or order. One of these men, Charles
Darwin, accumulated evidence over many years which suggested that new
species of life evolved simply by natural selection.

Butler's theological "hang-over" prevented him facing up to this dis-
covery of science with intellectual integrity. His mind had been for so
long accustomed to putting all control into the hands of a God, that it was
terrified to contemplate the logical results of Darwin's hypothesis, namely,
a Nature based upon invariable causation.

Butler proceeded to argue that unless the organism adapts itself by
use of a mind, then it follows that all life is based upon chance, and we
are what we are as the result of a series of quite unintelligible accidents. The intellectual confusion inherent in this argument arises from the projection of purely human attributes into a cosmic field. The terms "chance" and "accident" have really no meaning in the natural processes. These terms describe human experiences which the human mind has not yet grasped, or which it has not had the pre-vision to control.

So, to take care of chance and accident in the universe, Butler had to impose an intelligence upon some incomprehensible Infinite. That is, he set up the immanent god of all theists. At the same time he postulates a god with "personal" elements, with such human failings that it becomes almost an anthropomorphic being.

"The intelligence that operates in the 'ensemble of animal and vegetable life' is 'only quasi-omnipotent and quasi-all-wise' -- in return for the limitations we have assigned to Him, we render it possible for men to believe in Him, and love Him, not with their lips only, but with their hearts and lives." 1

To make the best of both worlds, Butler thus holds to a religion with a fallacious basis. Many of his philosophical ideas stem from this original illogicality.

Butler's abhorrence of the hard and fast rules of logic is a case in point. Throughout his life Butler believed in the supremacy of the instinct over any appeals to the intellect. Faith, for him, not logic, becomes the supreme arbiter, because "logic is like the sword -- those who appeal to it shall perish by it." 2 It seemed to Butler, and to many others in the nineteenth century better versed in science than he was, that

1. Butler, S. God the Known and God the Unknown. p.72 and passim in ch. VII.
the work of the scientist was being pursued to a logical and therefore absurd extreme in revealing the mindlessness of the universe. So his praise is reserved for the Lamarocks and the Buffons who apparently offered a mean between evolutionary and religious thought. By only a slight extension, it is easy to see how this praise came to spread to all people who could avoid extremes, who could lead a life of moderation, being successful in their own way, without giving too much thought to the matter.

The Italian peasant was such a person, because, by asking no reasons of Mother Church, he leads an instinctively successful existence, quite without thought. People who can so live are the "best" for Butler.

"Belief in instinct, or faith, 'consists in holding that the instincts of the best men and women are themselves an evidence which may not lightly be set aside.'" 1

The exemplars for Butler are the self-possessed, confident worldlings who are never embarrassed, whose savoir faire is sufficient to cope with all situations. They know instinctively how to wear clothes and instinctively how to come by an easy manner with a prostitute. Towneley and Pauli are god-like creatures when judged by these standards.

Scientists, on the other hand, are not content with this belief in instinct. For them it is too subjective a quality upon which to base behavior. They were constantly and aggressively probing, asking for proof of matters that other people just knew. They, all specialists and geniuses, refused to live as the mill-run of people did; their work had a disturbing effect upon order. "It unsettles mores and is therefore immoral," said

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Butler. 1 True, some change should be permitted to everyone, but only a peck, whereas genius wants many sacks full.

"There is a myth among some Eastern nation that at the birth of Genius an unkind fairy marred all the good gifts of the other fairies by depriving it of the power of knowing where to stop." 2

Scientists, for Butler, are men who do not know where to stop. They refuse to adhere to the "nice sensible class who know what's what rather than to the discovering class." 3 So, for three decades Butler carried a chip on his shoulder, and went out of his way to invite all geniuses, intellectuals, and specialists to knock it off. He wanted to take issue with them over their neglect of the activities which were the common property of mankind; those activities in which sensible people participate easily and without fuss because their forebears in pre-human generations have given them an "unconscious knowledge" of their working.

These average people are the touchstone of all morality for Butler. To know what's what, he simply watched the instinctive behavior of the sensible common man. He could do nothing else, considering the compromise he had made in spinning his beliefs out of two incompatible worlds, orthodox religion and science. This set of beliefs, Butler's "religion", could give no rational basis for ethics, because it was in itself fundamentally irrational. So just where Butler's religion should have taken imperative command of man -- in his everyday life -- it fails most strikingly. Butler does not even attempt to base his own behavior on it. He simply refers all problems to a Pauli or Jones or Mrs. Boss.

2. ibid.
3. Butler, S. Life and Habit. p. 34.
This *consensus gentium*, an appeal to the court of the universal agreement of sane, sensible, average people bristles with problems. First, how can Butler show that this majority of ordinary men really agree upon the subjects that he assumes they do? Alfred Cathie, Festing Jones, Mrs. Boss, the "mean" with which Butler had most contact, have left no record of having committed (or even of being able to commit),themselves upon the multitude of vexing questions that split society. He found it "refreshing" to have people like Alfred about him, making stupid remarks about the solar system which he could not understand.¹ But this coterie of sane; sensible mediocrity very simply found agreement upon contentious matters by never considering them at all. These companions suited Butler because they flattered him by providing an admiring claque, because they told him when to change his flannels and socks, and because, generally, they left him free to weave his own fantasies around the problem of the evolution of life, the question of truth, and so on. Upon these problems there was profound disagreement, but Butler was not aware of it because his mind had no contact with the people who thought about such things. All of Butler's rancour in the row with Darwin indicates a man who is not at home in a disinterested intellectual discussion. He shunned all his intellectual contemporaries because he felt they could not run their lives so successfully as Cathie, Boss, and Jones, who, instead of questioning truth, simply lived so as to give themselves the least trouble.

¹ Jones, F. Memoir. p. 125.
What makes for freedom from trouble, what is convenient, then, is the truth.

"All we should aim at is the most convenient way of looking at a thing -- the way that most sensible people are likely to find give them least trouble for some time to come. It is not true that the sun used to go around the earth until Copernicus's time, but it is true that until Copernicus's time it was convenient to us to hold this." 1

Convenient for whom? The College of Cardinals would have felt it of great convenience to them if Copernicus had not spread the results of his investigations. And Bishop Wilberforce certainly felt Darwin (and no doubt Butler) to be an inconvenience. There is always some vested interest that is concerned with the propagation of error, that finds it economically or socially or politically useful to have error universally agreed to by all "sensible" people. But even if it is felt that error is not perpetuated by this method, and that "common sense" does accumulate a residue of truth which expedites progress, the position of the scientists and philosophers remains unexplained. These are not men who find truth "what they can acquiesce in with the least discomfort." 2 Rather their work tends constantly to disturb the settled pools of opinion of the average mind. From this disturbance, if violent enough, a new set of opinions, perhaps slightly modified, takes possession of the "nice, sensible" people. 3

Ordinary, nice, sensible, men become an obsession with Butler.

"Homer tells us about some one who made it his business -- always to excel and to stand higher than other people. What an uncompanionable disagreeable person he must have been! Homer's heroes generally came to a bad end and I doubt not that this gentleman, whoever he was, did so sooner or later." 4

3. Brightman, E.S. An Introduction to Philosophy. p. 39-41. (My criticism through here has been suggested by the early part of this book).
Butler's heroes are made ordinary so that he or "his neighbors" can comprehend them; yet his villains he damns by making them ordinary.

"Why should the botanist, geologist or other-ist give himself such airs over the draper's assistant?" 1

he asks. And answers that, in his view, it takes as much intelligence and labor to classify the sub-divisions of textile life as it does to master the details of any other "great branch of science." So Darwin is reduced to the level of a clerk in Shoolbred's drapery department, and Butler's sour grapes are sweetened accordingly. Homer is dethroned, and his place taken by a young woman, Nausicaa, "a prehistoric Jane Austen", 2 whose work he renders for his sensible mediocre neighbors, into "Tottenham Court Road English". Shakespeare, to Butler, was an ordinary Elizabethan who would have been much greater had he written less, and gossiped more to us about himself and his times and the people he met in London and at Stratford-on-Avon; 3 Mr. W.H. ceases to be a peer, and takes up the same rank as the author of the sonnets. And Mr. Pontifex, who shares with Alethea all of Butler's sympathies in The Way of All Flesh, is essentially an ordinary man.

"Granted that Mr. Pontifex's was not a very exalted character, ordinary men are not required to have very exalted characters. It is enough if we are of the same moral and mental stature as the "main" or "mean" part of men -- that is to say as the average." 4

The ordinary people are not the intellectuals, the specialists, the dealers in extremes. They are people who would accept Butler's theism,

2. Jones, F. Memoir, v. 2 p. 106
who would not quibble and press home its illogicalities. They are the people who form opinions without making logic the supreme arbiter. How then are these opinions formed? In considering a difficult question, according to Butler,

"we think alternately for several seconds together of details, even the minutest seeming important, and then of broad general principles, whereupon large details become unimportant." 1

There follow periods when we resort to rules and logic to help us, and others in which

"the unwritten and unwriteable common sense of grace defies and over-rides the law." 2

This victory of the "deductive fits" is most Butlerian. From here on, how this mental pabulum finally becomes opinion is a miracle, like food becoming flesh and blood,

"involving the stultification of every intelligible principle on which thought and action are based." 3

Let us follow the assimilated opinion of the individual a little farther. By "assimilated" Butler means that the opinion must have become as much a part of him as the corpuscles of his blood. The individual does not think about these; unconsciously, they course through his blood-stream. A secure opinion is one that has become such an integral part of his mind that he need take no thought for it. Then he can afford to be temperate in expounding it. The most heated controversialists, Butler would say, are those who are most uncertain of their opinions, and must resort to argument to clinch a matter.

2. ibid.
3. ibid.
Argument tends to kill ideas because it seeks to hurry them into popular acceptance.

"Ideas and opinions, like living organisms, have a normal rate of growth which cannot be either checked or forced beyond a certain point." 1

To propagate an unpopular opinion, the propagandist should be especially careful not to outrage conventionalities, and

"if possible, he should get the reputation of being well-to-do in the world." 2

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2. ibid.

(So, according to Butler, I presume the socialist leader would have more opportunity of making his ideas stick if he has money enough to mingle with, and influence, the petty bourgeoisie. And so the philosopher of radical ideas should be strictly a "one-woman" man. The recent case of Bertrand Russell (see Time, issues of March 11 and 25, 1940) at the College of the City of New York might be used as a touchstone for this argument of Butler's. Would Russell's influence upon contemporary opinion have been greater, if while debunking the sanctity of marriage vows, he had seen fit to live a model, monogamous existence? Or has the spectacle of an eminent intellectual, courageously living according to his principles, while being attacked by religious obscurantists, brought his opinions into great respect among the majority of people? Butler would probably have assented to the former, overlooking the fact (as pointed out above) that the suppression of enlightenment among the masses is usually procured by certain vested interests, and that to make a new opinion (no matter how true it may be in theory) become one with this organised distortion is like asking a fish to live in poisoned water. Rebellion can change opinions.)
Note the interplay of contrasting elements in this method of forming opinions -- the point and counterpoint of induction and deduction, the details in generalities, and *vice versa*, the logical in the unreasonable, and *vice versa*, -- in all, the constant aversion to anything like an absolute. I feel here that Butler is vindicating his own habit of mind, a habit that does not ask for positive and final evidence. He is "rationalising" his own inability to be a rational person. The all-wise and sensible average of the public does not have to think out an opinion; it just "knows" as much as suits its convenience.

To what extent are Butler's own opinions arrived at in this way? At the end of his Notebooks, Butler lists the following as some of the "finds" of his life.

1. "The emphasising the analogies between crime and disease."

In *Erewhon* Butler's satire is directed against the stupidity of the English who, while aware of and sympathetic towards bodily illnesses, could not bring themselves to see that most crime was nothing but mental illness.

The Erewhonian judge delivers his sentence:

"Prisoner at the bar, you have been accused of the great crime of labouring under pulmonary consumption, and after an impartial trial before a jury of your countrymen, you have been found guilty. --- It pains me much to see one who is yet so young, and whose prospects of life were otherwise so excellent, brought to this distressing condition by a constitution which I can only regard as radically vicious; but yours is no case for compassion; this is not your first offence; -- You were convicted of aggravated bronchitis last year."

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It is all very well for you to say that you came of unhealthy parents and had a severe accident in your childhood which permanently undermined your constitution; excuses such as these are the ordinary refuge of the criminal; but they cannot for one moment be listened to by the ear of justice." 1

The worth of any analogy is that it illuminates the unknown by relating it to the known. Here Butler reasons from the accepted opinions of all sensible people regarding bodily illnesses and, by analogy, pleads that the majority may come to accept a similar attitude towards mental disorders. That this opinion has become partially "assimilated" to the average body of thought of the twentieth century can be seen in our psychiatric study of crime, with its emphasis upon therapeutic rather than punitive treatment.

2. "The emphasising also the analogies between the development of the organs of our bodies and of those which are not incorporate with our bodies and which we call tools or machines."

This is one of Butler's leading ideas. It is sketched in Erewhon 2, is a principal theme in Life and Habit, and is often referred to in Luck or Cunning? 3 As before, in the preceding "find", Butler could assume a body of knowledge that was beginning to commend itself to the majority of "sensible" people, namely, evolution. By grafting his own theory upon the accepted evolutionary principles, he could effect a compromise that, by its absence of shock, would meet with general acceptance.

In the Book of the Machines in Erewhon, Butler sets forth his idea that tools are extra-corporeal limbs which we have manufactured. "Machines

3. Butler, S. Luck or Cunning? see pp. 80-81, 89 et seq.
"Machines are the supplementary limbs which man has made for himself through his intelligence and sense of need. They are only extensions to his physical organization." 1

Six years later, in Life and Habit, Butler had come to believe that, by a simple extension of this Erewhonian principle, we could easily think of our limbs as machines, as tools which we have manufactured through our desire or need for them. A wooden leg is

"nothing but a bad kind of flesh leg, and a flesh leg (is) only a much better kind of wooden leg than any creature could be expected to manufacture introspectively and consciously." 2

3. "The clearing up the history of the events in connection with the death, or rather crucifixion, of Jesus Christ; and a reasonable explanation, first, of the belief on the part of the founders of Christianity that their master had risen from the dead and, secondly, of what might follow from belief in a single supposed miracle."

This "find" covers a period in Butler's thinking on religion that dates from The Evidence for the Resurrection (1865) and The Fair Haven (1873) to Erewhon Revisited (1901). In the first book he was willing to present a "reasonable explanation" of how the followers of Jesus came to believe He had risen from the dead -- indicating a perfectly natural occurrence. (ante. p. 5) In The Fair Haven (ante. p. 7) Butler proceeded to knock the props from under Christianity by demolishing, with masterly irony, the supernatural Resurrection. And finally, in Erewhon Revisited, he goes on to show the great structure of clergy-inspired supernaturalism that can be reared on a very natural occurrence, if only it can be accepted as a miracle.

1. Stillman, C.G. Samuel Butler. p. 120.
Mr. Higgs escaped from Erewhon in a balloon. When he returns twenty years later, this feat has become a miraculous thing. He himself has been deified as the Sunchild, and made the central figure in the new religion, Sunchildism. A vast state church has sprung up, and keeps the myth alive through relics and testimonials, glosses and "conjectural emendations." All of this is satire upon the development of religions in general, and upon Christianity in particular. Such a monstrous development in Erewhon was the inevitable result of the machinations of the extremists, the enthusiasts, who must carry a belief to an extreme instead of "reasonably" trying to make it fit in with the beliefs of moderate, sensible people. Consider Butler's description of the three members of the Erewhonian professional classes with whom Mr. Higgs has most contact.

Hanky, the Professor of Worldly Wisdom, is the scheming fanatic without peer. He is scientific attitude incarnate for Butler; unscrupulous, plausible, heartless; a man constantly on the alert for his own aggrandisement and that of his order. Deceit and lies will be his stock in trade. "Hanky is everything that we in England rightly or wrongly believe a typical Jesuit to be." ¹ Could any more damning insult be flung at Darwin, Huxley, and their kind?

On the other hand, Panky, the Professor of Unworldly Wisdom, "must persuade himself of his own lies, before he is quite comfortable about telling them to other people." ² He is what "in England would be called an extreme ritualist." ³ Eventually he will become the tool of

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2. ibid.
3. ibid.
Hanky because the church is not clever enough to resist the wiles of the scientists. That is, in time the church will fall a victim to "natural selection", and all that it stands for. It will be forced out of existence by the zealots, the Hankys, of the scientific hierarchy.  

The third Erewhonian professional is the mean between these two extremes, Dr. Downie, Professor of Logomachy, and author of the best-seller, The Art of Obscuring Issues. But even the moderate doctor is not untouched by Butler's venom:

"He had earned a high reputation for sobriety of judgment by resolutely refusing to have definite views on any subject; so safe a man was he considered, that while still quite young, he had been appointed to the lucrative post of Thinker in Ordinary to the Royal Family."  

But nevertheless Dr. Downie comes nearer to Butler's own religious views than either Hanky or Panky. In his preface to Erewhon Revisited, Butler avows that he has always professed himself a member of the English Broad Church. And Dr. Downie is Butler's enlightened Broad Churchman. He is the man who would keep the spirit of religion from getting beyond the ken of ordinary men, from falling into the control of scientific zealots and religious bigots. 

"He will neither preach nor write against it (Sunchildism), but he will live lukewarmly against it, and this is what the Hankys hate. They can stand either hot or cold, but they are afraid of lukewarm."  

It was the Dr. Downies who alone could prevent a "blatant, bastard science" stepping in to replace an antiquated Church of England. They would balance the corruptions of the one against the other, acting

2. Butler, S. Erewhon Revisited p. 89.  
4. op. cit. p.288.
prudently, without haste or open dissent or extreme measures. They would, according to Butler, never get the perfect truth, but they would get a version of Sunchildism as near to truth as it was ever possible to come. And this version would be appealing to sensible, mediocre people. Higgs' advice to his son, as they are about to part, summarizes it:

"get rid of cock-and-bull stories, idealise my unworthy self, and, as I said last night, make me a peg on which to hang your own best thoughts --- But if Hankyism triumphs, come what may you must get rid of it, for he and his school will tamper with the one sure and everlasting word of God revealed to us by human experience."  

4. "The perception that personal identity cannot be denied between parents and offspring without at the same time denying it as between the different ages (and hence moments) in the life of the individual and, as a corollary on this, the ascription of the phenomena of heredity to the same source as those of memory."

This corollary I have discussed above on page 11. Having concluded that the individual's hereditary experiences are but the remembrance of parallel stages in the development of the race, Butler is forced to ask how the individual can remember the experience of the race unless he actually took part in that experience himself. 2 There is no answer except "personal identify". As there is identity between parent and offspring, so there must also be between all generations back to the primordial cell.

It is generally conceded that the man of eighty is the same person as the baby a few hours old. It is not so widely held that the same baby is even closer in identity to the embryo one hour before birth than to the

old man. So, the man is identified with the embryo back to the
impregnate ovum, and, even farther, to the ovum before impregnation and
the spermatozoon which impregnated it, and ultimately to the primordial
cell even, "which again will probably turn out to be but a brief
resting-place." Clara Stillman brings the proceedings together as
follows:

"The generations are to life what successive phases
of personality are to the individual, though some
of them may exist simultaneously or overlap as
phases of personality do too."

Butler's "find" here is in his adumbration of the continuity of
the germ plasm, a matter now in scientific acceptance. His methods of
arriving at it again follow the Butlerian principles as illustrated
throughout this section of the essay. From the obvious and known
identity between the different ages of the individual, the eighty year
old man and the one hour old child, Butler can project his own theory of
the identity of parent and offspring through all time. He can thus, by
analogy, invite the mind of the sensible majority to add another cubit to
their mental stature, without confusion and without shock.

5. "The tidying up of the earlier history of the theory of evolution,
and
6. "The exposure and discomfiture of Charles Darwin and Wallace and
their followers."

In one of his notes Butler says that America was too big to have
been discovered all at once. "It would have been better for the graces
if it had been discovered in pieces of about the size of France and

2. ibid. pp. 96
4. in Butler, S. Evolution, Old and New.
writers, not for the connoisseur, but for the sensible and artistically inclined Cathies and Paulis and Joneses. Justice must be done to Ferrari and Tabachetti in the eyes of the multitude, not of the specialist. Their work must be set moving again in the common tide of knowledge.

The sixteenth of his "finds" reads

"In Narcissus and Ulysses I made an attempt, the failure of which has yet to be shown, to return to the principles of Handel and take them up where he left off."

This is the prescription which Butler had for the making of all art. The greatest artists are those which attach themselves to their predecessors and grow out of those whom they find most congenial. Thus Beethoven grew out of Haydn and Mozart, Mozart grew out of Haydn, Haydn grew out of Domenico Scarlatti and Emmanuel Bach, each adding a little leaven to the whole lump. Musical composition becomes thus a singularly simple and prosaic art. The composer, to be successful, should fit into the current mode of the prevalent "school" in his own country. He should feel no scruples about lifting even a dozen pages from a predecessor; after all, only a small percentage of any music can be original. To be enjoyable, a piece of music must not shock us by its strangeness; it must always have hooks upon which we can hang our earlier associations.

"He who loves music will know what the best men have done, and hence will have numberless passages from older writers floating at all times in his mind, like germs in the air, ready to hook themselves on to anything of an associated character."

2. ibid. p. 124.
3. ibid. p. 126.
Germany at a time."  

His quarrel with the Darwinians took shape from his belief that they would not consider evolution too big a subject to be discovered by one man. It seemed to Butler that the popularizers of one man's theory were now being hailed as discoverers. The Cuviers, Huxleys, Tyndalls, and Romaneses had conspired to elevate their hero above all rivals, and to snuff out the discoveries of Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, and Lamarck. So Butler expounded the views of these "forgotten" men to relight an interest in pre-Darwinian evolution (and, of course, to give chapter and verse in his personal pique with Darwin). The worship of Darwin was outdoing the worst features of the worship of Christ. A man, Butler notes, may say what he likes about Christ but he must be very careful how he attacks Mr. Darwin.

"'How many more victims must be sacrificed before wrong-headed vestrymen will obey the teachings of science?' (Globe, 1878) Here we have exactly the spirit of the Hebrew prophets."  

To clear away this specious reverence, to inform sensible, average men of the long tradition of evolutionary thought that they were heirs to without benefit of Darwin, was Butler's intent in Evolution Old and New. Butler took men through the fields of evolution and showed them flowers which they had not been before.  

His note, fourteen years after the publication of Evolution Old and New indicates that the expedition had not been in vain:

1. Butler, S. Further Extracts from the Notebooks. p. 158.
2. ibid. p.42.
3. ibid. p.137.
"To talk about this (the inheritance of acquired characteristics) with the average Darwinian scientist is like talking about Home Rule with a Gladstonian. The Gladstonian is not likely to leave off avowing that he has the best of the argument, and the common sense of the country, however apathetic and incurious it may have been, is not likely to let the Gladstonian have his own way now that it is beginning to wake up to the situation." 1

9. "The restitution to Giovanni and Gentile Bellini of their portraits in the Louvre and the finding of five other portraits of these two painters of whom Crowe and Cavalcaselle and Layard maintain that we have no portrait."


11. "The calling attention to Gaudenzio Ferrari and putting him before the public with something like the emphasis that he deserves."


13. "The unearthing of the Flemish sculptor Jean de Wespin (called Tabachetti in Italy) and of Giovanni Antonio Paracca."

The impulses that drove Butler to make these artistic "finds" were probably very mixed. He blamed his own shortcomings in art upon the academy which he attended. The academic spirit blighted everything from "the Pope to the War Office." 3 So the shallow deductions and "tacit overweening conceit of infallibility" of the academies had Butler in a constant state of opposition. He admires Swinburne for refusing to join an English Academy of Letters, and feels it a compliment that he himself was not asked to join. 4 Academicians were the faddists of the arts for

1. Butler, S. Further Extracts from the Notebooks. p. 287.
2. I have not been able to locate any acknowledgment by art critics of this particular "find."
4. Ibid. p. 316.
Butler, people who paint bad pictures and hope some day they will turn out to be appreciated works of art.

"The academies and universities are the servants' halls of art, literature, and science. The talk that goes on in them is the servants' hall gossip of these three great families. The masters are the outside people whose money the academicians are trying to catch; unfortunately these outsiders are too apt, like many other masters, to give their servants credit for knowing as much and working as hard and disinterestedly as they pretend to do, and are long to transform them into masters." 1

Butler therefore fled to the cantons of Northern Italy and Austria, to the chapels at Varallo and Saas-Fee, places so out of the way that their paintings and decorations had not yet felt the clammy hand of the academicians. These places were vantage points for Butler, where he was the unchallenged master, fulfilling himself by drawing the public's attention to art treasures, and inviting them to judge without the conceit and priggishness of the critics intervening.

Furthermore, when Butler discovered works of Ferrari and Tabachetti and Paracca, and "restored" a Holbein to its rightful ownership, he had emancipated himself from the self-opinionated faddists of the academies. He had compensated himself for his own artistic mediocrity, and had served notice on the critics that while it might please them to condemn his own work, here was still a man who could do things which average sensible people would appreciate in spite of academicism.

In these "finds" Butler has common sense opinion constantly in mind. He is interested in "restoring" and "discovering" painters and

1. Butler, S. Further Extracts from the Notebooks. p.293.
This advice of compromise for artists, this timidity about trying the new and hesitancy about laying the old aside, produces first class imitators, but never inspired artists. It fosters the sedulous apes of music, the Butlers and the Joneses, but it cannot account for the Beethovens and the Mozarts. The greatest of musicians (and painters and writers) exist almost in spite of their predecessors. By no critical accident is Beethoven's seventh symphony considered superior to his first and second.

Note that all of this positive work of Butler's career he calls "finds". It is impossible to be a professional scientist or discoverer or specialist without at some time making a final appeal to rational criticism; it is possible, however, to be an earnest amateur, wandering around in the arts and sciences like a learned guide pointing out things which the average people have not seen — it is possible to do all this, without having to give critical, intellectual justification for one's "finds." No more equipment is necessary than what is needed "to pick up in the public place sovereigns that other people would not notice." ¹ A quick eye and an inquisitive mind are the pre-requisites.

Butler certainly had both of these qualities, but was far from being an intellectual giant. He seems to have fallen between the two professions of artist and scientist, and this dilemma, I submit, springs from his original compromise between religious orthodoxy and the science of evolution.

Butler's failure as a creative artist bears out this contention. This great advocate of faith, of intuition, just lacked enough faith, enough "inspiration", to make himself the artist of genius. His portraits look like touched-up passport pictures, and his one large canvas, Mr. Heatherley's Holiday might well serve as a stage back-drop. The only thing remembered in Butler's poetry is a blasphemous refrain to his tirade against the city of Montreal for hiding its Discobulus from the public view; the sonnets have dropped out of sight because their competent structure cannot hide their mawkish sentiments. His music takes up where Handel left off and results in imitation.¹

Butler's real competence lay in the pointing of satire, which is just a method of revealing the follies and inconsistencies of things as they are. He excelled in the drawing of analogies, in perceiving overlooked matters, and in helping the average mind to assimilate them.

¹. This is a somewhat prejudiced criticism of Butler's music. I have not had an opportunity to hear it. But from reading some of the librettos, and considering Butler's musical training under Rockstro, I gather his work is second rate.

Furthermore, I think it can be argued that Butler's one novel is not, in all strictness, the work of a fully creative artist. The Way of All Flesh is semi-autobiographical; the plot was made for him by his own life and the lives of the members of his own family; the characters are his own friends and enemies. Butler has used this ready-made material without attempting to shape it according to a pattern. So the work lacks unity; the incidents, even where they have relevance, are strung together. Perhaps if Butler had been more interested in creating a novel than he was in making an autobiographical tale, he might have succeeded in bringing home order into his material.
All of this work then of Butler's is the product of a man who was at home in the world neither of the rationalist, who lives by reference principally to his intellect, nor of the artist, who lives, in the main, by reference to his faith. The dilemma remains when the whole broad field of Butler's philosophy is surveyed: Butler's lively mind and scientific reading would not allow him to be the complete mystic who would ask for no other proof than that which faith would give him. Butler seems to hover rather pitifully between a complete belief in ratiocination and a consistent trust in faith. I submit that he could not do otherwise because of the fundamental compromise of his life, namely, his attempt to graft an intellectual faculty on to the religious faith which had persisted from his childhood. The resulting confusion led him into the forming of a "philosophy" that depended upon instinct, common sense, vague non-committals --- in a word, into becoming an earnest compromiser between extremes in all questions.
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(a) Jones' uncritical attitude towards his master; the faithful puppy-dog attitude pervades most of the book.

(b) The failure to indicate the estrangement that took place between the two men after Jones became financially independent of Butler. (Muggeridge makes much of this omission in *The Earnest Atheist*, pp.150-155). It does for me weaken the authority of the latter half of Volume II.

(c) Jones' own limited background. So often in the books I feel it would be illuminating to have Butler's ideas and work tied in with a wider social or political context in Europe. Jones is not the man capable of doing this.

The Notebooks and Further Extracts from the Notebooks were my most fruitful source of Butlerian ideas (not excepting such longer works as *Erewhon*, etc.) Almost every note has in it the germs of a long essay.
Malcolm Muggeridge's _The Earnest Atheist_ is the most sheerly stimulating book on Butler which I have read. It is a suave, witty, almost cunning piece of debunking that leaves Butler a pitiful misanthrope and Jones a conscientious hypocrite.

Mr. Muggeridge's book is the perfect antidote for Mrs. R.S. Garnett's _Samuel Butler and his Family Relations_ -- 228 pages of gushing whitewash. Mrs. Garnett clings to some relationship with the Butler family (actually her grandfather was brother to Butler's mother), and her unwavering attitude is "my relatives right or wrong, but --". The perverse Samuel just misunderstood his parents and sisters.

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