THE PRAGMATISM OF SAMUEL BUTLER (1835-1902)

An abstract of a Thesis by
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Samuel Butler, English Victorian man of letters, is best known for his work on evolution and his three didactic and often satirical narratives: Erewhon, The Way of All Flesh, and Erewhon Revisited.

In his writing Butler developed a philosophy of pragmatism, based on a belief in evolutionary progress, common sense, and the idea of a divinity expressed through human conduct.

Butler's scientific works lay the theoretical groundwork for his pragmatism. Evolution was purposive, self-initiated. Guided by the principles of "memory" and "unconscious knowledge," man achieves "grace" by committing himself to the product of his senses, living according to "instinct" in the ordinary world.

The natives of Erewhon live up to Butler's code of conduct, but his English protagonist, Higgs, fails to fully realize man's potential for enlightened progress. Erewhon is not as much a satire on the age of machines as a call to "instinct." Butler's pragmatism reaches new heights in the working out of his theories in human society.

In The Way of All Flesh and Erewhon Revisited, Butler's pragmatism is colored by his personal frustrations and by the failure of his two protagonists to live up to his code of conduct. The Way of All Flesh adds the test of time to Butler's theory as a standard for measuring the achievement of individuals and families, since Ernest Pontifex cannot come to grips with the evolutionary forces at work in his own life. The aging Higgs in Erewhon Revisited turns to his son, George, as a representation of Butler's gentlemanly ideal; but the younger man is no match for a changing social order. Butler's pragmatism could not encompass the dawning twentieth century and Butler's own deepening sense of failure.
THE PRAGMATISM OF SAMUEL BUTLER (1835-1902)

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Chapter 1

Introduction
Butler's Pragmatism: A Critical Overview

Samuel Butler is best known not for what he said but for how he said it, as the satirist who delighted in taking what John Stuart Mill called the "received opinions" of his day and turning them upside down and topsy-turvy, taking as much pleasure in the confusion of his friends as in the anger of his enemies. As a social critic, and he was this in spite of his well known antipathy to contemporary causes, Butler harbored few illusions that he was appreciated or even understood by his Victorian readers. In his own mind, indeed, he was nothing less than the "enfant terrible" of literature: "If I cannot, and I know I cannot, get the literary and scientific bigwigs to give me a shilling, I can, and I know I can, heave bricks into the middle of them." Bold words, coming from a man his self-proclaimed ally, George Bernard Shaw, once characterized as a "shy old bird."


3Phillip Henderson, Samuel Butler: The Incarnate
The facts of Butler's placid, self-contained existence, coupled with the frequent shrillness of his invective against middlebrow complacency, made him from the beginning of his career an object of critical and academic abuse and social ostracism. Butler's reputation was made by the Edwardians after the posthumous publication of his novel, The Way of All Flesh, in 1903. The book delivered the final blow to what had been the mainstay of the preceding age, the middle class family; and for a new and presumably enlightened generation of British intellectuals, Butler was a belated but nonetheless delightful breath of fresh air. Cyril E. M. Joad, an early admirer, invokes perhaps the best known description of Butler's unique talents: "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 was a satirist, a mocker, a jester, not savage like Swift, but irreverent like a schoolboy who laughs his masters out of countenance. He pricked the bubbles, the reputations popped, and the mischievous laughter of the schoolboy was heard in the background."^2


In 1915, another admirer, the novelist Gilbert Cannan, assessed Butler's good deeds in this way: "Faced with a mountain of prejudice, Butler planted his grain of mustard seed, and we who have come after him have the privilege and proud pleasure of seeing the mountain move. May the prejudice we create in our time be in favor of worthier aims, and may there be another and a greater Butler to assist in removing it when its weight becomes intolerable!"\(^1\) To the young Shaw, Butler was in his own way "the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century."\(^2\)

Shaw's praise of Butler in the "Preface" to *Major Barbara* helped immeasurably to enhance Butler's popularity, as Hugh Kingsmill notes in his perceptive essay on Butler in *After Puritanism*;\(^3\) but the feeling for Butler after *The Way of All Flesh* was not entirely dependent on the approval of the London literary establishment. Butler's followers combined a characteristic British respect for eccentricity with a twentieth-century fascination about the mind. They found Butler's exploration of the roots of consciousness painful and exciting.


Because of the nature of The Way of All Flesh, the battle over Butler in the early years of the century was almost always fought on personal grounds. As his reputation grew, the reaction against Butler's work and what had come to be known as "Butlerism" set in firmly.\(^1\) Butler's decline may be traced to the revaluation of Victorianism, to the recognition that much had been good in the institutions he and others had so bitterly attacked. G. D. H. Cole, one of the first to proclaim Butler's talents as a social philosopher, conceded that while Butler had given his readers a faithful rendering of contemporary life, his version was colored and in fact distorted for the purposes of satire.\(^2\) Cole's analysis, like Kingsmill's, showed restraint in linking the details of Butler's life with his art, something other, less judicious critics were by no means inclined to do.

Mrs. R. S. Garnett began the attack on Butler in 1926 with her book, Samuel Butler and His Family Relations.\(^3\) Mrs. Garnett was a woman with ulterior motives; as a first cousin,\(^4\)

\(^1\)No doubt the man most responsible for the Butler cult was his good friend, Henry Festing Jones. Jones's proselytizing--the infamous "Butler dinners," the voluminous Memoir, the gathering of a collection of "Butlerania" (shoes, kettleholders, and the like)--lent to Butler's posthumous reputation the dull orthodoxy he detested in life. For a complete discussion of this phenomenon, see Phillip N. Fur-bank, Samuel Butler, 2nd ed. (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1971).

\(^2\)Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh, p. 6.

\(^3\)Mrs. R. S. Garnett, Samuel Butler and His Family Relations (London: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1926).
the daughter of Phillip Wosley, Fanny Butler's brother, she took it upon her honor to uphold the threatened family circle, threatened, that is, by the close resemblance of Langar Rectory to Battersby in The Way of All Flesh. Butler's hostility toward the Christian family was, Mrs. Garnett states, the result of his "own temperament and doings." Lacking "moral robustness," he refused to confront his anxieties directly, channeling his blighted feelings into increasingly futile intellectual undertakings. Butler, claims Mrs. Garnett, was the pathetic victim of his own ridicule: "He stabbed himself with every thrust of his enemies." Unable to openly defy the things he hated most, he "got his blows in sideways," and the family was left to suffer the consequences.

Mrs. Garnett's account contains some truth, although I suspect she too was eager to have her say in the general revival of interest in her kinsman. Unfortunately, she never met Butler and knew her aunt only slightly. Samuel Butler and His Family Relations is a valuable source of anecdotal material about the Butlers; but in the end it is not, as Mrs. Garnett had hoped, a vindication of Fanny and the Canon. Her careful documentation of their kindnesses—the Canon's "flower" poems, Fanny's sentimental sketches—and their cruelties—Butler's father, it seems, really did hate children—rather proves Butler's point. If the Butlers were not villains, they were at least silly about a great many things,

1Garnett, p. 130.
the essence of the charge leveled against Theobald and Christina in *The Way of All Flesh*.

More characteristic of anti-Butler sentiment in the twenties and thirties is Malcolm Muggeridge's *The Earnest Atheist*.¹ In making Butler the man synonymous with Ernest Pontifex, his caricature in *The Way of All Flesh*, Muggeridge paints an unsparing portrait of a plodding, mechanical dwarfish soul. Butler, his pathetic crony, Jones, and the younger men they eagerly "mothered," lose all dignity under Muggeridge's scorn. Butler's mind was his refuge, states Muggeridge, as he and Jones "buried their appetites under deep layers of sentimentality, trying to abolish his [Butler's] altogether, outdoing their pattern of domestic felicity with another of solitary felicity, stuffing ideas, instead of conventions, into the mouth of passion to silence it, laying up treasure not even of gold, but of paper money."²

Within this bleak picture, Muggeridge frames the aspirations of the generation of the thirties, the source of his real grudge against Butler:

*The Way of All Flesh* has born a rare progeny of young men and women living in their own way in their own rooms and in front of their own gas fires; of earnest promiscuity--he matters to


²"Introduction" to *The Earnest Atheist*, ix.
her, she matters to him, may matter, once mattered, matters no longer, mattering and not mattering and perhaps mattering; of poets in coloured shirts who love one another, and are Communist, and sing of the worker in the factory, the miner in his mine; of quiet, kindly solitary persons who take each other's arms, and smile meekly as the kettle boils for tea, and go for country walks discussing the League of Nations on their way; of other novels--how many other novels! which empty out the insides of their authors as Butler empties out his inside, dissecting relationships, streaming consciousness.¹

For a writer who disdained political causes, Butler succeeded in evoking a kind of socialistic nightmare for Muggeridge. All this from "the ultimate Victorian."² The Earnest Atheist is anti-Butlerism in the extreme, but Muggeridge's criticism serves as a clear warning of the dangers of a biographical assessment of Butler based on a smattering of first-hand sources and the incidents recounted in his narratives.³

¹Muggeridge, xiv. ²Muggeridge, ix. ³A number of critics in recent years have contributed toward a more balanced view of Butler. Phillip Henderson's biography, Samuel Butler: The Incarnate Bachelor, resolves some of the questions that Jones was either unable or unwilling to deal with in his Memoir, Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon: A Memoir, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan and Company, 1919). F. N. Furbank in Samuel Butler provides an equally succinct analysis of important trends in Butler's theory and
Butler was a man of many, although limited talents: painter, musician, philosopher, scientist; but beyond all this—for all his activities led to this single aim—he was a seeker after what he hesitantly called truth, after the one principle or set of principles that would, if followed conscientiously, permit him to cope with his anxieties. He shares this goal, of course, with many other men and women of his time. Yet unlike other social prophets—Matthew Arnold is one example—he harbored few schemes for the betterment of those outside his small sphere of interest. Above else Butler sought truth on his own, self-contradictory terms. Butler, claims Daniel Howard in his "Introduction" to Ernest Pontifex or The Way of All Flesh, "considered himself merely an intelligent individual, aware of the corruption and stupidity of social institutions—indignant, but indifferent to social reform. Through agonies like those of Ernest he had come to private terms with the world as it was, and he did not want his balance upset by any general change."

This self-centeredness is one reason why Butler escapes both Shaw's accolades and Mugggeridge's wrath.


A loner at heart, Butler spent most of his adult life "chasing something," pursuing an idea that he alone was capable of fully perceiving, twisting, contorting, amplifying his find until he had exhausted its possibilities, stopping only then to proclaim with satisfaction the fruits of his labor.¹ Butler's heart, as he tells us in his notebook, was in his work. "A man's work," he wrote there, "whether in music, painting or literature is always a portrait of himself." (Note-Book, p. 115) Such is the first tenet of Butler's pragmatism.

Although he is best remembered as a narrative writer, Butler never saw his work in a strictly literary context. "It is all very well," he wrote his friend, Eliza Mary Ann Savage, before the publication of his religious satire, The Fair Haven, "but I cannot settle down to writing a novel and trying to amuse people when there is work wants doing which I am just the man to do, and which it seems to me is crying out to be done. I shall never be quiet until I have carried out the scheme which is in my head."²

As Butler feared that the effort expended in writing The Way of All Flesh could better be expended elsewhere, so too he felt assured that the ultimate purpose of his work


transcended aesthetics. If Butler had a message for his readers, it was for each person to seek out what was best in his own heart. "I am afraid," he wrote, "I shall regard The Way of All Flesh as I regarded Erewhon, as a mere peg on which to hang anything I have a mind to say ... the only question is whether after all that matters much, provided the things said are such as the reader will recognize as expressions of his own feelings, as awakening an echo within himself, instead of being written to show off the cleverness of the writer."¹

Butler received his greatest pleasure in life from the twin acts of discovery and creation: "writing Life and Habit literally took my breath away. ... It was a full year after Life and Habit before I righted myself."² Few writers have led so utterly a life of the mind, and few have devoted so much energy to justify their effort. And yet Butler came to disparage his work. Truth, he finally believed, involved more than anything else the rejection of the absolute and the denial of rational or "conscious" knowledge. He wrote in his notebook "logic has no place save with that which can be defined in words. It has nothing to do, therefore, with those deeper questions that have got beyond words and consciousness." (Note-Book, p. 136)

I call Butler's philosophy "pragmatism"--it was C.E.M. Joad who first used the term³--because of the way he

¹Letters, p. 186.  
²Letters, p. 188.  
³Samuel Butler, p. 135.
attempted to build for himself a working philosophy, one in which the lessons of instinct could be applied to the rigors of getting on in the world. In it the components of common sense, faith in a humanly realized divinity, and a belief in evolutionary progress work toward a remarkably self-contained view of existence. Butler's universe was an ordered macro-cosm, the purposive composite of many minute and acutely observed parts, among which man was left to work out his destiny. Butler defined pragmatism on his own terms, and he saw the ultimate result of his philosophy as an enlightened mode of individual behavior, the real-life embodiment of the best features of human conduct.

Butler's praises are sung to the men and women like Arrowhena in Erewhon, Mrs. Jupp in The Way of All Flesh, or George in Erewhon Revisited, who live naturally according to instinct. His pragmatic vision, seeking always literal form, undercuts the abstruseness of his theory at every point and is the source of the tension animating his best narratives. My study will examine Butler's pragmatism, first as it appears in his writing on evolution and second as it develops in his three didactic narratives. Butler must be measured against Butler. Within the voluminous and often repetitive body of his work lies the key to both his anxiety and his art.
Chapter 2

"Butler as Theorist: Faith, Evolution, and Common Sense"

As his remarks to Miss Savage indicate, Butler in his middle years was completely carried away by his work on evolution and by what he perceived as the implications of that work for his own personal and intellectual growth. Butler as theorist is in many ways Butler at his best; his excitement over the ideas he so vigorously "chased after" is barely contained within the satirical, often inverted framework of expression that characterizes most of his essays and sneaks into his book-length studies as well. Butler began studying Darwin in New Zealand, where he spent the years from 1860 to 1864 as a sheep rancher. The Origin of Species was published in 1859; and Butler, on the verge of renouncing the Christianity of his father and grandfather, willingly converted to Darwinism.

Butler's first work of merit\(^1\) consisted of a series of letters to the Christchurch, New Zealand Press, a correspondence which in its entirety forms a witty and enthusiastic affirmation of the theory of evolution. The term

\(^1\)While a student at Cambridge, he had gotten a few short pieces--primarily satires on college life--into The Eagle, the publication of St. John's College, a periodical founded during Butler's residency at the university.
"natural irony" has been applied to Butler's writing;\(^1\) the clue to much of his admittedly complex point of view rests on Butler's deep-seated awareness of the incongruities of life, a recognition of the absurd that transcends his considerable talent at manipulating the language.

Butler's irony may be the ultimate product of his analytical mind, a mind unusually capable of perceiving the imperfections in things. The two most important essays from the Press series, "Darwin Among the Machines" and "Lucubratio Ebria," reveal the obstacles both great and small that perplexed Butler in his pursuit of his own evolutionary theory. Together they contain the germ of his thinking on evolution, suggesting his ultimate impatience with the excesses of the intellect even as they examine the implications of Darwinism.

"Darwin Among the Machines" won notoriety as the core of "The Book of the Machines," the treatise that pitched the Erewhonians into civil war. At the time this early essay was written, Butler's mind was in its own state of turmoil. Increasingly repelled by Christianity, increasingly attracted by the idea of natural selection, he declared to his Cambridge friend, Mariott, in 1862: "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."¹ But what was "sufficient evidence"? Butler did not exactly know, and his consequent essay, written in 1863, shows an unusually free play of ideas, the result of thought as yet unsolidified into opinion. "I feel strongly," he wrote to Mariott, "and write as I feel; but I am open to conviction, and that I can take in more sides of a question than one is proved by the many changes my opinions have undergone."²

"Darwin Among the Machines" begins on a typically Victorian note of self-congratulation. Since machines have made their presence felt in ordinary life, man's lot has changed incalculably for the better. Butler, however, could not stand praising anything for too long. The outlook for continued human progress, he notes, is far from certain. Of Christianity Butler had little to say. "Darwin Among the Machines" proclaims evolution at the expense of a divine creation by forcing the unwary reader to accept or at least acknowledge the idea of the natural progression of things. Thus Butler claims, "If we revert to the earliest primordial types of mechanical life, the wedge, the inclined plane, the screw, and the pulley, or (for analogy would lead us one step

²Jones, Memoir, I, p. 98.
further) to that one primordial type from which all the mechanical kingdom has developed, we mean to the lever itself, and if we then examine the machinery of the Great Eastern, we find ourselves awestruck at the vast development of the mechanical world, at the gigantic strides with which it has advanced in comparison with the slow progress of the animal and vegetable kingdom.\(^1\)

The analogy is made; machines are but the latest examples of evolutionary development. Butler chose, initially no doubt for the purpose of comic exploitation, to fit the inorganic into the Darwinian conception of the natural order. Machines, he declared, are like species in every way; "missing links" connect variety with variety, while certain "rudimentary organs" yield unmistakable signs of a common descent. What is more, this new "mechanical kingdom" will one day be considered the "antediluvian prototype" of a vast and powerful race of machines.

In a note Butler presents further "evidence" of a progressive mechanical evolution. The protuberance at the bottom of the bowl of a tobacco pipe, he explains, was originally designed for the same purpose as the rim at the bottom of a teacup, another form with the same function. Its purpose was to keep the heat of the pipe from marking the table on which it rested. However, "use and disuse have come into

\(^1\)"Darwin Among the Machines," in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, p. 208.
play and served to reduce the function to its present rudimentary condition." ("Darwin Among the Machines," p. 209) A pipe bowl, of course, has had at best only several hundred years of development; the comparatively rapid modification of the protuberance may be attributed to the "more prompt action of the human selection as compared with the slower but surer operation of natural selection." ("Darwin," p. 209)

The leap from the awesome to the trivial, from the evolution of industrialism to the development of the pipe bowl, is Butler at his keenest and best. As Laurence Black notes, even when Butler "poached on the sacred preserves of science, he was armed with his rapier wit. He used it often in satire, as in the case of 'Darwin Among the Machines,' but he used it as well to lighten more serious preachments."1

Yet even in his earliest essays on evolution, Butler was serious about the implications of the new biology. The pipe, like all mechanical devices, evolved under man's direction; if Butler's analogy is to hold, then who guided man? His wittily conceived intimation of purposiveness became in time a full-blown declaration against the chaos he began to see as the inevitable corollary to the Darwinian theory. "Natural selection" would indeed be no better than the will of God or the Mosaic law if it supposed the creatures of the earth to be at the mercy of luck or dependent on some unintelligible power outside themselves.2 Comic devices do not

1"Samuel Butler as Satirist," p. 231.

2Cannan, p. 64.
always remain comic in Butler. The recognition of this fact contributed heavily to the quiet ostracism with which his work was generally greeted, a silence that more often than not masked near-total confusion over his intent.

Butler went to great lengths, both in jest and in earnest, to find examples that would appear to prove his theories,1 examples often drawn disconcertingly from the details of ordinary life. If Paley had likened the order of the universe to the workings of a watch, Butler saw the instrument itself as the diminutive focal point of the new path of evolutionary development: "Examine the beautiful structure of the little animal, watch the intelligent play of the minute members which compose it; yet the little creature is but a development of the cumbrous clocks of the thirteenth century--it is no deterioration from them. The day may come when clocks, which certainly at the present day are not diminished in bulk, may be entirely superseded by the universal use of watches, in which case clocks will become extinct like the earlier saurians, while the watch, (whose tendency has for some years been rather to decrease in size rather than the contrary) will remain the only existing type of an extinct race." ("Darwin," p. 210)

Butler's ability to find the extraordinary within the commonplace is an essential part of his pragmatism and

may in fact serve as the link between the analytical and satirical elements of his thought. In "Darwin Among the Machines," the familiar takes precedence over the unfamiliar, lulling the reader into a false sense of security about things as they are. Thus man's prospects are not, Butler assures us, soon threatened by the machines. To be sure, the human race ultimately faces extinction; but for the time being, as inferior creatures, the species can look forward to a slow but not unattractive decline into submission. As for the machines, the future never appeared rosier: "If they are out of order, they will be promptly attended to by physicians who are thoroughly acquainted with their constitutions; if they die, for even those glorious animals will not be exempt from that necessary and universal consummation, they will immediately enter a new phase of existence, for what machine dies entirely in every part in one and the same instant?" ("Darwin," p. 209)

The majority of men, continues Butler, have already lost their progressive capacity in the slum and factory; the remainder, the few individuals capable of creative development, are too busy making newer and more ingenious machines to foresee their own inevitable defeat. What Butler feared most and what is most evident in "Darwin Among the Machines" was, as Leo J. Henkin suggests in his study Darwinism and the English Novel, that all men might lose their ability to
adapt. Evolution was never an evil in Butler's view, but rather the final self-regulating force in nature, the one element which keeps mind in control of matter by permitting each individual to bolster his odds for survival. This, Butler felt, was merely common sense at work. If machines are still dependent on the will of man, then the human situation is not yet hopeless.

At the end of "Darwin Among the Machines" Butler is optimistic. It could be that the two rival species are not at cross purposes after all; perhaps the ultimate future of both races lies in the carefully plotted union of one with the other--man as master, machine as servant. With voyeuristic glee, Butler projects the possibility of such a fusion: "There is nothing our infatuated race would like to see more than a fertile union between two steam engines." ("Darwin," p. 212) Butler's conclusion, that the time has come to wage war on our mechanical children, is for the most part a satirical flourish. Butler was by no means ready to go back to the "primeval condition of the race." ("Darwin," p. 212)

"Darwin Among the Machines" has been taken seriously by a number of readers, as a warning against the dangers of industrialism, as a clever plea for human dignity in a callous technological society. A good satirist, Butler could

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not help but express concern for the human condition. Yet the essay preaches evolution, not social doom, a fact vital to the development of his pragmatism.

Another good indication of the direction Butler's study was leading him may be found in "Lucubratio Ebria," the essay written in part as a foil to "Darwin Among the Machines" and published in the _Press_ in 1865. "A man's style in any art," Butler said in his notebook, "should be like his dress—it should attract as little attention as possible." (Notebook, p. 104) Although Butler detested ornamentation in serious writing, he nonetheless was more than willing to employ high-flown prose if it happened to suit his critical or satirical purposes. Like the conclusion to "Darwin Among the Machines," the introduction to "Lucubratio Ebria" serves as a comic guidepost to the initiated reader. Butler's "muse" is whiskey and water: "We are rapt in a dream such as we ourselves know to be a dream and which like other dreams, we can hardly embody in a distinct utterance." Even so, a good deal of the essay is written with an undertone of purposiveness. Butler's speculation had gained substance, the result of his readiness to experiment with ideas.

The key to the argument in "Lucubratio Ebria" is that man and the machine are not, as Butler had first suggested,


2"Lucubratio Ebria" in _A First Year in Canterbury Settlement_, p. 214.
separate although analogous species; they must instead be construed as one vital entity, a proposition he had tentatively come around to at the end of "Darwin Among the Machines." The machine is a human product and as such it serves solely at the need or pleasure of its creators. "Darwin Among the Machines" had posited a world in a continual state of flux; new species arise, old species decline and die. In "Lucubratio Ebria" Butler proposes a notion he was to seriously consider in maturity, the continuity between the animal and vegetable kingdoms and man and his machinate partners. Organisms may be differentiated by their prone-ness to change; the most advanced species have perceived within themselves the need for modification: "the limbs of the lower animals have never been modified by any act of deliberation and forethought on their own part." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 215)

Again in "Lucubratio Ebria" Butler plays with the idea of a universal consciousness arising out of design, thus establishing further grounds for his break with Darwinism. As Basil Willey notes, Butler perhaps had what Darwin himself lacked, a clear brain capable of probing into the philosophy of science.¹ Almost from the beginning of his career as a writer Butler singled out what he felt to be the

crucial shortcoming of the theory of natural selection: its inability or unwillingness to deal with the origin of life. Indeed, he claimed in "Lucubratio Ebria," "recent research has thrown absolutely no light upon the origin of life, upon the initial force which introduced a sense of identity and a deliberate faculty into the world." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 215) Natural selection serves as an explanation of how variations happened in species but not why they occurred. At this stage in his thinking Butler was willing to concede that the development of species had been largely a matter of circumstances—chance, after all, appeared to many Victorians to be a corollary to the theory of evolution—but he was unwilling to grant that life had begun entirely without purpose.

There is and there was, states Butler, "a moral government of this world before man came near it—a moral government suited to the capacities of the governed and which unperceived by them has laid fast the foundations of courage, endurance, and cunning." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 215) "It has laid them so fast," he continues, "that they have become more and more hereditary." (p. 215) The best species, the ones that have exerted their will over their own physical limitation and the restrictions of the environment, have always been sensitive to this life force. The difference between man and the apes—here is where Butler first sounds his major thesis—is in part a function of the former's
ability to "of his own forethought add extra-corporeal limbs to his own body," to become, in other words, "not only a vertebrate animal but a machinate animal." (p. 215) Butler could not seriously convince himself that machines were alive, and so in "Lucubratio Ebria" he turned to the rather Lamarckian notion\(^1\) that machines were exterior and detachable appendages that men have made for themselves.\(^2\)

The distinction is an important one. From the beginning man's tools, his simple sticks, his flints, his crude earthenware pots, have served as testament to his dominance and survival. The idea is a sound one, but Butler, as usual, stretches his assertion to its utmost. The stick is responsible for man's upright stance; but once the device had completed this task, it too underwent modification: "the stick wherewith it had learned to walk would now serve to beat its younger brothers, and then found out its service as a lever." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 216) Man, then, could manipulate his

\(^1\)In the early nineteenth century, the French scientist Lamarck established a tentative theory of evolution in which the doctrine of "inherited habit" became the basis for the development of variations in organisms. Using his famous example of the giraffe's neck, Lamarck maintained that a sense of need induces creatures to make the structural changes necessary to the continued survival of the race. Butler praised Lamarck's thesis in Evolution Old and New and noted that like other scientists of his day, the naturalist was forced by the church to suppress the full implications of his work. This censorship, according to Butler, was one of the reasons for the relative obscurity of the early evolutionists, an obscurity that Darwin and his followers exploited to their own advantage.

body at will, and as the body grew the mind grew until at last man had attained what no other species had attained before: the conscious perception of the moral government under which he held the feudal tenure of his life." (p. 216)

The relationship between mind and body is an intriguing one, even when it is drawn half in jest. Butler's concept of progressive evolution directed the whole course of his future studies in science. "All consciousness or no consciousness: can we know the truth of our existence or shall we remain perpetually ignorant of the forces that control our lives?" The question, as P. N. Furbank expresses it, is the ultimate issue Darwinism raised in the minds of the Victorians.1 Butler knew almost from the start how he would answer the problem.

To prove his contention that tools are the decisive factor in man's survival, Butler asks for evidence of a race of men, anywhere on earth, lacking in the capacity to use mechanical devices. "Lucubratio Ebria" modifies "Darwin Among the Machines." By the time the former essay was written, Butler was taking evolution more seriously; he had gone beyond the desire to tease his Christchurch readers into a study of The Origin of Species.

In Butler's view there was something almost maliciously wrong about Darwinism, and he felt honor bound to

1Samuel Butler, pp. 64-65.
discover what it was. The conclusions of "Lucubratio Ebria" must be approached gingerly, for they represent Butler's first hesitant venture into the dangerous waters of social evolution. In one sense Butler confirms his contention in "Darwin Among the Machines"; man needs to invent new "limbs" in order to advance. That is why entire races, like the Chinese, have remained static. Machines have made us as much as we have made them. "It must be remembered, Butler states in "Lucubratio Ebria," that men are not merely the children of their parents but they are begotten of the institutions of the state under which they were born and bred." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 218)

Butler no doubt prided himself on the common-sensical way in which he explored evolution by examining the function of things in daily life. The difference between a primitive society and a complex one may be measured in the sophistication of the technology each has developed. An individual's "limbs" may be as simple as a slingshot or as intricate as a steam engine.

Indeed, Butler states, if there be varieties and sub-varieties among the members of homo sapiens, they may be discovered not "in the Negroes, the Circasians, the Malays or the American aborigines, but among the rich and the poor." ("Lucubratio Ebria," pp. 218-219) Victorians since Carlyle had of course made such distinctions. Butler's "conservatism," as it has been called, lies partly in his respect for the institutions of wealth, a respect confirmed by his middle
class upbringing as well as his own bitter experiences with financial failure. As Clara Stillman observes, it was not the having of money that counted so much as the not having it. ¹ "Neither rich or poor," Butler said in "Lucubratio Ebria," "can see the philosophy of the thing or admit that the man who can tack a portion of one of the P. and O. boats on to his identity is a much more highly organized being than the one who cannot." ("Lucubratio Ebria," p. 219) The social acclaim accorded to the man of means is not only proper but natural; in fact, Butler asserts, "it is wrong to attribute this respect to any unworthy motive, for the feeling is strictly legitimate and springs from the highest impulses of our nature. It is the same sort of affectionate reverence the dog feels for man, and is not infrequently manifested in a similar manner." (p. 219)

One suspects on encountering such a passage that one is being had, but there is an undertone of seriousness in Butler's observations and a pang of truth as well. "Who . . . will deny," he continues, "that a man whose will represents the motive power of a thousand horses is a being very different from the one who is equivalent of the power of a single one?" (p. 219) If this be cold-hearted, Butler rescues himself in the concluding paragraphs of the essay. If rich and

poor are to be regarded scientifically, it is imperative they be viewed with the sense of fair play that the discipline implies. Thus his redefinition of the social order: "Instead of saying that a man is hard up, let us say that his organization is at a low ebb, or if we wish him well, let us hope that he will grow plenty of limbs. It must be remembered that we are dealing with physical organizations only. We do not say that the one-thousand horse man is better than a one horse man, we only say that he is more organized and should be recognized as being so by the scientific leaders of the period." ("Lucubratio Ebría," p. 220)

"Lucubratio Ebría" offers a partial answer to "Darwin Among the Machines," or at least to Butler's conclusion in the latter that human progress is threatened by industrial development. "Lucubratio Ebría," like "Darwin Among the Machines," represents the analytical Butler at his best, "running" a notion to its limits and offering along the way glances into topics of vast interest and importance, glances made all the more compelling by their sly wit and brevity. Butler was never satisfied with his early work, even though he acknowledged the importance of the Christchurch correspondence for what was to come. "The mere fact that a thought or idea can be expressed articulately in words involves that it is open to solution." (p. 90) How Butler attempted to find words for his solutions is the subject of his serious writing on evolution.
Butler's pursuit of science, begun as a backlash against Christianity, became as his studies progressed the spiritual foundation on which his pragmatism rests. It is a platform based first on the recognition of an organically revealed divine presence. (Only later would Butler consider himself a "broad churchman").¹ For more than a decade after he returned from New Zealand, however, his interest in Darwin became an obsession. Called to Canada on business in 1876, Butler made notes for his first and most important book on evolution, Life and Habit.

The ideas Butler wrestled with disturbed him greatly. He wrote to his friend, Miss Savage: "The theory [by now his own and not Darwin's] frightens me— it is so far reaching and subversive— it oppresses me and I take panic that there cannot really be any solid truth in it; but I have been putting down anything that it seems to me can be urged against it with as much force as if I were a hostile reviewer, and really cannot see that I have a leg to stand on when I pose as an objector."²

Life and Habit followed Erewhon, which had enjoyed a modest popular success, and The Fair Haven, Butler's satire

¹ In a remarkable essay at the conclusion of Evolution Old and New, Butler pursues the possibilities of a reconciliation between science and the church. The religion of the future, he said, will draw strength not from the divisive spirit of Protestantism but from the tolerance increasingly exemplified by the Church of Rome. Only the institution of an organized established faith can come to grips with the "variety of delicate, almost intangible questions which belong to conscience rather than law." (p. 352) Religion should assist man in his search for truth by providing an environment conducive to personal spiritual growth.

² Letters, p. 136.
on the credulity of the Gospels, which once discovered, had met with the stony silence of official ostracism. In spite—or perhaps because—of the fact that most of what he had to say was greeted with little or no approval, the years between 1870 and 1885 were, as Edmund Wilson suggests, the most productive of Butler's career.1 Two other books on evolution followed Life and Habit: Evolution Old and New (1879) and Unconscious Memory (1880). In 1886 Butler published Luck or Cunning?, the end result of nearly two decades of exhaustive speculation.

Each of Butler's books on evolution grew out of his increasing discontent with The Origin of Species; his feelings toward Darwin, once warmly appreciative, cooled to exasperation at the other's refusal to admit the shortcomings of natural selection and finally hardened to contempt over what Butler perceived as the famous scientist's outright falsification of his source material.2 As I have stated, the seeds of Butler's animosity were planted in his early impatience with a system putting the forces of nature at the mercy of circumstance.


2For a meticulous account of the famous (or perhaps infamous) Darwin-Butler quarrel, see Jones's Memoir. Later biographers and critics have reduced the affair to its proper historical perspective. See Phillip Henderson, The Incarnate Bachelor. For a brief account of Darwin's response to Butler's accusations, see William Irvine, Apes, Angels and Victorians.
Life and Habit lays the groundwork for Butler's uplifting of common sense to a spiritual plane. The book spells out his thesis about the effects of "acquired habit," a phenomenon discussed at great length by the early evolutionists--Lamarck, Buffon, and Erasmus Darwin--and rejected in The Origin of Species.

Butler was fascinated by the way certain actions pass from the voluntary or conscious to the involuntary or unconscious. Consider, for example, the art of the musician: during the course of a concert a pianist may play literally thousands of notes with ease, even though he may not be able to describe his actions verbally. Such ingrained knowledge is the result of continuous practice. The majority of actions we perform in life we perform with the same unconscious assurance. Talking, reading, walking, eating--all require skills that once mastered are "forgotten" in the routine of the function. Our vital processes--digestion, circulation, and so on--never enter the realm of conscious control. They represent the oldest learning of the race, a knowledge or "memory" that can be traced to the simplest living creatures.

Thus it would appear that "we most often know and are what we least think and understand." (Life and Habit, p. 19) Butler did not deny the function of mind; the knowledge that any species has is acquired not by some accident of survival but as a deliberate result of "design," the need response of
individual members of the race. In time, need becomes habit, and the rational elements of the will disappear. Butler's theory, as expressed in *Life and Habit*, points to the futility of the modern quest for knowledge. The man who searches for truth may be wasting his time doing consciously what he ought to be doing automatically.  

Butler's advocacy of the powers of instinct plays a considerable role in the development of his narratives, particularly *The Way of All Flesh*. Much of his criticism of art and music hinges also on his ideas about "memory."  

In matters of faith Butler held that "what is most true is often the least susceptible of demonstration, owing to the very imperfectness with which it is known." (*Life and Habit*, p. 22) The break with Darwinism is evident. *The Origin of Species* is nothing if not a mass of empirical evidence in favor of natural selection. Written against the

1 *Joad*, p. 109.

2 In *Alps and Sanctuaries*, for example, Butler delivers his most complete invective against the "Academy Style" he had as a painter so long pursued. In painting after models, particularly landscapes, the prospective artist subverts his own best impulses, the "unconscious" affinity with the natural world that is our universal biological heritage. There is no man or woman that does not possess some measure of artistic talent; the only way to learn to paint, the only way the great masters succeeded, is to practice according to one's own inclinations: "One may ask, how can the beginner paint, or draw conveyances, until he has learnt to do so? The answer is How can he learn, without at any rate trying to do so? If the beginner likes his subject, he will try; if he tries, he will soon succeed in doing something which shall open a door. It does not matter what a man does; as long as he does it with the attention which affection engenders, he will come to see his way to something else." (p. 42) Butler's theory in part explains his preference for the village art he chronicled on his many trips to Italy.
hesitancy of its author, Darwin's study is one of the great examples of inductive reasoning. Butler, on the other hand, needed little factual support for his repeatedly deductive hypotheses. Content to let others do the fact finding, he took his greatest intellectual pleasure in deriving his own proofs from the research of his peers and predecessors. Butler unquestionably knew his Darwin, however much his findings contradicted the great scientist's previous research.  

Almost in spite of himself, Butler remained a religious skeptic, but because of what he believed about memory, he refused to acknowledge the conscious disbeliever as the true infidel. Take, for example, Galileo, "whose indifference to religious animosities has won him the cheapest immortality, which, so far as I can remember, was ever yet won." (Life and Habit, p. 21) The astronomer was no doubt a man of "the sincerest piety," since his disinclination toward Christianity had never been serious enough to commit to mind. The true skeptic was the "unconscious" disbeliever, like Theobald Pontifex, who "however greatly he would be surprised to know the truth," lived in total opposition to religion.

1Butler often used his intimacy with Darwin for vindictive ends. In Unconscious Memory, for example, he sought to humiliate the scientist into an acknowledgment of his errors in reasoning with an exhaustive analysis of the qualifications—the "butts"—in The Origin of Species. Butler could be cruel when he chose, and his denunciation of Darwin became increasingly furious after the publication of Life and Habit and the death of Miss Savage, who had frequently cautioned him against such excesses.
Butler realized that he was not one of those fortunate individuals who succeed in life by drawing on the powers of ingrained memory. "Above all else, he wrote in a well known passage at the end of Chapter Two in Life and Habit, "let no unwary reader do me the injustice of believing in me. In that I write at all I am among the damned." (p. 25) After his first rejection of Christianity, Butler was faced with the continual dilemma of wanting to escape God and yet remain in His presence. What faith in Christ meant for the Christian, "unconscious knowledge" became for Butler. The purpose of nearly all his writing on evolution was to proclaim for man a new state of "grace"; the purpose of his narratives was to realize that grace in human terms, experientially, the only way he knew how. And yet, as his own case so amply illustrated, grace was not open to everyone. Those who chose to follow the path of formal learning, be it science or theology, would find themselves forever barred from the true meaning of life.

The best Butler could do was to define the components of grace: intuition, honesty, good health. These things form the basis for conduct in his pragmatic philosophy, a set

1Like several other Victorians, Butler equated pessimism with natural selection. "Which, I would ask, is the pessimist?" he wrote in Evolution Old and New, "He who sees love of beauty, design, steadfastness of purpose, intelligence, courage, and every quality to which man has assigned the name of worth; as having drawn the pattern of every leaf and organ now and in all past time, or he who sees nothing in the world of nature but a chapter of accidents and forces interacting blindly." (p. 52)
of beliefs that is not an end in itself but a means to something better.

Butler was deeply interested in the process by which certain actions are transmitted via memory from parent to offspring, for if grace could be achieved, it must be the result not of God but of some demonstrable biological occurrence. "Personal identity" is a term Butler coined to express the unbroken hereditary chain between an individual and his ancestors, a racial consciousness that paradoxically proclaims the autonomy of each living organism:

What is all this talk about the experience of the race, as though the experience of one man could profit another who knows nothing about him? If a man eats his dinner, it nourishes him, and not his neighbor; if he learns a difficult art, it is he that can do it and not his neighbor. . . . Is there any way of showing that this experience of the race, of which so much is said without the least attempt to show what way it may or does become the experience of the individual, is in sober seriousness the experience of one single being only, repeating in a great many different ways certain performances with which it had become exceedingly familiar. (Life and Habit, p. 41)

It is evident how Butler could fashion a novel like The Way of All Flesh, frankly autobiographical and at the same time
generalizing about the nature of the race through the story of Ernest and his family.

"Each ovum," Butler wrote, "is a continuation of the personality of every ovum in the chain of its ancestry, every which ovum it actually is or truly as the octogenarian from which it is developed." (Life and Habit, p. 70) To the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg, Butler might answer both, simultaneously. If it is possible to trace life back to its primitive beginnings, then are not all organisms fundamentally a part of one vast primordial cell?

In Life and Habit, Butler rejects the idea, implied in "Darwin Among the Machines" and "Lucubratio Ebricia," that only the higher species are in touch with divinity. As his theory developed he recognized the principle of man's interrelatedness with the organic kingdom as the ultimate expression of God in nature.¹ Our identity is the sum total of our past; we are never more ourselves than when we realize what others have made us. This is the law on which existence rests, and it colors all Butler's writing, prose and narrative.

Butler felt in many ways that he had drawn the inevitable conclusions to the concepts that Darwin and others had derived about evolution. Darwin himself, according to Butler, had constructed a provisional theory of pangenesis;²

¹Willey, p. 87.

²Ultimately Butler was to expand this principle to include the inorganic as well. In Unconscious Memory he
and Butler went to great lengths to demonstrate that his own views about science and religion had not been put forth "wantonly." *Life and Habit* is Butler's best scientific book. It contains his freshest and most enthusiastic thinking about memory and identity. The book also introduces Butler's ultimate answer to Darwin, his advocacy of the principle of individual design, or as Butler called it, "cunning."

The idea of will is inherent in the development of Butler's evolutionary theory. There is a deeper moral argument undercutting almost all of his writing. Its moral for man's guidance is that there is in each of us a limited power of adaptation which makes it possible for us to handle situations neither our memory or past experience has enabled us to cope with. Grace is not a static condition.

As individuals we must use our cunning to succeed in life. Butler perceived the soul as the source of will, a center of nervous activity that together with other nerve centers in the body controls the behavior of the organism. proclaims, "I cannot conceive of matter which is not able to remember a little, and which is not living in respect of what it can remember. I do not see how action of any kind (chemical as well as vital) is conceivable without the supposition that every atom retains a memory of certain antecedents." (p. 146)

1 Black, p. 96.

2 In one of the strangest passages in *Life and Habit*, Butler cites as proof of his hypothesis the experiments of the Frenchman, M. Ribot, on headless frogs. Such unfortunate
From such humble physiological origins Butler attempted, as did Lamarck before him, to portray a world of creatures acting in response to need. The record of our performance is the raw material of memory. In this way design, not the whim of some external being or the accident of circumstance, but the careful deliberate behavior of organisms caught up in the art of living, underlies the phenomenon of variation among species. Like grace, cunning may be equated with mind but not always with consciousness. "The more a thing knows its own mind," Butler wrote in Luck or Cunning?, "the more living it becomes, for life viewed in both the individual and the general as the outcome of accumulated developments, is one long process of specializing consciousness and sensation, that is to say, of getting to know one's mind more and more fully upon a greater variety of subjects." (p. 125)

If there be such a thing as death, Butler felt, it must be described as the cessation of memory, the gradual extinguishing of the mind's power to adapt to the needs of the organism. What matters most is the process of growth, for we develop as individuals only to the extent that we refine and expand the collective wisdom of our ancestors. Wisdom and old age, however, were not necessarily synonymous creatures, deprived of head or limbs, will continue to make certain spasmodic movements which, in the view of "plain matter of fact people," indicate that "the headless body can still, to some extent, feel, think, and act," thus possessing "a living soul." (p. 182) This type of speculation raises the possibility of satire, but Butler took his idea seriously. He consistently maintained this definition of the soul in his work on evolution.
in Butler's view. The older we get, the less we are capable of knowing and the more we must rely on our own limited resources, once we move chronologically beyond the realm of our ancestors' experience. "Life and death," he said in *Luck or Cunning?*, are the extreme modes of something which is partly both and wholly neither; this something is common ordinary change; solve any change and the mystery of life and death will be revealed; show why and how anything becomes ever anything other in any respect than what it is at any general moment, and there will be little secret left in any other change." (p. 57) Given this belief, it is easy to see the fascination with youth and age that exists in each of Butler's narratives.

"God," he proclaimed in an essay written in 1879, is a name for the spirit that is evidenced everywhere; it is impossible to think about God without thinking about a person or a concrete form."¹ Butler built his evolutionary theory with this faith. God must live within us, for there is no other place for Him to be. Evolution, Butler came to believe, is the manifestation of divine will: "The moral government of God over the world is expressed through us, who are His ministers and persons, and a government of this description is the only one which can be observed as practically influencing human conduct. God helps those who help

¹"God the Known and God the Unknown," in *Collected Essays*, I, p. 5.
themselves because in helping themselves they are helping Him." (God the Known," p. 45) God, like man, is a limited being; in recognizing our strengths and weaknesses we can build a better existence for ourselves and our offspring. This is what all of Butler's fictional characters attempt to do.

"I wish I could see more signs of literary culture among my scientific opponents. I should find their books much more easy and agreeable if I could; and they tell me to satirize the follies and abuses of the age, just as if it was not this that I was doing in writing about themselves." (Luck or Cunning?, p. 12) The scope of Butler's writing on evolution is restricted, despite the efforts of Clara Stillman and others to enlarge his scientific reputation. ¹ Butler was sensible enough to realize that his greatest contribution was not to science but to the scientific spirit; his critical questioning served as a clear if unheeded warning against both excessive zeal and orthodoxy. Most important, his attempt to forge a synthesis between mind and matter, to view the body as the most vital "tool" in man's struggle to determine his existence, laid the theoretical groundwork for his philosophical pragmatism. "Unconscious knowledge," the innate potential for right action we all possess, directed Butler's attention to moral and ethical concerns, raising intriguing possibilities for the conflict of ideas revealed in his narratives.

Chapter 3

"The Testing of the Theory: Erewhon"

If Erewhon is no more than Butler said it was, "a mere peg on which to hang ideas," then his first attempt at a sustained narrative is a masterful exercise of the free play of thought characterizing his best writing. The most successful of all Butler's books published in his lifetime, Erewhon was the only one to reward its author with financial as well as spiritual profit.¹

Framed within a fictional narrative, the book yet manages to defy convenient description. The story itself is simple. A young English seeker of fortune, one Higgs,² pursues open range in the back country of a mysterious unexplored colony. Making his way through a treacherous mountain pass, the adventurer discovers himself in a civilized land, the natives of which he likens to one of the ten "lost tribes" of Israel.³ Higgs, harboring grand schemes for the

¹Butler kept a meticulous account of the sale of his books. His records in 1889 show that Erewhon, having sold 382 copies--five times more than its nearest competitor, Life and Habit--cleared roughly £69.

²Butler's narrator is not specifically named until Erewhon Revisited, but for the purpose of clarity I will refer to him as Higgs.

³The idea of finding a "lost tribe" of Israel was a popular notion, as well as a favorite hoax, with travelers of the time. For a discussion of the colonial background of Butler's satire, see Joseph Jones, The Cradle of Erewhon: Samuel Butler in New Zealand (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959).
conversion of the populace, is adopted by a prosperous banking family, the Nosnibors, and spends most of his time engaged in lengthy conversation with representative members of Erewhonian society. In time the traveler escapes from the country (via balloon). Accompanying him to England is the beautiful younger daughter of the banker, a creature known as Arrowhena. Once home, Butler's hero is last seen making ineffectual plans for an expeditionary voyage to Erewhon with the hope of farming out the natives to the burgeoning colonial sugar industry.

Besides being his first full-scale attack on convention, Erewhon represents Butler's initial attempt to organize the ideas he had been pursuing since maturity into coherent form, two functions which became more or less synonymous as his studies progressed. In a sense the book practices what his theory at times only preached: the rejection of absolutes, of labels of all kinds, and most importantly, of prejudices based on a belief in those labels. To accomplish this end, the application of his pragmatism to the contemporary human landscape, Butler created a world of shifting and multifaceted uncertainty. Erewhon may be looked upon as a kind of great intellectual puzzle in which the pieces are all present but undecipherable without a good deal of study, too much study for the reader merely wishing to be amused by the cleverness of the game. In addition, each part
of the puzzle touches a sensitive nerve, another reason why it is so difficult to put the book into perspective.

Its bewildering nature notwithstanding, Erewhon appears to be the most favorably received of all Butler's books, although few critics would perhaps agree with P.N. Furbank that the narrative is "his most self-sufficient and most satisfying accomplishment." Butler's touch, razor sharp, was not yet lastingly painful; his frustration had not reached the momentum it was to build in The Way of All Flesh or Erewhon Revisited, where the blows are aimed at individuals as well as institutions. Butler acknowledged that he was in his own lifetime an "homo unius libri"; he did not forget Erewhon, as he ultimately tried to forget his work in New Zealand, nor did he disparage his efforts in the narrative. Instead he insisted, probably correctly, that Erewhon be viewed as a steppingstone for the books that followed. If the public refused to go along with him, well, that was not his business. "If I die prematurely," he wrote in his notebook, "at any rate I shall be saved from being bored by my own success." (Note-Book, p. 155) Undaunted in spite of this rather bleak frame of mind, Butler continued to write.

"It is a bad sign for a man's peace in his own convictions when he cannot stand turning the canvas of his life

1Samuel Butler, p. 15.
occasionally upside-down, or reversing it in a mirror, as painters do with their pictures that they may better judge concerning them." (Alps and Sanctuaries, p. 50) The special charm of Erewhon is that it confirms what Butler wrote in Alps and Sanctuaries and what even his worst critic sensed when he claimed the book was written while its author was yet "in the pleasant transitory stage between belief and unbelief without the depth of one or the ponderousness of the other."¹

Erewhon is more like Butler's early work than he cared to admit; in a very literal way the book links the young Butler of Christchurch with the mature man who wrote Life and Habit. The complexity of thought revealed in Erewhon reflects Butler's mixed intentions in the narrative. For all their perverseness, there is an undeniable charm about the Erewhonians, a charm enhanced by their deep-seated reluctance to take themselves or their institutions too seriously. The spirit of relativism pervading Erewhon makes it, unlike most of Butler's later works, a lively and practical success.

The character of Higgs exhibits some of the same charm, reflecting as he does features of both the British and the Erewhonians, peoples who mirror each other even as they go their separate ways. "Prig,"² soundingboard, mouthpiece--

¹Muggeridge, p. 205.

²Butler, as R. A. Streatfield recalls in the introduction to The Canterbury Settlement, was in the habit of referring to himself disparagingly in the company of friends, particularly in regard to his early years at Cambridge and in New Zealand. More often than not, his criticisms were for the purposes of entertainment, so that his company took what
Higgs is all of these things and none of them, as in the series of treatises beginning with "The Book of the Machines" when he disappears from the scenario altogether. Most important, however, for the development of Butler's ideal of pragmatism are the occasions when the traveler is simply the hero, as in Higgs's first encounters with the Erewhonians.

These early meetings contain a clue to what may be the primary concern of Erewhon: in a world where immorality is a disease and illness a crime, where beauty is a virtue and deformity a vice, to what extent is the individual responsible for his own actions? In Erewhon Higgs is presented with a series of occasions in which the principles governing human behavior are put to the test. His reactions to these occasions and Butler's compromise between the nineteenth-century versions of free will and necessity form the backbone of the narrative, the one thread tying the random sequences in the book into an ordered whole.

Higgs's heroic qualities, his good looks, his courage, his vitality, lay the foundation for the physical basis of life Butler ultimately recognized in Erewhon. The adventurer discovers the comely natives are antitheses of the grotesque "musical statues" guarding the entrance to the country, figures serving in their own way as spokesmen for the continued well being of the race. Higgs realizes impulsively he said lightly. There is undoubtedly some of the same intent in Butler's characterization of Higgs; we put up with his foibles, but we do not take them as seriously or as contemptuously as we might.
that he himself is a striking complement to the beauty of
the Erewhonians, for "I have more to glory in the flesh than
in any other respect." (Erewhon, p. 37) First impressions
are often made on such grounds, but neither Higgs or his cap-
tors will let the matter rest.

The prisoner very quickly discovers that his good
looks alone hold the key to his security in the country, the
kind-hearted dispositions of the Erewhonians aside. In spite
of his attacks on Erewhonian institutions, Butler held the
Erewhonians themselves in high esteem. The natives live best
as examples of the grace he sought after in life; Butler
reverenced the Erewhonians as he reverenced the Italian
peasants, for their beauty, their pride, their wealth, and
their courtesy.1 If the painter's eye is at work in Butler's
description of the men and women Higgs meets on his journey,
the philosopher in him was equally swift in perceiving virtue.
"Their expression," Higgs exclaims, "was divine; and yet as
they glanced at me timidly . . . I forgot all thoughts of
conversion in feelings that were far more earthly." (Erewhon,
p. 57)

"Feelings" are important in Erewhon. The shared sym-
pathies between Higgs and the Erewhonians are precipitated
by Butler's belief, based on his studies in empirical philos-
ophy, that the physical and spiritual are in the end one and

1 Kingsley Amis, "Afterword" to Samuel Butler, Erewhon
the same, that God's laws can only be realized in the natural order. This, in part, is the Erewhonian creed. The problem, as Higgs soon discovers, is that the natives attach some rather disturbing consequences to their belief in natural virtue. What if the ugly Chowbok had instead been taken prisoner? Higgs learns what all conscientious Erewhonians acknowledge and accept, the necessity of maintaining the facade of good health at all times. Though the Erewhonian obsession with appearances forms the core of some of the most amusing passages in the book, the fun of Higgs's run ins with "straighteners," society ladies, and judges by no means obscures a serious point.

In Erewhon each person is held responsible for the conditions of his existence. Overlapping Butler's affirmation of the physical basis of life is his fundamentally satirical view of the traditional Christian principle of individual responsibility, an idea cherished by both the British and the Erewhonians. The problem is a complicated one, for Butler believed that the majority of man's actions seldom reflect professed religious values but rather the supreme pitilessness of nature. Religious systems, indeed, are usually little more than hedges against this larger condition. The only thing that really matters, the only "moral" question we all must face, is whether or not we

fully utilize our innate capacity for survival. This in Butler's mind was the great test of natural law.

The Erewhonians live under a hodge-podge of faith and fact. Criminal behavior, actions violating persons or property, is considered out of the control of individuals, as long as such deeds do not harm one's own physical well-being. Bad luck may be the fault of the diseased, but the unfortunate embezzler or petty thief earns only the solace of his family and friends. The Erewhonians preach the doctrine of individual responsibility for two main reasons, one being the convenience of the creed for those in physically advantageous positions, the other the universal willingness to sacrifice the realities of life to some dogmatically contrived ethical ideal.

In this light, Higgs's attempt to convince his hosts of the folly of their ways is particularly ironic. "Could I never bring them to see that while habits of mind and character were entirely independent of initial force and early education, the body was so much a creature of parentage and circumstances, that no punishment for ill health should be tolerated save as a protection from contagion, and that even where punishment was inevitable it should be attended to with compassion?" (Erewhon, p. 106) In defying Erewhonian convention, Higgs falls precisely into the same fallacy, which is
to assume that it is possible to take choice out of some matters while insisting on it in others.

The truth is, Butler wrote in his notebook, in all our actions we have the idea of will and the idea of necessity as "two apparently incompatible and mutually destructive faiths, each equally and self-evidently demonstrable, each equally necessary for salvation of any kind." (Note-Book, p. 322) But as a self-determinist, to borrow H. V. Routh's term,¹ he looked with disfavor upon the Christian notion of will which in its assessment of blame and demand of punishment, thwarts the real will, the constant need of every organism to adapt itself to its environment.

Nowhere are Higgs's principles more shaken than his account of "some Erewhonian trials." It seems that in Erewhon the individual is responsible for his own fortune; good luck is a virtue, bad luck a disgrace. Higgs learns that the courts mete out justice on the basis of how such fortune effects others. The premise is that "ill luck of any kind, or even ill-treatment at the hands of others, is considered an offense against society, inasmuch as it makes people uncomfortable to hear of it." (Erewhon, p. 70) The idea of luck, as Breuer has noted, fits rather awkwardly into Butler's scientific scheme of things. What Higgs learns in the

course of his observations demonstrates the principles influencing the real life of the country.

The case that moves Higgs the most is the trial of the young man accused of "labouring under pulmonary consumption." On the stand, the defendant pursues a typically Erewhonian course of evasion. By feigning illness, the dying youth had hoped to defraud an insurance company, a plea of "cunning" the judge dismisses almost at once. The verdict: guilty. The accused cannot blame his misfortune, as he finally does, on his parents' unsoundness of body. "'There is no question of how you came to be wicked,'" the magistrate proclaims, "'but only this--namely, are you wicked or not?'" (p. 85)

In Erewhon judgment is made on the basis of results; means do not really count. Nature, after all, does not ask whether or not an organism intends well or whether or not it can account for its actions, but whether or not it has actually done well.¹ Says the judge, "'If you tell me you had no hand in your parentage and education, and that it is therefore unjust to lay these things to your charge, I answer that whether your being in a consumption is your fault or not, it is a fault in you, and it is my duty to see that against such faults as this the Commonwealth shall be protected. You may say that it is your misfortune to be criminal; I answer

¹Black, pp. 88-89.
that it is your crime to be misfortunate." (Erewhon, p. 87)

Butler adds fuel to the issue by asking to what extent must the needs of the individual, even justice itself, be measured against the collective good?

This is the question Higgs finally seizes upon. His criticism of the case is not against the necessity for taking action—the consumptive is a much greater threat to his fellow man than the embezzler—but on the kind of action taken. There might be better methods of stooping disease without having to inflict additional pain on its victims. Butler's impatience with questions of virtue lies at the base of Higgs's evaluation of the Erewhonian system of justice.

The judge's position is no more than an extension of the thesis of "Lucubratio Ebria." Society is a living organism, its "tools" being its individual members. The machinery of the state must be kept in good working order, replacing and at times eliminating discordant components in the system. This is the heart of Butler's "conservative" social philosophy, and if the implications for the individual are a little disturbing, the reasoning behind his argument is backed by a hundred generations of human experience. "'We kill a serpent,'" argues Higgs, "'if we go in danger by it, simply for being such and such a serpent in such and such a place, but we never say that the serpent had only itself to blame for not having been a harmless creature.'"
The similarities between Erewhon and England add a great deal to Higgs's discomfort and Butler's own amusement in the narrative. The British, too, recognize natural law as evidenced in their terminology of disease: a "bad" arm, "peccant" matter, and so forth. What is more, both the British and the Erewhonians put themselves at the mercy of those who profess to cure their ills. If Butler goes hard against the Erewhonians, as he does in his discussion of the "straighteners" art, it is the British who are really coming under attack. Still, Butler is not as disagreeable in Erewhon as he might have been; and seldom are his positive feelings more truly revealed than in his ultimate account of the "Musical Banks."

Erewhon, despite its apparent backwardness, is a prosperous and thriving nation, the inevitable result of a nation where poverty is punishable by imprisonment. Because the backbone of Erewhon is commerce, the banks Higgs visits with Mrs. Nosnibor evoke comparison with the real sources of power and wealth in the country. Perpetrating the Musical

1Certainly Butler's analogy extends to the poor-houses and prisons of Victorian England, but in Erewhon he makes no significant issue of the treatment of the poor. The admiration Butler expresses for the poor man in his commentary on the Colleges of Unreason, while satirical in intent, reflects his usual admiring attitude toward the lower classes. Every inch the product of his public school education, as John Butler Yeats dourly observed in his anecdotal account of Butler (Essays Irish and American [New York: Macmillan Co., 1918]), Butler yet idolized the poor as examples of how men lived up to his standards of conduct under natural law. Butler's attitude runs curiously counter to his admiration of the man of means, whom he often praised but did
Banks and their "clerks" is the business of the "Colleges of Unreason," the body responsible for maintaining the intellectual life of the country. The subject of the banks reflects Butler's growing concern with the question of what makes a successful spiritual life, a matter he felt particularly able to discuss since he had narrowly escaped the clutches of the religious institutions Higgs explores in the novel.

The function of the banks is spiritual, meaning for the Erewhonians they bear no relation to the outside world. Economically useless as the banks may be, those who believe in them have ample justification for their continued existence. After all, Mrs. Nosnibor assures Higgs, "'The heart of the country is thoroughly devoted to such establishments, and any sign of their being in danger would bring in support from the most unexpected quarters.'" "'It is,!' she says, "'only because people know them to be so very safe that in some cases ... they felt support unnecessary.'" (p. 112)

Paradoxically the reason for the decline of the banks is precisely the reason for their continued existence. In practice, as Higgs observes, "'those institutions never departed from the safest and most approved banking principles. Thus they never allowed interest on deposit, a thing now frequently done by certain bubble companies, which by

not ever fully understand. Butler understood the poor better, and some of his best characterizations are of lower class men and women.
doing an illegitimate trade had drawn many customers away, and even the shareholders were fewer than formerly, owing to the innovations of these unscrupulous persons, for the Musical Banks paid little or no dividend, but divided their profits by way of bonus once every 30,000 years." (Erewhon, p. 113)

Those who oppose the banks, according to Mrs. Nosnibor, do so out of an inflated sense of their own abilities, a feeling misleading confident speculators into thinking they can get a greater return for their investment elsewhere. Yet regardless of whether or not one actually believes in the value of the Musical Bank currency, having the coins and displaying them properly is something no respectable person can afford to neglect.

Respectability is a powerful motivating force in Erewhon, as Higgs realizes that the spiritual fervor of the Erewhonians is manifested not in the fading majesty of the Musical Banks but rather the marketplace, where the real life of the country takes place. "Ydgrun"--the name is a play on the catchword for British propriety--is the deity providing the Erewhonians with the means of making the best of things, financially or otherwise.

Higgs sees the goddess as an oddly inconsistent idol, for "'She was to be both omnipresent and omnipotent but she was not an elevated conception, and was sometimes both cruel and absurd.'" (Erewhon, p. 132) Still, Ydgrun's Erewhonian followers tried to carry out her demands. It was, after all,
they who had invented her and not vice versa. Ydgrun differed, too, from the Musical Bank god in that it mattered little to her whether or not she was obeyed as long as her followers acknowledged her influence. For the most part, Higgs observes, those disparaging the goddess were lesser men and women than those worshipping her. Ydgrun's high priests were "'gentlemen in the fullest sense of the word; and what has one not said when one has said this?" (p. 130)

The focus of Butler's analogy is clear. Propriety, Ydgrunism: each signifies the application of common sense to life, an intuitive art of survival transcending the artificial concerns of more formalized creeds. More than just unconscious knowledge gone humorously amuck, Ydgrunism is Butler's religion of everyday life. The test of the faith is the endurance of the Erewhonians themselves, in spite of civil war, a confusedly malicious system of justice, and a cumbersome national church. "'The example of a real gentleman is, if I may say so without profanity, the best of all possible gospels; such a man upon the stage becomes a potent humanizing influence, an Ideal which all may look upon for a shilling.'" (Erewhon, p. 132) Butler, who styled himself an "Ishmaelite" in his notebook, never stopped believing in this gracious outgoing code of conduct,¹ the realization of his

pragmatism in life. In contrast with Butler and the Erewhonians, the Englishman Higgs seems to insist on a distant deity.

Certainly Higgs has a great deal of trouble understanding the here and now. Like the ancient Greeks, the Ydgrunites personify the best attributes of propriety—hope, justice, truth and so forth—not so they may encourage man to some greater afterlife, but to remind him of his own earthly potential for success. The followers of Ydgrun refuse to undermine their faith by removing it from the sphere of real human concerns. "'They would never have it,'" Higgs says, "returning constantly to the assertion that ages ago the divinities were frequently seen, and that the moment their personality was disbelieved in, men would leave off practicing even those ordinary virtues which the common experience of mankind has agreed on as being the greatest secret of happiness.'" (Erewhon, p. 126)

Higgs, the victim of Butler's satire, fails to realize that all religions rest on a similar humanization of virtue. Faith for Butler was no Arnoldian matter of "sweetness and light." God was a literal presence, as real as the men and women who actualized Him through their own faith in their capacity for life.¹ What he balked at was the reduction of individual spiritual values to impersonal forms, the denial of the known god that resides within us in favor of

¹Willey, p. 109.
some vague unapproachable and omnipotent being. "'Mention but the word divinity,'" says Higgs, "'and our sense of the divine is clouded.'" (Erewhon, p. 128)

Arrowhena's single moment of triumph in the narrative occurs when she leads her lover to a disturbing reassessment of his faith in an ethereal god. Higgs's divine "sense" is misdirected, she argues, for if there is a religious spirit, might it also be found in those individuals with no sense of a "god" at all: nature lovers, for example, or art worshippers? In reply the Englishman can only claim the literal truth of the Bible, evidence for Butler of Higgs's failure to see the truth in front of him.

Butler's attitude toward the church is complex. That he had, as Kingsley Amis notes, an axe to grind with some few of his countrymen both deepens the sincerity of Butler's own spiritual conviction and intensifies the vigor of his satire on the clergy. The characteristic fault of the men trained by the "Colleges of Unreason," the clerks of the Musical Banks, is that they "'lack the true Erewhonian frankness,'" the common-sensical drive animating Nosnibor, for all his vices, and perpetuating the economic life of the country. Yet Higgs cannot help but pity the clerks. After all, even the lowliest laborer works at something tangible; the men of the banks deal only in worthless coinage.

The theory behind the Colleges reflects certain Erewhonian assumptions about the nature of individual potential,

1"Afterword" to Erewhon, p. 235.
assumptions Butler held but was willing to satirize in order to arrive at his final affirmation of human progress. Higgs learns that the college men are quite willing to concede that each person is capable of some form of originality. Genius, according to the professors, is not a rare quality but an all too common one.\(^1\) What is hard to find is the individual willing to assert his particular talent at any cost and the men or the institutions willing to let him have his way. Like the British, the Erewhonians recognize freedom in principle, however much they may deplore it in practice. At the Colleges of Unreason, intelligence was rather "like offenses--needs that it must come, but woe unto the man through whom it comes." (Erewhon, p. 165)

The purpose of the Colleges is to suppress brilliance, substituting in place of real thought the pursuit of the tortuous "hypothetical language." The philosophy of the Colleges is different from that of the Ydgunites even though both groups treasure conformity. Butler himself was suspicious of genius, which he saw as detrimental to the individual possessing it. "A man who thinks for himself," he wrote in his notebook, "knows what others do not, but does not know what others know." (Note-Book, p. 177) The course

\(^1\)Two of Butler's later works, Ex Voto and Alps and Sanctuaries, were written in part to glorify the genius of the so-called "common man," the unknown craftsman who offered through his work a living testament to his faith.
of study demanded by the professors is not bad, merely dull; what is so wrong about the Colleges of Unreason is that the institution robs the student of his most precious possession, youth. Fortunately the Colleges fail more often than they succeed: "The natural instinct of the lads in most cases so absolutely rebelled against their training that do what the teachers might they could never get them to pay serious heed to it." (Erewhon, p. 168) The Ydgrunites recognize instinct, the force that saves the Erewhonians from themselves as it later saves Ernest from his parents in The Way of All Flesh.

One aspect of life almost completely out of the Erewhonians' control is the birth of children, a subject which Butler as an "incarnate bachelor" approaches cooly. Few people would dispute the existence of unwanted or unplanned families even in Butler's time. In Erewhon such occurrences are viewed as the result not of nature but a mysterious prior life, an Edenic "world of the unborn" where immortal beings observe the activity of the human populace. The unborn may decide at any time to enter the society of mortals as infants; earthly parents are little more than victims of the choice.

The unhappy mothers and fathers possess so-called "birth formulae" to assure family and friends that they are not responsible for the child. The formula is the Erewhonian recognition of original sin, an admission, as Breuer notes,
of natural guilt, forcing the newborn to accept the con-
sequences of his actions as a condition of life. The Ere-
whonians no more believe in the depravity of infants than
the British, but the act makes a convenient out for parents
and teachers. Signing the birth formula is the first in a
long series of compromises the Erewhonians make with them-
selves, some for the better, others for the worse, but all
equally important to the fulfillment of Butler's pragmatic
vision.

The unborn, of course, face almost certain misery
upon taking human form. Poor parents (or worse yet, stupid
ones), the obligation to work hard for a living, the assur-
ance of being themselves subjected to the "pesterings" of the
unborn—each consequence is spelled out in detail to those
eager to attain mortality. But by far the hardest thing
facing the prospective sojourner on the planet is the cer-
tainty of being victimized by the caprice of "free will."
If this is a contradiction in terms, it is one Butler fully
intended. No man can consistently choose what is best for
himself. If, as Bekker maintains, evasion is the predomi-
nate characteristic of the Erewhonians, it is because the
problems of self-determinism are compounded in a world where
the real nature of individual responsibility is so little

1"The Source of Morality in Butler's Erewhon,"
p. 29.

2Bekker, p. 121.
understood. All of Butler's people are bewildered by the web of alternatives confronting them in life, an exhaustive agonizing physical confusion that most of them, including Higgs, never overcome.

Like Butler, the Erewhonians were obsessed with the acquisition of wealth, which they dimly perceived as the best way out of their dilemma of living with responsibility. The argument Higgs explores as he examines free will is an extension of the "Lucubratio Ebria" thesis. The superior organization of the rich is not strictly mechanical; the wealthy man has the best of it ethically, too. As the only "true philanthroplst," he allows others to grow on his fortune, allocating choice to his many dependents, who steer his course for him. Such an arrangement lies at the core of every social grouping.

The ideas in Erewhon work back to the germ of Butler's social philosophy, a progression of thought he recognized and refined in his revision of the book in 1901. "The Book of the Machines" and the treatises that follow employ Butler's favorite technique of satirically "running" a pet idea, and the brilliant result overshadows the rest of the book. In destroying the poor remnants of what had been an attempt at a novel, Butler built a lasting reputation for Erewhon, one reason why he wrote his conclusions in Life and Habit into the 1901 edition. The rapid-fire essays in Erewhon are really better than the bulk of Butler's volumes on
evolution. Unencumbered by the defensiveness of his stance as scientist, Butler assumed the role he was best suited for, the bemused ironic chronicler of human fallibility.

He had precedents for the role. The idea that life might be defined in other than organic terms is one of the premises of "Darwin Among the Machines," the Christchurch essay reappearing in "The Book of the Machines." In the guise of an ancient Erewhonian philosopher, Butler refines his argument for universal consciousness with a slyly malicious zeal. No one, begins the "professor," would deny that in the space of a few years machines have made more progress and have reached a higher level of consciousness than, for example, the lowly mollusk has managed to achieve in several thousand years of evolutionary progress.

Indeed, who is man, Butler asks, to define consciousness, being himself only dimly aware of the life force? "Where does consciousness begin and end? Is not everything interwoven with everything else?" (Erewhon, p. 176) Each organism is capable of using its native resources for the sake of survival. Even a potato in a cellar "knows perfectly well what it wants and how to get it." The potato expresses itself by its actions, the best and truest of languages. Deliberately Butler blurs the distinction between the living and the non-living, instinct and intelligence. If, as one might argue, the growth of the tuber is only an example of chemical action, a stimulus response, is not the basis of all life chemical and physical?
It is not consciousness we have to fear, because machines are conscious already; and who would contend that a mollusc takes more kindly to man or is more conducive to human progress than a steam engine? The problem lies instead in the extraordinarily rapid nature of mechanical development. "What we fear is the great rapidity with which they [machines] are becoming something very different to what they are at present." (Erewhon, p. 180) We must curtail the growth of our mechanical children while they are still dependent on us.

The issue at stake is not a moral one, since machines are no more inherently good or evil than man himself. Butler's argument shifts once again to the premise of "Lucubratio Ebria." We are all of us machines, our bodies mere tools under the mind's control. "What is a man's eye but a machine for the little creature that sits behind in the brain to look through?" (p. 182) Man is dependent on his "extra-corporeal" limbs as he is on his own flesh and blood; neither man or machine could, in fact, long survive without the other. "Man's very soul is due to the machines; it is a machine-made thing: he thinks as he thinks and feels as he feels through the work that the machines have wrought upon him, and their existence is quite as much a sine qua non for his, as his is for theirs!" (p. 184) The matter is a simple question of dominance: who is to be king of the roost, man or the machine? As human beings, Butler contends, our only hope lies in the destruction of our rivals.
The problem is how do we eliminate our mechanical creations without destroying ourselves in the process? As the "professor," Butler makes no reply except to deny the uniqueness of the human situation. The argument cannot be given that man, as a creature endowed with free will, has a spiritual superiority denied to his mechanical creations. If Butler has squelched Christian dogma before now, the Erewhonian professor gives the final blow to humanity's feeble claims to favor in the eyes of nature. "What is there in this world, or in the worlds beyond it, which has a will of its own? The Unknown and the Unknowable only!" (Erewhon, p. 193)

What fosters the illusion of free will is our awareness of the impact of certain forces inside and outside ourselves. We cannot see our development in a true light; rather from our necessarily limited perspective "we see but a part, and being thus unable to generalize human conduct, except very roughly, we deny that it is subject to any fixed laws at all, and ascribe much both of a man's character and actions to chance, or luck, or fortune; but these are only words whereby we escape the admission of our own ignorance; and a little reflection will teach us that the most daring flight of the imagination or the most subtle exercise of the reason is as much the thing that must arise, and the only thing that can by any possibility arise at the moment of its arising, as the falling of a dead leaf when the wind shakes it from the tree." (p. 194) If we could see into the future we could
perhaps determine more exactly the limitations of our existence, but to do this it is necessary to know what has happened already in the past and what is happening now. The more we know of these two, the more we can predict, the more certain we can become of our future course of action.

To those despairing of such a view, Butler implies that man's scant knowledge of himself is really a great blessing, far more so than the unbearably gloomy picture the Erewhonians paint for themselves in the world of the unborn. To ease the agony of decision-making, the curse of the average man's ignorance of himself, whole systems of science and ethics have been created. The best men feel the weight of circumstances pressing against them and act accordingly.

"Men," claims Butler, "will only do their utmost when they feel that the future will discover itself against them if their utmost has not been done. The feeling of such a certainty is a constituent part of the sum of forces at work upon them, and will act most powerfully on the best and most moral men. Those who are most firmly persuaded that the future is immutably bound up with the present in which their work is lying, will best husband their present, and till it with the greatest care." (Erewhon, p. 195)

The laws governing mechanical operations govern human conduct; this is Butler's point. He sums up his position admirably: "Spontaneity is only a term for man's ignorance of the Gods." (p. 192) Did Butler believe in the threat of
the machines? To a limited extent, yes. The only serious reply to the treatise is a modified form of the "Lucubratio Ebria" thesis. Man must be regarded as a "machinate mammal": "a train is only a seven leagued foot that five hundred may own at once." (p. 193) The worst danger of an advanced industrial civilization is the possibility of man losing his own mechanical capacity, becoming little more than a kind of super-developed brain controlling the labor of thousands of extracorporeal limbs, "an intelligent but passionless principle of mechanical action." (p. 203) Wealth, which is defined by the number and complexity of such limbs, is the clearest sign of a superior being, the only truly spiritual state man can reach. "That old philosophic enemy, matter, the inherently and essentially evil, still hangs about the neck of the poor and strangles him: but to the rich, matter is immaterial; the elaborate organization of his extracorporeal system has freed his soul!" (Erewhon, p. 204) This last statement is the closest to Butler's heart on the subject.

"The Book of the Machines" is noteworthy for Butler's advocacy of what might be called enlightened determinism or scientific common sense. The absence of mechanical conveniences is a curious and certainly droll feature of the Erewhonian state; but it is not the lack of machines that makes the best of the Erewhonians stand out, just as it is some thing other than an excess of mechanical limbs that ultimately
characterizes the best aspects of the British gentleman. What really matters is the recognition of place, the threefold process of knowing one's past, living one's present, and anticipating one's future from the practical knowledge of these antecedents. Man need not be overwhelmed by the forces regulating his life. Free will and necessity are the Scylla and Charybdis of science and religion; avoid both and live.

The two treatises on the rights of animals and vegetables confirm what Butler has been indicating all along and what the uncomfortable Higgs has only just begun to realize. "Logic" can get you nowhere; intuition is the key to success in life. Butler took a dim view of social prophets. He trusted no one, not even himself, with the responsibility of telling others how to think, a native suspicion of advice-givers that extended to scientists, clergymen, politicians, and critics. People, he believed, are all too quick to "offer up common sense at the shrine of logic." (p. 206) The best invitation to disaster, in Butler's view, was a good argument.

The thesis of "The Rights of Animals" presented the Brewhonians with an almost perfect opportunity for folly. The treatise, as Higgs discovers, goes something like this: It is wrong to kill humans and an act of the gravest offense to eat them. Because we do not feed on members of our own species, it follows that for our increased happiness and security, we should refrain from killing all living creatures for the purpose of consumption. Man should set an example for the animal kingdom.
Any closely reasoned opinion invites quibbling.

Butler, who was a master quibbler when it came to dealing with his own foes, recounts gleefully the philosophical and moral arguments advanced as interpretations of the treatise's commands. Should eggs be eaten? What about milk? What constituted a "natural death"? Soon a remarkable number of animal "suicides" were discovered by the Erehwonians. Sheep would apparently go beserk at the sight of a butcher's knife. Dogs, heretofore gentle creatures, became responsible for a rash of cow and pig killings. The early Erehwonians took characteristically human pains to have things both ways, to follow the law at no cost to the appetite.

The mischief of such commands lay not in their avoidance— one must do what is necessary to survive—but in the pangs of conscience inevitably felt by the violators. To instill an artificial sense of wrong was the greatest of all possible sins in Butler's book. Conscience is a whip used by the few to keep the many in line with some rigidly imposed standard of conduct. Nowhere are standards forced harder than upon the young. Like most youths, the young Erehwonians were reluctant to accept the sanctions against meat, the belief that "it was a sin to do what their fathers had done unhurt for centuries." (Erehwon, p. 204) Unlike Ernest Pontifex, the Erehwonians quickly perceived the hypocrisy of the official system of conduct: "those who preached to them about the enormity of eating meat were an unattractive
academic folk, and though they overawed all but the bolder youths, there were few who did not in their heart dislike them." (Erewhon, p. 212)

The story of the young man who commits suicide after illegally devouring a beefsteak holds direct relation to the conflict between conscience and desire in Butler's England, for his analogy clearly points to the issue of proper sexual conduct. The youth's mind warns him to stop eating meat; his body tells him he must have it: "the better he became in body the more his conscience gave him no rest; the two voices were forever ringing in his ears--this one saying, 'I am Common Sense and Nature; heed me and I will reward you as I rewarded your fathers before you'; But the other voice said: 'Let not that plausible spirit lure you to your ruin. I am Duty; heed me, and I will reward you as I rewarded your fathers before you.'" (Erewhon, p. 213)

There is little question which course of action Butler favors in Erewhon, although in Erewhon Revisited the issue of conscience is by no means as neatly resolved. "The Rights of Vegetables" gave him an opportunity to do forthrightly what he had been doing subtly all along, to reduce an argument by extension to its underlying absurdity. Irony, as Worcester notes, is never so sweet as when a character seems to defend his cause with consistency but in reality gives it completely away.¹ Seldom are the powers of reason more

¹The Art of Satire, p. 87.
devastated than by the treatise ending the tyranny of the
"Vegetarians." The Erewhonians, who are really nobody's
fools in the end, have their suspicions about the "prophet"
who would ostensibly defend the case of the "Puritans": sensing
the result of his argument, however, they common-sensically
remain silent.

Like a magician revealing the secrets of his craft lest others be harmed trying to duplicate his feats, Butler in the last chapters of Erewhon gives his intentions dead away. The prophet's thesis is borrowed from Life and Habit. All living things, animal and vegetable, share certain profound similarities. The "germ" forming the rose is indistinguishable from the seed of a mouse—or a man. Furthermore, the prophet claims, "the course of the germ's development is dictated by the habits of the germs from which it was descended, and of whose identity it had once found part. If a germ found itself placed as the germs in the line of its ancestry were placed, it would do as its ancestors had done, and grow up into the same kind of organism as theirs. If it found the circumstances only a little different, it would make shift . . . accordingly; if the circumstances were widely different, it would die, probably without an effort at self-adaptation." (Erewhon, p. 216)

All species (one is reminded of the potato in "The
Book of the Machines") are possessed with an intelligence that is uniquely theirs; if anything, the prophet implies
that vegetable intelligence is superior to that of the so-called "higher species." The rose, for example, demonstrates the fruits of its knowledge instinctively by its actions, for in truth, "the less signs living creatures give of knowing what they do, provided that they do it repeatedly and well, the greater proof that they give in reality that they really know how to do it and have done it already on an infinite number of past occasions." (Erewhon, p. 216)

Butler makes shrewd use of his evolutionary theory, not to ridicule himself but to force his opponents into admitting the folly of their ways. If all things are possessed of intelligence, how can we justify the consumption of any food? Common sense joins with science to combat spurious logic. All of Butler's invective has at heart a practical function. If man has gotten himself into a moral quagmire, let us use what we can to get him out of it. Whatever works to save the day:

He who sins aught
Sins more than he ought;
But he who sins nought
Has much to be taught.
Beat or be beaten,
Eat or be eaten,
Be killed or kill;
Choose which you will. (Erewhon, p. 221)

All the prophet exclaims, "reason uncorrected by instinct is as bad as instinct uncorrected by reason." (Erewhon, p. 214)
Both the British and the Erewhonians, Butler felt, needed to be reminded of this sample rule.

Ideas in the end are the real heroes of Erewhon.¹ Higgs's growth as a character is at best sporadic. By the time of the book's conclusion he becomes once more a target for Butler's satire, this time on the topic of missionaries, a subject Butler had had his fill of in New Zealand.²

The application of Butler's pragmatism to human institutions, his rejection of religious dogma, his insistence that all men live within their evolutionary means, indicates finally that the search for self is the most important feature of Erewhon. In this way the book bridges the gap between the concerns of the Victorians and the interests of the modern age. Erewhon is more than a primitive utopian romance.³ The past as we know it is dead, its maze of institutional values largely hypocritical, having ignored, neglected, or suppressed the best human impulses. Since life is short and death in the individual sense final, man's aim should be to avoid such collective unhappiness, instead of putting up with it. The sequel to Erewhon, Erewhon Revisited, had a great deal more personal focus, and in it Higgs's own

¹Stillman, Samuel Butler: A Mid-Victorian Modern, p. 87.


search for happiness becomes a major theme.\footnote{Butler himself declared Erewhon was the better of the two books because of the wider application of his theories. See his "Preface" to Erewhon, viii.} In the meantime, Butler's pragmatism matured and his powers as a writer increased in The Way of All Flesh.
"Theory and Personality: The Way of All Flesh"

By the time Butler began writing *The Way of All Flesh*, he was thirty-eight years old and well into the serious pursuit of literature, science, and the arts. He continued to work on the novel for more than a decade, primarily at the insistence of his friend, Miss Savage, who had encouraged him to develop his potential for fiction. Finally in the spring of 1884, troubled by family and financial problems, he laid the manuscript aside. It went largely untouched until his death in 1902.¹

"I had to steal my birthright," declared Butler in one of the most frequently quoted passages from his notebooks, "I stole it and was bitterly punished. But I saved my soul alive." (Note-Book, p. 181) Most critics have regarded the story of Ernest Pontifex's slow rise to fortune

¹There is some evidence that Butler intended to revise the manuscript shortly before his death. He never considered the book finished, although he left plans for its eventual publication. The release of the manuscript in Butler's will was contingent on the death of his remaining family, but his wishes were not honored by his literary executors. For a brief account of the history of the book see Joseph T. Bennett, "The Devil in the Flesh: Samuel Butler's 'Confessional' Novel," Victorian Newsletter, 39 (Spring 1971), 25-28. All quotations from *The Way of All Flesh* will be from Ernest Pontifex or *The Way of All Flesh*, Daniel F. Howard, ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1964). The text of this edition follows Butler's original manuscript and notes. Following quotations, *The Way of All Flesh* will be abbreviated WAF.
as synonymous with Butler's own protracted struggle to find his niche in life. Jones states flatly in his Memoir that "the childhood of Ernest Pontifex in The Way of All Flesh is drawn as faithfully as Butler could draw it from his own; Theobald and Christina being portraits of his own father and mother with no softening and no exaggeration." Jones's claim leaves the reader to piece together for himself the real facts of Butler's youth.

C. E. M. Joad, in sympathy with the message of the novel, yet suspected Butler of using Langar Rectory as ammunition for the outright "parent baiting" coloring his masterwork, a charge taken up by critics from Mrs. Garnett to P. N. Furbank. Butler, of course, was always one to capitalize on his own experience; his style of writing depended on the sly rendering of ordinary life into extraordinary episodes to inform, infuriate, or intrigue the unwary reader. The distancing he achieved in this way varied, depending on the extent of his own involvement in his subject matter. Butler could be savage, as in "Darwin Among the Machines," or reveal himself abruptly, as he did at the end of Erewhon. In The Way of All Flesh, Butler turned inward, more so than he had ever done before; and the result is a self-contained quality both animating and inhibiting his peculiar vision of the world, a satirical intensity that irritates as much as it delights.

11, p. 19.  
2Samuel Butler, p. 90.
Butler put into *The Way of All Flesh* everything he knew; and he realized, as he wrote in his notebook, that "the foundations which we would dig about and find are within us, like the Kingdom of Heaven, rather than without." (WAF, p. 17) Ernest and his mentor, Overton, confirm Butler's "Ishmaelish" position in society, even as they seek to illustrate and explain the evolutionary theory that lies at the heart of the book. Butler was conscious of his motives as author: "Every man's work," pronounces Overton early in the novel, "is always a portrait of himself." (WAF, p. 55) At the same time he knew that much, perhaps all, of what he had to say was the product of forces he could only begin to understand, let alone control. Thus, continues Overton, the more a man "tries to conceal himself, the more clearly his character will appear in spite of him." (WAF, p. 55) In *The Way of All Flesh*, as in *Erewhon*, Butler attempted to reconcile the things one could know with the things one could not. This spirit of compromise, so central to his pragmatism, makes tolerable the idiosyncracies of the novel in a way unlike anything he had done before, for never before was so much at stake personally or philosophically. *The Way of All Flesh* anticipates what William Frierson calls the British "life novel," if only because Butler explores subjectively the ideas he presents, ideas linking him to his own personal and intellectual heritage.

The preface to *The Fair Haven*, Butler's slyly satirical review of the credulity of the gospels, contains a rather remarkable "memoir," an account of the life of one "John Pickard Owen," as told by his younger brother, William. Scarred in childhood by the narrow Christianity of his mother (the boys' father dies when they are quite small), young John Owen runs while still in his youth the gamut of religious conviction, from Catholicism to free thought. Along the road to his final enlightenment, Owen learns "to give up Christ for Christ's sake," to revel in the spirit, if not the fact, of God. The trouble is, however, that Owen never loses his peculiar literal-mindedness, his obsession to know Christ in the flesh as well as in the ideal. "Nothing less than the strictest objective truth as to the main fact of the Resurrection and Ascension would content him," says his brother, and the vehicle for Butler's satire is the failure of Owen's attempted "proof" of the validity of the New Testament, an account leading to his inadvertent denial of all scriptural truth. The struggle to breach the gap between skepticism and orthodoxy costs Owen his life; after experiencing a state of the "profundest melancholy," he dies insane at an early age.

The Owen memoir is important, apart from its own value as religious satire, as a test "running" of the story of Ernest Pontifex. John Owen is an Ernest gone amuck, an Ernest left stranded in a world which cares little for real
truth, a world all too willing, without the aid of spiritual
guides like Overton and Alethaea Pontifex, to urge a vain
youth to ruin in his search for absolutes. Owen is too much
of a fool to be actually pitied, but his defeat at the hands
of dogma carries with it one of Butler's strongest warnings
against the dangers of misguided zeal.

Butler himself never tired of chasing speculative
rainbows, an irony undercutting both The Fair Haven and The
Way of All Flesh. Still, the novel represents a kind of
personal rite of passage. Once Ernest realizes the nature
of his ancestry, once he puts, in Erewhonian terms, past,
present, and future into proper balance, he is free to follow
without peril the path of his expanded knowledge. Without
this perspective Owen is doomed, however sound the "logic" of
his convictions. Ernest and Owen are twin figures, and the
success of the former can be measured against that of his
counterpart, for Ernest until almost the end of The Way of All
Flesh is no better or worse than Owen. Ernest's final victory
occurs when he comes to grips with the world around him, an
important achievement for Butler, who, as Bekker notes, saw
before each individual a long vista of moral and physical
improvements brought about by a better understanding.¹
Understanding, on one level, is what The Way of All Flesh is all
about.

Like Erewhon, the form of Butler's novel defies con-
venient description. The book is really a story within a

¹An Historical and Critical View of Samuel Butler's
Literary Works, p. 27.
story or more accurately, several stories within stories; what William H. Marshall calls the "Chinese box" structure of the novel makes possible Butler's characteristic exploitation of several differing viewpoints, each in some way related to his own. At the center of the box stands the figure of Ernest Pontifex, who like Owen acts more as a kind of photographic plate than as an individual in his own right, a sensitive mirror changing with each impression of the people and ideas around him.

It is vital to Butler's scheme of things that his account of Ernest begin with the life of his great-grandfather, John Pontifex. The old carpenter is as near an illustration of the "good life" as Butler could conceive, an idealized creature, certainly, but more human than any of Butler's other "heroes." Pontifex is a success in every way Butler was capable of defining the word, as a skilled tradesman, a musician, an artist, but above all else as a spirit in kindred with the natural world. Two kinds of time, historical and evolutionary, envelop The Way of All Flesh and John Pontifex stands at their crossroads. His spirit runs through the book like a clear and heartfelt melody, softening the discordant elements in the Pontifex line, lending dignity and grace to an otherwise undignified


and graceless family, a persuasive if understated argument for being true to oneself.

Ernest's life has not one specific starting point but several, and the first of these is 1750, the year of the marriage of John and his wife, and the second 1765, the birth year of their son, George. Butler paid close attention to dates in the novel. John Pontifex is a romantic figure, who uses his native abilities to make a comfortable life for himself and his family, an important juxtaposition of aim and talent in a changing social order. What H. V. Routh said about George Eliot's novels applies in a limited way to Butler; he placed The Way of All Flesh in the immediate past not to give picturesque charm or other worldliness to his narrative, but to force his readers into a consciousness of change and progress.1 Nothing can remind us more insistently of what we have gained or lost than our parents or grandparents.

In Erewhon, Butler worked out an important tenet of his evolutionary faith, that the greater part of any action is a reaction to the controlling environment. Life is a continual process of coping with the demands of the moment, instinct being the force within ourselves enabling us to see our way clear among the complex range of alternatives we daily confront. Old Pontifex's instinct allows him to make just as much of himself as his humble surroundings will

1Towards the Twentieth Century, p. 261.
comfortably allow, and no more. From Butler's standpoint too much change was not a good thing; like the hybrid whose traits radically combine the features of its parents, too sudden a jolt to the slow-spinning devices of memory and personal identity results in sterility and waste. Ernest's great-grandfather bridges the gap between the old order and the new, the one fairly fixed in its view of man's potential; the other exploding, whether for good or for evil, with a profoundly dynamic view of the human situation.

P. N. Furbank argues that the whole weight of The Way of All Flesh is behind the demonstration that given a certain background and heritage, the victim of these chooses nothing at all for himself, and is in fact not given an opportunity for choice.¹ Such a judgment is probably too severe, for in his novel Butler confirmed what he had suggested in Erewhon, that men can change, given the right use of the powers of instinct. The bonds between men are formed by a recognition of this innate capacity for growth, one reason why Overton's father cautions his son of the dangers of assessing men by their actions alone. This is a civilized step up from the brewhonian affirmation of "natural law": "'I tell you Edward,' said my father with some severity, 'we must judge men not so much by what they do as by what they make us feel they have it in them to do... It is not by what a man has actually put down upon the canvas of his life that I will judge him, but by what he makes me feel he has felt and

¹Samuel Butler, p. 12.
It is not enough for Ernest to re-establish his link with the past; his gifts for music and carpentry will not save him, but rather how he comes to view these things as signs of a deeper grace, of a will begging to renew its vigor. To change the course of the Pontifexes, for this is what his struggle amounts to, he must be active instead of passive, no longer the timid victim of his father and grandfather. To accomplish this task he must stand firm against the destructive assault of an age which would permit little independent thought and only the most rudimentary feeling.

To Butler's credit, *The Way of All Flesh* is as much a story of individual personalities as it is an examination of the family organism. The "boxes" comprising the novel are joined by the intricate entwining of character, by the wit and pathos of the Pontifexes as much as the biological or historical reality underlying their common predicament. The birth of George, Ernest's grandfather, is framed in an atmosphere of dry humor. Even John Pontifex fails to escape from Butler's gentle ridicule, his readiness to comically exploit the small scenes of domestic life. Perhaps the very unexpectedness with which George comes into this world is enough to set the man off balance.

"The boy," recalls Overton, "grew up into a sturdy bright-eyed little fellow, with plenty of intelligence, and

1 Henkin, pp. 212-213.
perhaps a trifle too great readiness at book learning." (WAF, p. 8) Such habits are dangerously cultivated when the fresh air of the village beckons. The lad is whisked away to Paternoster Row at an early age, and the pattern of his life is permanently established. It is important to remember that George Pontifex, too, is a man of his time with his ostentatious approval of "academy style," his sloganeering, and above else, his proud realization that like so many others of his class, he had at last come financially and socially into his own.

"I believe," says Overton, "old Mr. Pontifex along with his pride and affection had a certain fear of his son, as though of something he could not thoroughly understand, and whose ways, notwithstanding outward agreement, were nevertheless not his ways." (WAF, p. 10) The Pontifexes are a family whose "luck" has gone out of control, and the very rapidity of George's commercial success casts a doubtful light on his character as well as his times. Wealth is of vital concern in The Way of All Flesh but if money was to be a sign of grace, it had to be coupled with purpose, the realization of the existence of "profound convictions."

The Pontifexes reveal their evolutionary instability not in large errors of judgment or morality but in small violations of taste and sensibility. The plant severed from the root dies slowly. Overton chronicles the erosion of conviction. Old Pontifex distributes penny loaves at his
wife's funeral; no such nonsense is permitted at his own. The carpenter's cottage is torn down to make way for a rail station. The occasion of Ernest's christening, an affair which occurs at the peak of Pontifex pride and prosperity, is marked by what have been an inspired gracelessness. The baptismal water spills on the cellar floor, and the dinner is ruined. As a final blow, the symbolic value of the day, not to mention Theobald's pride in his one successful accomplishment, is thwarted by a quick succession of Pontifex grandsons.

Strange as it may seem, it is not George who suffers most from his sudden affluence, although the good life takes its toll on his physical capacities. Money causes the greatest trouble to those inheriting it, the unfortunate men and women who must somehow cope with the unfamiliar stresses of a new evolutionary development. As Overton explains, "a certain kind of good fortune generally attends self-made men to the last. It is their children of the first, or first and second generation who are in greater danger, for the race can no more repeat its most successful performances suddenly and without its ebbings and flowings of success than the individual can do so, and the more brilliant the success in any one generation, the greater as a general rule the subsequent exhaustion until time has allowed for sufficient recovery."

(WAF, p. 19)

The Pontifexes, Butler emphasizes, are by no means an exceptional family. "Mr. Pontifex might have been a little sterner with his children than some of his neighbors, but not much," claims Overton early in the book. (WAF, p. 21)
Overton and Ernest look back on the past they find a certain amount of inevitability in the relationship between the generations. Youth is a condition to be endured more often than enjoyed, a necessarily harsh precursor to the pleasures of maturity. In his role as overseer, Overton asserts Butler's observation about the characteristics of youth and age: "Some satirists," notes Ernest's aging guardian, "have complained of life inasmuch as all the pleasures belong to the forepart of it and we must see them dwindle till we are left it may be with the miseries of a decrepit old age. To me it seems that youth is like spring, an overpraised season; delightful if it happens to be a favoured one, but in practice very rarely favoured, and more remarkable as a general rule for biting east winds than genial breezes. Autumn is the mellow season, and what we lose in flowers, we more than gain in fruits." (WAF, p. 26)

Butler's evolutionary theory breaks down on the sensitive subject of youth and age. His satire in The Way of All Flesh only enhances the despondency he felt over renewing the powers of memory through the young. Ernest's best impulses, the instincts linking him to his great-grandfather, John Pontifex, are stifled in boyhood, when instinct should be at its zenith. Christina views her final confinement with a sense of impending doom: "Could any death be as horrible as birth? Or any decrepitude so awful as childhood in a happy united God-fearing Christian family?" (WAF, p. 27) The Erewhonians, who witnessed birth with a funeral solemnity, are
no match for Overton and the Pontifaxes. At the end of the book, when Ernest packs his own children off to a Thames bargeman, Overton's early words ring true with a disturbingly bitter quality. Butler's pragmatism had always rested on his ability to use his own memory to advantage, but the detailed domestic pathos recounted in *The Way of All Flesh* frustrates his larger intentions for Ernest and the Pontifaxes.

Ernest's offspring remain shadow figures. In a similar way much of what goes on in young Theobald's heart is unknown. "Theobald did not complain even behind his father's back," recalls Overton, who claims to know him as well as anyone. "He very rarely mentioned his father's name even while his father was alive, and never once in my hearing afterwards." (*WAF*, p. 28) Theobald and George maintain an uneasy coexistence, the one ambitious and self-righteous, the other lazy and morally indifferent. Theobald's one praiseworthy stance is in itself an act of avoidance; he does not want to be ordained. On his own, the young Theobald is no standard bearer for his ancestral line; rather, his passiveness increases, pulling him into marriage and fatherhood in his own right.

Only in *The Way of All Flesh*, where the courtship of Theobald and Christina becomes the vehicle for his finest writing, does the subject of matrimony enter into Butler's work. Elsewhere his thoughts on marriage are casual. He once wrote a sketch in his notebook about a couple trapped
in a union of convenience, who live for the day they can divorce. (Note-Book, p. 236) This was the most charitable tone Butler could muster on the subject. Darwin's principle of "sexual selection," the singling out of a mate on the basis of physical attributes, does not explain the Pontifex match, even though the notion would give to nature the kind of purposiveness Butler desired. Whatever the force motivating the marriage of Ernest's parents, it is not biological.

With zeal Overton strips away the myth of romantic love from marriage, revealing in its place the pride, selfishness, and mutual deception characterizing the relationship between the sexes as Butler knew it. "A pair of true lovers," claims Overton, "are like sunset and sunrise; there are such things every day, but we very seldom see them. Theobald posed as the most ardent lover imaginable, but to use the vulgarism for the moment in fashion, it was all 'side.' Christina was in love, as indeed she had been twenty times already, but then Christina was impressionable, and could not even hear the name 'Missolonghi' mentioned without bursting into tears." (WAF, pp. 43-44)

The Allaby blood is the sadly inevitable complement to the Pontifex line, hardly the stuff to put new vigor into the next generation. Theobald and Christina live in a shadow world, where emotional certainty is mistaken for certainty itself,¹ where the illusion of righteousness comfortably covers

¹Marshall, p. 586.
the reality of failure and incompetence. Theobald symbolizes the power of that world in his son's eyes, but it is Christina who most energetically perpetuates the hypocrisy characterizing the Pontifexes. She is perhaps the most important person in the book and the best developed of all Butler's creations, the object of his keenest scorn and most heartfelt affection.

Butler's people are portrayed both as they supposed themselves to be and as they appeared to an acute, prejudicial observer.¹ Christina is neither innately good or hopelessly evil; like the rest of the Pontifexes she is a half-comic, half-pathetic victim of circumstance. "In spite of her flights of religious romanticism," says Overton, "Christina was a good-tempered, kindly natured girl, who if she had married a sensible layman--we shall say a hotel keeper--would have developed into a good landlady and been deservedly popular with her guests." (WAF, pp. 48-49) The affection she holds for her eldest son is genuine, if somewhat selfishly conceived. Because Ernest loves his mother, it takes a long time for her faults to triumph over her virtues.

Still, Butler weighed men and women finally by the results of their actions, and by results Christina is doomed. The union of Theobald and his wife is consummated not physically but morally, in the small victory of a frightened bridegroom over his quailing wife. Marriage gives Theobald

a chance to exert his crippled will through Christina. The result is an ineffectual tyranny, harmless save for his sensitive eldest son. Like George, Theobald and Christina were "stupid in little things," and as Overton notes, "he that is stupid in little will be stupid also in much."

Butler's description of Ernest's childhood is justly famous for its reconciliation of wit and pathos, for the precision with which Butler recorded the spirit of his past. When young Pontifex enters the novel the momentum of the book shifts, as if having probed the collective recesses of the Pontifex heart, the reader must begin the process of synthesizing his knowledge, to watch as Overton, Alethaea, Ellen, and others put Ernest back on the proper evolutionary course. The implications of the novel widen as Butler's focus increased, but for a brief time his two aims, personal and philosophical, merge in Ernest.

"We may say that we will," declared Butler in his notebook, "but life is, au fond, sensual." (WAF, p. 229) Like the young boy in Erewhon, Ernest is torn between his strong natural instincts and his conscience, which is, like Theobald's, weak but persistent. "Man," observes Overton early in the novel, "prides himself on his consciousness. ... We know so well what we are doing ourselves, and why we do it, do we not? I fancy that there is some truth in the view that it is our less conscious actions which mainly mould our lives and the lives of those who spring from us."
(WAF, p. 22) The "way of all flesh" is towards the sensual, in spite of the attempts of men and institutions to deny the body; this is one of the first conclusions we can draw from the story of Ernest and his family. Images of food, if not more explicit physical references, abound in the novel, from the loaves of bread John Pontifex instinctively passes out at his wife's funeral to the meat and wine Theobald offers in his awkward attempts to minister to his diseased parishioners, to Dr. Skinner's lavish "bite of bread and butter."

Ernest pays for his ignorance of life over and over again, as a sickly puny child and later as a rashly impulsive adult. Overton discovers that the best metaphor for life at Battersby lurks literally within the walls of the house itself, for even the bees swarming yearly under its roof are affected by the sham that prevails within: "The drawing room was of a pattern which consisted of bunches of red and white roses, and I saw several bees at different times fly up to these bunches and try them under the impression that they were real flowers. . . . As I thought of the family prayers being repeated night and morning, night and morning, week by week, month by month, and year by year I could not help thinking how like it was to the way the bees went up the wall and down the wall, bunch by bunch without even suspecting that so many of the associated ideas should be present and yet the main idea be wanting hopelessly forever." (WAF, pp. 87-88)
The literal-minded Ernest takes pity on the painted birds adorning the rectory parlor, an act typical of his misguided affinity with the natural world. In his deliberate way Overton makes clear the youth is progressing toward something. But what? "He was a really happy man. He was without father, without mother, and without descent. He was an incarnate bachelor. He was a born orphan." (Note-Book, p. 25) Butler wrote this in his notebook, too, in reference to one of his heroes. The mature Ernest cuts himself off from his kin because the family group is in itself like a hive of bees, a "compound organism" remarkably complex in structure but fundamentally static, a creature long ago surpassed by the more individual forms of life. "I would do with the family among mankind what nature has done with the compound animal," asserts Ernest in retrospect, "'and confine it to the lower and less progressive races.'" (WAF, p. 91)

Life as portrayed in The Way of All Flesh alternates continually between these two extremes of family and individual, so remote and yet so closely related. The conflict between the sensual loving Ernest and the aloof intellectual he becomes is one of the major sources of tension in the book. The more human Butler's pragmatism becomes the less satisfying it is, his metaphors strained, his people unconvincing advocates of the standard of conduct he prized. Ernest's evolutionary "success" is not the kind everyone could emulate, nor is his personal victory absolute, in spite of the efforts
of three different mentors, each in some way representative of the battle between passion and logic.

Edward Overton is probably the most familiar figure in the book, the one man capable of working through the many levels of Pontifex life in pursuit of his peculiar task of reforming Ernest. At his weakest Overton is little more than a paternalistic dies ex machina, ready with cash to help his charge out of the scrapes he gets into in London; at his best he colors the role of observer with his own first-hand knowledge of life. Like no other figure in the book Butler's narrator spans the centuries, linking the rural existence of John Pontifex to the fate of his great-grandson.

Yet Overton's perspective is misleading. We never know more than what he and his ward conspire to tell us, and while it seems Overton and Ernest's story is true, it never loses its particular one-sidedness, as if all the varying viewpoints in the novel may be traced to this one unalterable source. Butler's free reign with Overton cramps his vision of the other characters in the novel, making The Way of All Flesh one of the most inflexible of all his books. The results of Butler's intensity of purpose may be seen before he unMASKS himself at the end of the novel, in Ernest's relationship with his other mentors.

The forces at work in young Pontifex converge at several points in the novel. One of these is the episode at Battersby with Ellen, the fallen serving girl, who more

1 Marshall, p. 583.
than any other character is a living reminder of the powers of the flesh. Overton describes Ellen as "the kind of girl about whom one is inclined to wonder how [she] can remain unmarried a week or a day longer." (WAF, p. 142) When Ellen becomes pregnant it is no surprise to anyone except, of course, Theobald and Christina and their son. Overton and Alethaea aside, Ernest's greatest sympathy was with the members of the lower classes; and the youth's bond with the servant is all the more meaningful for naiveté about sexual matters.

Ernest's native sympathy for Ellen prohibits him from realizing either his parents' or the village's side of the issue: "Ernest could only see what he gathered from the cook, namely that his favourite Ellen was being turned adrift with a matter of three pounds in her pocket, to go she knew not where, and do she knew not what, and that she said she should hang or drown herself, which the boy implicitly believed she would." (WAF, pp. 147-148) Ernest characteristically renders the matter into emotional absolutes, the kind of response he later learns to check. In this instance, instinct leads him to the right decision. The boy's act of kindness is impulsive and foolhardy, perhaps because our later knowledge of Ellen makes us wonder if she is worthy of the sacrifice.

Ernest's deed of charity marks the beginning of his break with the rectory, an act far more important than the furtive crime Christina eagerly suspects. Ernest deals his
father his first open blow, although without allies among
the servants the defeat might have been short-lived. "Ernest
tells me," Overton recalls, "that he looks upon this as the
time when he began to know he had a cordial and active dis-
like for both his parents, which I suppose means that he was
now beginning to be aware that he was reaching man's estate."
(WAF, p. 160)

From here out Ernest's battle is as much with ideas
as it is with men, and instinct only confuses the issues at
hand. Although the two characters are not often compared,
it is interesting to consider Ellen in relation to Alethaea
Pontifex, Ernest's aunt and by far the most sympathetic
female figure in the book.1 Alethaea brings to the surface
the best of the Pontifex spirit, the common-sensical vigor
animating John, the grace that would, if nourished, renew
itself in Ernest. Not surprisingly, Alethaea is the black
sheep of the family, an outcast not for her physical assert-
tiveness but "because she was determined, so she said, to
make the rest of her life as happy as she could, and she had
clearer ideas about the best way of setting to work to do
this than most women, or indeed men, generally have." (WAF,
p. 118) A spinster, Alethaea is no stranger to the ways of
men, although Overton takes care to note she "lived after a
fashion in which even the most censorious could not complain
of." (WAF, p. 119)

1Stillman, Samuel Butler: A Mid-Victorian Modern,
p. 192.
Like most of Butler's characters, Alethaea Pontifex is a contradiction in terms, human but ultimately unapproachable. Ellen's beauty masks an assortment of vices. Alethaea's impeccable character is an equally deceptive embodiment of virtue. Miss Pontifex can make Ernest wealthy, in the process helping him to discover his talents. She cannot, however, force him to act on his knowledge as Ellen does, in spite of Butler's final disdain for the serving girl. Alethaea and Overton never cope with the issue of love, and Alethaea dies before she is firmly secured in Ernest's affection. Ellen gratefully abandons her husband and children at the end of the novel. Neither Alethaea or Ellen hold up as autonomous creations; but the two women, different as they are, act as symbols of what Butler could only realize in a limited way, the positive force of instinctive behavior. In a world dominated by Theobald and Christina, Pryer and Dr. Skinner, such a force could not long endure comfortably.

While Ernest learns in the end that idols are meant to be broken, his many failures in life stem less from gullibility than from a more basic ignorance of self. "Never," says Overton, "was there a little mortal more ready to accept without cavil whatever he was told by those who were in authority over him." (WAF, p. 115) His trusting nature is a target for the machinations of Battersby. "He knew nothing of the other Ernest that dwelt within him and was so much stronger and more real than the Ernest of which he was conscious." (WAF, p. 115)
At Cambridge this "dumb Ernest" finds room for expression, more than the rectory or Roughborough School had ever willingly allowed him. Like Higgs in Erewhon, Ernest is highly susceptible to the physical beauty of the colleges but finds no greatness of mind comparable to the grandeur of the university landscape. At Cambridge, Ernest, the victim of his evolutionary fate, becomes a victim of the times as well. Like another famous casualty of spiritual self-deception, Robert Elemsere, young Pontifex comes to Cambridge during the intellectual lull of the 1850's. Victorian complacency offered little challenge to the inquiring mind, the intellect as yet untrained in the ways of truth and falsehood. Echoing his prototype, John Owen, Ernest darts "snipe-like" through the cults of the day, grappling with well-worn arguments and faded controversies with a ferocious, literal-minded intensity.

Ernest and his college "set," clever though they fancy themselves to be, prove no match for their more rigorously devoted opponents, the Simeonites. Ernest's first brush with religion--the Simeonites are the only sincere Christians he ever encounters--widens the gap between himself and Battersby. Yet his struggle with evangelicalism leaves him no further along the road to self-realization. Academic life, like Alethaea's encouragement, convinces Ernest he has some talent, but it does not show him the means to discover his own abilities.
Ernest's relationship with his hero, Townely, provides him with a model for his first real set of values. Whatever the reader's opinion of Townely, there can be little doubt for Ernest, as well as Butler, that the young swain represents the best attainable in life, the success that wealth and instinct can alone achieve in men. Townely, of course, is a man without family, his parents having had the good sense to favor their infant son by leaving him heir to "one of the finest estates in the South of England." (WAF, p. 188) As a student, Ernest's hero is "not clever but very sensible." Townely troubles himself little with the intellectual life of the colleges, recognizing it unconsciously for the sham it is.

If Alethaea is a woman after Butler's fashion, Townely is very much a man after his heart. "The only thing that can produce a deep and permanently good influence upon a man's character is to have been begotten of good ancestors for many generations—or at any rate to have reverted to good ancestors and lived among nice people." (Alps and Sanctuaries, p. 227) Townely is the kind of "nice person" Butler had in mind when he wrote The Way of All Flesh, a refined version of the model he had cherished since Erewhon. Ernest's idol is a man with few apparent faults and no inconsistencies, a gentleman whose code of conduct takes him smoothly through the most sordid of escapades.

As a model, Townely more than any other figure in the book reveals the limitations of Ernest's character,
shortcomings Ernest himself begins to see as he matures. Townely affirms Butler's belief in evolutionary superiority, even though he appears to owe at least as much to "luck" as to "cunning," one reason why Ernest's declaration that there must always be inferior men is so bleak. Being around "nice" people" heightens Ernest's sense of inadequacy. Townely breaks into the narrative at the most inopportune moments, forcing a scene with Christina, sparking disaster in a lady's sitting room.

When Ernest cuts Townely at the end of the book it is with an "unconscious" sense of relief. "'Townely,'" he tells Overton, "'is my notion of everything I should most like to be—but there is no real solidarity between us.'" (WAF, p. 314) Nor could there be. Butler's philosophy, as Cole suggests, was that of a timid man and wholly unfit for heroes.1 Ernest's admiration of Townely is based on envy and frustration. A large part of maturity is settling with the hard reality of one's position in life. Ernest's response to Townely is typical of Butler, who chose oftentimes to ignore what he could not face.

In London, Ernest learns the difference between common sense and passion from the mysterious Pryer, who attacks not only the heart but the pocketbook. Like Townely, Pryer's actions deny the distinction between virtue and vice, a necessary step on the road to self-enlightenment. Unlike Townely, the Curate knows the arguments sanctioning his

1Samuel Butler and The Way of All Flesh, p. 33.
behavior, a defense no true gentleman need make. Pryer tells Ernest that "'No practice is entirely vicious which has not been extinguished among the comeliest, most vigorous, and most cultivated races of mankind in spite of centuries of endeavor to extirpate it. If a vice in spite of such efforts can still hold its own among the most polished nations, it must be founded on some immutable truth or fact in human nature, and must have some compensatory advantage which we cannot afford altogether to dispense with.'" (WAF, p. 205) The principle is related to that of survival of the fittest but with a perverse twist.

What Pryer succeeds best in doing, naturally, is swindling Ernest out of his grandfather's bequest; thereupon he disappears from the narrative altogether. (The Way of All Flesh demonstrates Butler was better at staging entrances than exits.) After Pryer, events move quickly. The freethinking tinker, Shaw, tears the last shreds of belief veiling Ernest's eyes; and the young clergymen finds himself yielding to more worldly impulses. The scenes following with the Misses Snow and Maitland have the appearance of both satire and melodrama. Butler exploits Ernest's misadventures to signal that what is to come is not tragedy but something of a quite different sort.

Jail marks the turning point in Ernest's life, although the realism of the prison sequence was in Butler's mind less important than the understanding Ernest comes to in his confinement. In his study of the English novel,
Morton Zabel has said Ernest lives too much after the fact to live within the fact,¹ but in jail young Pontifex rejects his upbringing irrevocably, forging a blood link with the future. His long illness, more mental than physical,² leads to his discovery of the true meaning of life, a meaning better felt than expressed in words. "As he lay on his bed day after day," Overton recalls, "he woke up to the fact which most men arrive at sooner or later, I mean, that very few men care two straws about truth, or have any confidence that it is righter and better to believe what is true even though belief in the untruth may seem at first sight most expedient. Yet it is only these few who can be said to believe anything at all." (WAF, p. 245)

In the world where nothing is absolute, faith is truly the only thing that matters. Belief itself, however, must be dynamic. To the relativist, instinct is the final court of appeal, "a mode of faith in the evidence of things not actually seen," as Ernest defines it. (WAF, p. 246)

Like John Owen, Ernest finds "Christ for Christ's sake," but his religion is without guile, untainted by the intellectual pride of priggishness. The new Ernest takes joy in simple things. "It pleased me," says Overton, "to take in the delight he took in all about him; the fireplace with a fire


²Howard, "Introduction," xvii.
in it, the red geraniums, the easy chairs, the Times, my cat, to say nothing of coffee, bread and butter, sausages, marmalade, etcetera. Everything was pregnant with the most exquisite pleasure to him." (WAF, p. 266) A fondness for little things is perhaps the best aspect of Butler's pragmatism.

The last chapters of *The Way of All Flesh* chronicle the progress of the reformed Ernest, growth which proceeds confidently in spite of certain setbacks. Slowly Ernest is freed from the burdens tying him to the drudgery of this world: parents, marriage, children. Overton administers the final biological "cure" to his charge, although the notion of "crossing" is nothing new to the novel. Ernest's whole life up to now is little more than a series of sudden evolutionary "shocks." The fifth generation of Pontifexes given little notice by the two bachelors, the youngsters being in themselves evidence of a foul stream run clear at the end.¹

Looking back on his life, the mature Ernest declares sensibly that "a man of five and thirty should no more regret not having been born a prince of the blood. He might have been happier if he had been born more fortunate in childhood, for aught he knows if he had, something else might have happened which might have killed him long ago." (WAF, p. 91) It is easy to accept William Frierson's notion that *The Way of All Flesh* is a novel without much hope and without

¹Bekker, p. 181.
regrets. From an evolutionary standpoint, Ernest's personal success is not as important as the knowledge he has finally acquired, knowledge that will someday find its way into the hearts of men, as Overton predicts:

Mr. Pontifex is like Othello, but with a difference—he hates wisely but too well. He would dislike the literary and scientific swells if he were to come to know them, and they him; there is no natural solidarity between him and them, and if he were brought into contact with them his last state would be worse than his first. His instinct tells him this, so he keeps clear of them, and attacks them whenever he thinks they deserve it—in the hope, perhaps, that a younger generation will listen to him more willingly than the present. (WAF, p. 356)

Butler's pragmatism is, as he himself realized, a poor substitute for religion. The "gentlemanly ideal" Towneley exemplifies finds no secure place in Ernest's heart. Young Pontifex cannot in the end come to grips with the code of conduct Butler claimed as the natural outgrowth of his theory. A darker view of instinct prevails ultimately in The Way of All Flesh, as Pryer illustrates the often malicious license instinct grants. The positive force of Alethaea, Ellen, and Overton is not enough to bring Ernest to a real affirmation of the best elements in the Pontifex line. The

1The English Novel in Transition, p. 189.
lesser characters in the book, Shaw and Mrs. Jupp, live the notions Ernest expresses. Their success stands in living contrast to his failure.

Butler was incapable of dealing with people close up for very long. The distance between Ernest and his circle of acquaintances widens with his final intellectual detachment from human society. *The Way of All Flesh* precludes the collapse of Butler's theory in *Erewhon Revisited*, where the human failings of his protagonist wrest the narrative from the control of philosophy.

Butler's way out of his human failures in *The Way of All Flesh* is to proclaim that time is the final test of the validity of his thought. This is the last major thrust of pragmatism as it is developed in the novel: an individual must be judged by his descendents. The key to immortality is the long-term growth of one's vision, and Butler hoped the ensuing years would sustain his pragmatism, a clue, perhaps, as to why he left the manuscript of the book rest. By the time of *Erewhon Revisited*, Butler's faith in evolutionary progress found new focus in a disturbing mixture of cynicism and sentimentality.
Chapter V

"Pragmatism Falters: Erewhon Revisited"

The strange sequel to Erewhon and the last of Butler's books to be published in his lifetime was printed in 1901. As an expression of his theory, Erewhon Revisited contains very little that is new, not surprisingly since after Life and Habit Butler focused his dwindling creative powers on refining and restating what he had said before. He was eager, however, to once again examine the fruits of his knowledge and experience within a narrative context, to perpetuate his discoveries even though they had long lost their original freshness.

Besides, then, exploring the principles of memory and unconscious knowledge, Erewhon Revisited rehashes a theme Butler had been wanting to rehash for many years; and this is the whole question of what Joseph Jones calls "credulity." What is the nature of faith? What conditions foster its development? And perhaps most importantly from a commonsense standpoint: who or what can we trust to guide us in such matters? Both Erewhon and The Fair Haven had discussed these questions within a satirical and usually inverted framework. Erewhon Revisited offers the same

1The Cradle of Erewhon, p. 168.
sharp challenge to propriety, to the institutionalization of human needs, but with several significant differences. Its distinguishing features are heightened, as in The Way of All Flesh, by Butler's deeper, better refined sense of purpose. Like his posthumous novel, Erewhon Revisited reveals more examples of straightforwardness than contortion, more evidence of unmasked feeling than disguised invective.

Unlike most of Butler's books, Erewhon Revisited came easily, or so Jones tells us in his Memoir. Butler on his deathbed declared himself pleased with the general orderliness with which his studies had proceeded, even to the end. "First I write Erewhon," he told Jones, "that is my opening subject; then, after modulating freely through all my other books and the music and so on, I return gracefully to my original key and write Erewhon Revisited. Obviously, now is the proper moment to come to a full close, take my bow and retire."  

There is both irony and bitterness in Butler's assertion, sentiments undercutting Jones's obvious pride in the anecdote. The Way of All Flesh, would, of course, publicly disrupt Butler's harmonious cycle. Yet even without that novel, Erewhon Revisited exposes a great deal that is neither free or graceful about Butler's life, most dramatically in the awkward show of emotion for Higgs and his sons, 2 but in less obvious ways as well. More than anything

1"Preface" to Erewhon Revisited, xiii. Following quotations, Erewhon Revisited will be abbreviated ER.

2Bekker, p. 143.
else, Erewhon Revisited chronicles the frustration and suffering of an unsuccessful life. It is an old man's book, although Butler tried very hard to make it otherwise. It is a lonely man's book, too, and Higgs in his last adventures is revealed as a character more worthy of pity than satirical contempt. Never before were words like love and reverence, tartly bandied in Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh, so desperately important as in the feeble traveler's struggle to win the affection of his muddled followers.

Erewhon Revisited is the only book of Butler's in which from start to finish people are as important as ideas, and because of this it is the one place where his pragmatism sours and in the end breaks down. Butler's people are ultimately stifled creations, flawed by the same literal-mindedness that makes his theories so whimsically plausible. As Kingsmill notes, the proselytizing part of Butler's nature was always quarreling with his deep and subtle sense of reality.1 Higgs still thinks in absolutes; he cannot reconcile his "rational" perceptions with the intuitively realized bonds tying him to his family and the Sunchildism. Erewhon Revisited represents Butler's final weary compromise with what he knew he could not change in himself. Hardly the old belief, the optimism that in the end common sense would somehow triumph over conscience, but at the beginning of the twentieth century it was the best he could do.

1After Puritanism, p. 73.
In his notes on the book, Butler stated his intention to let Higgs's English son, John, do the bulk of the revisiting. Instead Higgs dominates the tale in both the telling and the action, a sign of Butler's absorption in his own final predicament. The young Higgs is probably the most functional character Butler created, his task being largely to fill in the gaps of his father's narrative. This he does, with the standard Butlerian attention to detail. As a son, John Higgs is a kind of shadow version of his youthful sire in Erewhon, less dynamic than his Erewhonian half-brother, closer instead to the elder Higgs in his careful restraining nature. No antagonism colors the gap between parent and child in the sequel to Erewhon, but the lull is not a soothing one, nor is there triumph in the peace Butler documents.

In Erewhon Revisited, Butler achieved a distancing that none of his earlier books can match, not through satire but through the absence of an animating personal tension. More "elder brother" than father, the relationship of Higgs to John is played up at great cost to the mind and spirit of a man once described as more adept at hating than loving. The intellectual exhaustion dampening the force of the narrative originates in the truce between the generations, an awkward sentimentality marked by hesitancy and self-consciousness rather than emotional excess.

1Note-Book, p. 229.
2Moore, p. 170.
The mature Higgs bears only a limited resemblance to his youthful self in *Erewhon*, even though his destiny is implied at the end of that book. The adventurer, his son informs the reader, discovers the same thing Ernest Pontifex learns: a young man's priggishness is no match for the devious hostility of the British public. Higgs's failure to lead London in the cause of Erewhonian colonization is one of the aspects thwarting Butler's happy intentions for *Erewhon Revisited*, not in a large way but subtly and "unconsciously." "My father, when first I knew anything of his doing at all, supported my mother and myself by drawing pictures with coloured chalks on the pavement; I used to sometimes watch him, and marvel at the skill with which he represented fogs, floods, and fires. These three 'f's' he would say, were his three best friends because they were easy to do and brought in halfpence freely." (ER, p. 5) John's portrait of his father contains many such disturbing touches, clouding the clear stream of Butler's with with a dull persistent current of discontent.

Honest to himself, Butler could not, however, shift the blame for Higgs's shortcomings as an artist or entrepreneur on the shoulders of others, although he could not resist once more heaving a few half-hearted bricks into the citadels of science and religion. (By 1900, as he realized, the former was considerably more formidable than the latter.)¹ Yet there are no safe biological explanations for

¹Joseph Jones contends that Butler was preoccupied with the advance of science in *Erewhon Revisited*. Other
Higgs's character. The word "delirium," another one of Butler's disturbing touches, crops up repeatedly with reference to Higgs, not only as a malicious label proffered by Chowbok but as a descriptive term that even the friendly shepherds use to denote the traveler in their midsts.

In England, Higgs's "fits of ungovernable excitement" are attributed to the effects of alcohol; and the idea that his adventures in Erewhon are no more than another "lucubration ebria," the fantastic ravings of a drunken man, is a notion resting uneasily on the periphery of the narrative, too outlandish to seriously consider, too ironic to dismiss forthrightly. The one feature dramatically distinguishing the young Higgs in Erewhon from the old Higgs of Erewhon Revisited is the mature man's lack of physical vitality.

In Erewhon, Higgs is hailed as a splendid specimen of strength and beauty; in Erewhon Revisited, he is a figure broken both in body and spirit, a bad sign indeed in Butler's book. If Butler uses Higgs's illness to play on the reader's sympathy, he does so at great cost to his own personal dignity. Watching Higgs suffer the symptoms of the pernicious anemia Butler himself ultimately died from is critics, such as Basil Willey, have maintained that Butler's ultimate goal in the book is the preservation of the Church, partly as a check against rampant technological development but primarily for the value of religion as a moral and ethical ideal. While not yet giving up the battle against Darwin, Butler in his old age met the conflict increasingly on his own grounds.
Like watching Butler's old self-disparagement turned alternately vicious and pathetic. In Erewhon Revisited, Butler's ordered mind yielded to the undisciplined force of despair.

Fortunately for Higgs, the Erewhonians have altered the bans on disease; poor health rates more as a misdemeanor than as a major offense. If his hosts suspect anything, tact and affection keep them quiet. Nevertheless, Higgs's ailment has moral analogues inseparable from the intellectual decay pervading the narrative. Butler's hero does not recover from the shock of his first visit to Erewhon, just as Butler himself did not ever really get over the trauma of his own scientific discoveries. "'I was very young,'" Higgs tells John, "'and my mind was more or less unhinged by the strangeness and peril of my adventures.'" (ER, p. 2) In Life and Habit, Butler defined debility as the process of forgetting how to live. An organism, he said, dies when the mind can no longer rely on the knowledge of former minds to guide it. On a simpler level, the same shock kills Arrowhena, Higgs's Erewhonian bride, and the only really tragic victim in any of Butler's books.

Once set in motion, Higgs is unable to escape from the path his discoveries have set him on. Returning to Erewhon, he is haunted by a troubling sense of déjà vu:

He lit his fire, made himself some tea, ate his cold mutton and biscuits, and lit his pipe, exactly as he had done some twenty years before.
There was the clear starlit sky, the rushing river, and the stunted trees on the mountain-side; the woodhens cried, and the "more-pork" hooted her two monotonous notes exactly as she had done years since; one moment, and time had so flown backwards that youth came bounding back to him with the return of youth's surroundings; the next, and the intervening twenty years--most of them grim ones--rose up mockingly before him, and the buoyancy of hope yielded to the despondency of admitted failure. (ER, p. 17)

Even the love of his Erewhonian friends cannot save Higgs from the "passion of self-contempt" marking his progression in the book. The favors he receives serve only to heighten the sickness within him, for if there is one sentiment that transcends his sense of failure it is his sense of guilt.

Guilt indeed overwhelms the relationship with Yram, the jailor's daughter turned mayoress and the mother of his son, George. More even than Alethaea in The Way of All Flesh, Yram is the fine flower of Butler's imaginings about human character. Yram's virtues, sketchily drawn in Erewhon, are to a great extent realized in the sequel to Erewhon; but Butler's triumph at her creation is obscured by the disturbing possibilities her character raises for the aging traveler. Higgs can in no way approach this ideal woman, the sensual

1Furbank, p. 89.

creature he so casually embraced as a youth, nor in a larger sense can Butler. The reader learns that the young girl, alone and with child, is after Higgs's departure, coolly turned over to her prospective husband, whose only demand is that he not be put sexually "on any lower footing than Higgs was." (ER, p. 87) Such a practical arrangement might befit the tastes of an elderly bachelor in a more satirical context, but Erewhon Revisited is founded on feeling, not satire; and feeling, as Butler knew all too well, is the most profound aspect of common sense. "Forgetting" Yram, cutting her out of his destiny, is a greater offense than having taken her in the first place. Higgs's confrontation with the reality of memory is painful, in spite of the joy of reconciliation; and he pays for his ignorance mortally.

What Higgs cannot stand is that through his ignorance of George and Yram he has very nearly cheated himself out of his own best hope for salvation. The idea that our greatest life exists in the hearts and minds of others had been a favorite of Butler's since the time he began to define life itself in terms of memory. The principle of "vicarious existence" offers the brightest hope for Higgs in Erewhon Revisited. Butler's old rhetorical vigor shines through in "Dr. Gargoyle's" pamphlet on the meaning of immortality, his most heartfelt expression of pragmatism in the book. Life, Gargoyle argues in a treatise Higgs picks up in the marketplace, is by no means physically finite. The thing animating the flesh, the power of will, can transcend its corporeal
limitations at any time. "'Those!' claims Gargoyle, "'who make the life of a man reside within his body, are like one who should mistake the carpenter's tool box for the carpenter.'" (ER, p. 102)

Life, furthermore, cannot be defined as "consciousness" because most of our physical functions are by nature unconscious; according to Gargoyle, it is our actions which live on, for good or for evil, and not our necessarily restricted physical awareness. So-called "virtuous actions"—will-making is an example—may not produce the desired end result of affectionate remembrance. What we leave behind us is the sum total of our earthly deeds, the majority of which are too small and too closely entwined with our character to be deliberately directed.

Our will, says Gargoyle, is that which makes us hold our own against the onslaught of other wills; and death actually increases our power to influence others, for it means that we ourselves come no longer under the "unsettling" influence of those around us. Given these facts, which then is the best life? Higgs ponders the question with considerable anxiety, but for Gargoyle there can be only one reply: "'We should hold that even the best of all that we can know or feel in this life to be a poor thing compared with hopes the fulfillment of which we can never either feel or know.'" (ER, p. 109)

Higgs's share of immortality must be measured not by his wealth—but by his success as a father and lover. Whether or not he prevails on these human terms is one of the great
questions of the narrative. Butler pinned his personal hopes on the relationship between Higgs and his Erewhonian son, George, imbuing his account of the pair with all the warmth and good cheer he could muster.

To the reader of Butler, George is immediately recognizable as a "nice person," a practical gentlemanly hero out of the same mold as Towneley in *The Way of All Flesh*, only revealed more closely so that his strengths as well as his weaknesses are softened by the immediacy of his impact on the reader. P. N. Furbank calls George a representative of the "lad school" of literature, more innocent than knowing, more eternal youth than maturing adult. Yet for Butler, maturity was characterized by an instinctive and not rational capacity for behavior. George demonstrates the growing power of unconscious knowledge over Butler and Higgs.

Towneley is Ernest's unapproachable ideal, but for Higgs, George becomes a symbol for his elusive best self. Unlike John, Yram's son looks like an early version of his father, a hopeful sign in Butler's view. The nature of the bond between Higgs and his offspring is made clear by "Strong," George's adoptive father. "'Some men,'" he tells Higgs, "'have twin sons; George in this topsy-turvy world of ours has twin fathers--you by luck and me by cunning.'" (ER, p. 212) The aptly named mayor cannot afford to let circumstances take their course. It is Strong who has cared for George, after his calculated acquisition of Yram. Like

1Samuel Butler, p. 97.
his wife, he defends the boy in the face of the institutional opposition to Sunchildism, an active role not a passive one.

Higgs, on the other hand, willingly surrenders himself to his hosts. For George, he possesses a doting affection, not unlike the fondness an aging man might feel for a young servant. He cannot know his servant's life, but he can entrust him with his own. John recalls:

My father felt all the time as though he were a basket given to a dog. The dog had got him, was proud of him, and no one must try to take him away. The promptitude with which George took to him, the obvious pleasure he had in "running" him, his quick judgment, verging as it should toward rashness, his confidence that my father trusted him without reserve, the conviction of perfect openness that was conveyed by the way in which his eyes never budged from my father's when he spoke to him, his genial kindly manner, perfect physical health, and the air he had of being on the best possible terms with himself

Butler indeed spoke of his young manservant, Alfred Cathie, in terms very much like those used by Higgs to express his fondness for George. It is no accident that Higgs's London solicitor should go by the name of Cathie or that Cathie's address should be 15 Clifford's Inn--Butler's own. Such devices illustrate the extreme to which Butler's feelings led him in the narrative.
and everyone else--the combination of all this so overmastered my poor father (who indeed had been sufficiently mastered before he had been five minutes in George's company) that he resigned himself as gratefully to being carried in a basket as George had cheerfully undertaken the task of carrying him. (ER, pp. 170-171)

In name Higgs is the Sunchild; in actuality he is a child not of the sun but of his own offspring, an irony that resists the smooth cover of sentimentality in which Butler attempts to cloak George and Higgs.

To say Higgs prostrates himself before his son is perhaps an overstatement, although the older man feels a genuine humility in his presence. George accepts his father's affection but he has the good sense to repel Higgs's adoration, much in the same way that he rejects the false faith that idolizes the Sunchild. George's attitude makes Higgs's efforts all the more pathetic, for they defy common sense as well as the bounds of ordinary love. Higgs is a figure without dignity; even his parting advice to George about Sunchildism is obscured by the business of exchanging boots, a device illustrating how difficult it was for Butler to sustain the harmonious picture he tried so hard to create.

Part of Higgs's strange legacy to his fellow men is, of course, the religion of "Sunchildism." The discovery

\[1\]Furbank, p. 89.
that he has indeed been "immortalized" in this sham faith is the final blow to his exhausted system. The bond between Higgs and his son is one that exists almost in spite of Butler, and that is the instinctive good sense both men display in the face of danger, the spirit Higgs exhibits in his role of hero in *Erewhon*. Like Ernest in *The Way of All Flesh*, Higgs never completely loses his potential for right action; and in *Erewhon Revisited*, he becomes the vehicle for Butler's last assault on organized religion, or as Joseph Jones would say, on anything dogmatic that manages to impose itself on the public credulity. Higgs is aware of his task in *Erewhon*; he is also aware that he is to become, after the fashion of his creator, a victim to the cause.

Indecision gets the best of Butler's sadly enlightened protagonist. Should he follow his heart and reveal San-childism for what it is—the essence of his impulsive promise to George—or should he keep quiet, mindful of the uncertain consequences of such a declaration? The old man finds himself praying, of all things, in one of the Musical Banks. In agony Higgs recounts to John the substance of his plea:

"'Show me thy will, O Lord,' I cried in great distress, 'and strengthen me to do it when thou has shown me.' But there was no answer. Instinct tore me one way and reason another.

... I could get no farther than this, that the Lord hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He willeth, He hardeneth." (ER, p. 66)

1*The Cradle of Erewhon*, p. 168.
The collapse of Higgs is indicative of Butler's own failure to finally reconcile in his own mind these two familiar extremes of thought, in spite of having confidently labeled himself in his preface to the book "a member of the more advanced wing of the English Broad Church." ("Preface," xxiv) Certainly the compromise Higgs proposes at the dedication of the temple in his honor is contrived, the spiriting away of the Sunchild from his professorial enemies too slick in theory and simplistic in practice. The larger acceptance of the limitations of faith bears some looking into, if only because the facts of the Higgs affair frustratingly belie the spirit of his message to the Erewhonians.

The men and women Higgs encounters in Erewhon are nearly all divided into two rival camps of disbelief: cynics and honest doubters. In the entire novel, in fact, there is only one sincere believer in Sunchildism, Higgs's walking companion on the day of the dedication, the defrocked Professor "Balmy." Balmy--Butler does manage to have fun with names in the book--is the unfortunate victim of excessive religious zeal. Balmy's literal interpretation of the doctrines of the faith, his dogged persistence in sticking to his own convictions about the Sunchild, spell doom for the professor among his crafty colleagues at Bridgeford. Balmy is a harmless character, and Butler pokes gentle fun at him, for the sting had gone out of his quarrel with the church.¹

¹Feasting Jones asserts that Butler never lost his literal faith in the resurrection of Christ, an event which in spite of his satire in The Fair Haven and his studies in
Against Balmy, Butler pits two of his most intriguing if not his greatest creations, the Bridgefordian rivals, "Hanky" and "Panky." Like Tweedledum and Tweedledee, these two rogues represent opposite sides of the same sword; but the professors are less objects of satire than examples of the way in which clever men may manipulate the instincts of the public in order to serve their own selfish ends.

Neither Hanky or Panky—and the former, despite his foolish behavior at Higgs's campsite, is the more threatening of the two—hold credence with the Sunchild story. Panky throws himself into the game with the same earnestness that characterizes Balmy but with none of the correspondent sincerity. Hardly recognizing the extent and manner of his corruption, he has become in the course of his career "a living lie," a pathetic by-product of the sham marking his age. Hanky, on the other hand, can turn his earnestness off and on at will, so that, as Higgs explains, "his occasional frankness put people off their guard. He was the more common, superficial, perfunctory professor, who being a professor, should of course profess, but would not lie more than was in the bond; he was log-rolled and log-rolling, but still in a robust wolfish fashion, human." (ER, p. 31) As cynics, Hanky and Panky personify the overwhelming institutional barriers to whatever is good in Suchildism.

evolution, BUTLER saw as real and justifiable. Perhaps this is one reason why he treats Balmy with relative respect. Like Mr. Hawkes in The Way of All Flesh, the professor is a man of integrity. Earnestness, when tempered with evident sincerity, may not be an entirely objectionable trait. But-ler was prepared to make even this compromise in Brewhon Revisited.
The opponents of the professors are the natural skeptics like Yram, George, and the remarkable Mrs. Humdrum, individualists who refuse to allow their feelings to be tampered with by the Bridgefordians. Yram, of course, knows the truth about Higgs. "'She likes him well enough,'" George tells his disguised father, "'in spite of his being a little silly. She does not believe he ever called himself the child of the sun.'" (ER, p. 54) If Dr. Gurgoyle is the best philosophical spokesman for pragmatism in *Erewhon Revisited*, Yram and her followers are the living examples of the way common sense, sparked by physical vitality, may lead to a successful life. The old Erewhonian goddess of propriety lives in Mrs. Humdrum. In the church, this spirit is fueled by Dr. Downie, a true Erewhonian gentleman, who neither rejects or condones Sunchildism, serving instead as a quiet thorn in the side of the unscrupulous.

As the Sunchild, Higgs finally sees it as his obligation to distill the best of the faith for his hosts: "'If you abolish me altogether, make me a peg on which to hang all your own best ethical and spiritual convictions.'" (ER, p. 220) The church must remind each individual of his own potential for a more productive life. Better the institution be corrupt, Butler wrote at the end of the century, than not exist at all. Those who would disband the established faith—scientists and dissenters alike—"'are as corrupt as the church and more exacting. They are also more dangerous, for the masses distrust the church and are on their guard against
aggression, whereas they do not suspect the doctrinaires and faddists, who, if they could, would interfere with every concern of their lives." (ER, p. 221)

Higgs's words, although familiar, are still compelling; but like most final statements Butler's in Erewhon Revisited must be taken with caution. The truth is that Higgs cannot stay on the spiritual scaffolding Butler erects for him. In Erewhon Revisited, pragmatism becomes something warped, something even more tenuous than the thin compromise Ernest works out at the end of The Way of All Flesh. Butler's best discovery, always a check against the excesses of the intellect, becomes in his last narrative a barrier to the emotions as well. The satirical consistency that Butler aimed at elsewhere does not exist in Erewhon Revisited, no detailed vision of human fallibility to counter the smug sense of goodness pervading the book, only an undercurrent of impending doom that would have men and women engage in the difficult task of loving one another without giving them the means to handle their feelings: "'Let this,' continued Yram, 'be our leave taking, for we must have nothing like a scene upstairs. Just shake hands with us all, say the usual conventional things, and make it as short as you can; but I could not bear to send you away without a few warmer words than I could have said when others were in the room.' 'May heaven bless you and yours,' my father said, 'for ever and ever.' 'That will do,' said George gently, 'Now both of you shake hands, and come upstairs with me.'" (ER, p. 223)
Butler's own agonized world view prevents *Erewhon* Revisited from becoming the happy sequel he wanted it to be; his frustration with individuals and institutions transcends his hesitant offering of reconciliation and forgiveness. Always a believer in consequences, Higgs's encounters with the new Erewhonian morality suggest the difficulties Butler had with realizing his vision of human concern, a heavy-handed mockery of the code of conduct underscoring the futility of Higgs's final message to the Erewhonians.

In *Erewhon*, Butler inverted the standards of good and evil and in so doing tied them inextricably to the welfare of the individual. Ill-health carried a stigma for the victim of disease while breaches of honesty were construed as merely bad fortune. To remedy such spiritual ills, the Erewhonians called in "straighteners," specialists in ailments affecting the will. Higgs discovers on his return to Erewhon that the prestige and influence of the straighteners is rapidly being countered by the growing number of physicians, hitherto outlawed. Higgs sees the two camps in temporary equilibrium; "spiritual athletics," contests of moral strength, flourish alongside matches testing physical prowess, with no shortage of quacks to proclaim the virtues of mastering either skill.

Lying, like other forms of deception, has become a high art in Erewhon. Even George on occasion is as good as the professors. "'He enjoys falsehood as well as we all do,'" Yram informs Higgs, "'and has the nicest sense of when to lie and when not to do so.'" (ER, p. 198) Honesty, Higgs learns
at another famous "trial," not only hampers one's moral
growth but seriously impairs one's chances for survival in
a fiercely competitive society. Parents who fail to instill
the art of deception in their children are doing them a grave
injustice; even little girls, says the mayor of one Erewhonian
village, must know the value of falsehood. "'How can she
detect lying in other people unless she has had some experi-
ence of it in her own practice?'" (ER, p. 93)

The "deformatory" Higgs tours, a training school for
severely incorruptible youngsters, represents Butler's bleak-
est jibe at the power of institutions to maintain the status
quo. It is not that his portrayal of Dr. Turvey and his boys
is particularly savage--the portrait of Dr. Kennedy in The
Way of All Flesh is far more vicious--but that Butler should
present such a deadeningly forthright system of control. In
a sense, the "deformatories" are a real improvement over the
Colleges of Unreason, for they take in all segments of society,
not just the favored few.

The philosophy behind the schools is, according to
Turbey, that of "'the greatest good for the greatest num-
ber.'" (ER, p. 121) All men must conform to the standards
of the masses, who must be, because they are so many, the
most content: "'The greatest number are by nature somewhat
dull, conceited, and unscrupulous. They do not like those
who are quick, unassuming and sincere; how then, consistently
with the first principles of either morality or political
economy as revealed to us by the Sunchild, can we encourage such people if we can bring sincerity and modesty fairly home to them? We cannot do so. And we must correct the young as far as possible from forming habits which, unless indulged in with the greatest moderation, are sure to ruin them." (ER, p. 121)

As a spoof on utilitarianism, Turvey's philosophy does not succeed, for it comes too close to the heart of Butler's vision as he expressed it in Erewhon and other books. In a world of such men, where does common sense fit in? Butler's ideal fades in the general with Higgs, just as it does in the specific with Ernest Pontifex; his delicately balanced notion of right and wrong cannot withstand the rigors of modern life. Erewhon, having picked up the pieces of its former technical knowledge, is rapidly industrializing. Already the men of science are offering their shrill challenge to sunchildism—all this both because and in spite of Higgs.

In the end, Erewhon is little more than a stodgy corrupt England. The gentleman, reveals Dr. Turvey to his gathered pupils, is a thing of the past: "'And now my boy,' he said to a very frank and ingenious youth about half way up the class, 'and how is truth reached?' 'Through the falling out of thieves, sir.' 'Quite so. Then it will be necessary that the more earnest, careful, patient, self-sacrificing enquirers after truth shall have a good deal of the thief about them, though they are very honest people at the same time.'" (ER, p. 124)
Even inconsistency is no longer a satisfying virtue but rather a dull weapon in the struggle to serve oneself. When the common man is no longer good, individual growth cannot be synonymous with the common welfare. At the end of the narrative, John Higgs receives a letter from his half-brother Erewhon is in trouble. George, who is now prime minister, writes: "St. Panky is dead, but his son Pocus is worse. Dr. Downie has become very lethargic. I can do less against St. Hankyism then when I was a private man. A little indiscretion on my part would plunge the country into civil war. Our engineers and so-called men of science have a hand in every pie that is baked from one end of the country to the other."

(ER, p. 265) "Nice people" are not the answer to a nation's woes. The unfortunate thing is Butler knew no other.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: The Failure of Pragmatism

Butler's faith remains elusive, locked in somewhere behind the isolated routine characterizing his life and writing. In the end, "pragmatism" may not be a good label for his philosophy as he worked it out in his books. Butler was not a relativist, although one might conclude so from the intellectual struggles in Erewhon. The compromises he achieved in Life and Habit and Erewhon break down in The Way of All Flesh, the ultimate test of his ability to reconcile science and religion, Darwinism and purposive evolution. Against the fluidity of Butler's satire stands the fixed vision of Ernest and Overton and the doomed natives of Erewhon Revisited: the gloomy human reality undercutting his two final protagonists' search for truth and Butler's desperate hope to reveal another, better religion uniting men in a recognition of the absolute within themselves.

When common sense triumphs, as it does frequently in Erewhon and occasionally in his other narratives, it does so hesitantly and with a good deal of self-consciousness. Much of Butler's own life defied his ideal of sensible conduct, his literal mind seeking a consistency in life he knew in his heart he would never find. The metaphors Butler repeatedly expresses represent an inadvertant
acknowledgment of things as they are, a realization co-existent with his affirmation of the power of the ordinary to influence evolutionary progress.

Butler's treatment of youth, one of the best features of Erewhon and The Way of All Flesh, is in part based on his childlike sensitivity to the small facts of life, his willingness to rely intellectually as well as emotionally on the product of his senses. In this aspect, his pragmatism triumphs. Why should not appearances matter? Butler knew his powers of observation were his greatest asset as both a theorist and satirist, even if in recording experience the magic of things wore off. Butler's evolutionary theories have not stood his test of time; yet his ability to record the life around him lends a lasting quality to the characters and situations he invented to support his theories.

As a theorist, much of what Butler claimed as his own belonged to other men: Lamarck and Erasmus Darwin and even Charles Darwin. Still, his books on evolution helped to sharpen the manipulative skills he used to his advantage in the working out of his narratives. As a painter, Butler copied "Academy Style" and ruined himself; as a writer, he let his peculiar biases run their course. His results might have been better if he had submitted himself to more rigorous artistic discipline, last but by and large he made a fair success for himself in his books. The break-up of his ultimate vision of religious and evolutionary worth, the failure of the gentlemanly code of conduct in Townley and George
Higgs, is in part compensated for by the "grace" enlivening Yram and Alethaea, the crude joy of life vitiating Mrs. Jupp, the keen human awareness of Shaw and the closely realized foibles of Theobald and Christina.

The world, as Butler saw it, wanted to take the worst of science and Christianity; Butler in his pragmatism wanted it to take the best. His faith lives imperfectly in his narratives. As a writer, Butler does not fit comfortably inside the mainstream of British letters, in spite of his prophetic declaration of the "ways of the flesh," his bold declaration of the sensual nature of life.

Butler's legacy is rather an unyielding one, forcing the student to grasp his special insight, to wrest the germ of his ideas from beneath the surface wit of his epigrams and the brilliant focus of his figures of speech. Beneath his words lies a vague and often unflattering portrait of the writer. G. D. H. Cole put it best when after his study of Butler he claimed: "I like the books, but I don't like the man." Butler could seldom turn the frustration propelling his creative energies into products of artistic merit. If his struggles with common sense, faith and evolutionary progress have any message for the modern age, it may be to say that the best any individual can do is to cope with circumstances as they are, the most important task pragmatism can accomplish in life.
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