

**Parental - Filial Relationship
in Samuel Butler's Works**

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Preface

Samuel Butler (1835-1902) was a philosopher, Victorian rebel and author of two of the most remarkable novels of the period. Butler was born the eldest son of the Rector of Langar and a grandson of Dr Samuel Butler, Bishop of Lichfield. His High victorian childhood and its tyrannies are acidly recalled in The Way of All Flesh (1903). Butler went to school at Shrewsbury, and formed there two of the great loves of his life: Italy which he first visited in 1843 and music of Handel. He graduated from Cambridge in 1858 with a degree in classics. It was assumed that like his forebears, Samuel would enter the church. He refused, and instead pursued his passions for music and drawing while working among the poor in London.

The Fair Haven (1873), provided an ironic setting for the matter of his pamphlet, The Evidence For the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, written in 1865. He had begun, about 1872, The Way of All Flesh; but it was laid aside, worked over for several years, and posthumously published in 1903. His books of scientific controversy include Life and Habit (1877), Evolution Old and New (1879), Unconscious Memory (1880), Luck or Cunning (1887), and The Deadlock in Darwinism (1890). Several Italian holidays led to the publication of Alps and Sanctuaries (1881).

Butler's critical works exhibit the kind of originality that rejoices in differing from every body else. A selection from his manuscript collections appeared in 1912 under the title The Note Books of Samuel Butler. It is, in many respects, the most attractive and rewarding of his writings. Butler was an original and overweening writer. Butler had genius not to be denied. As humorist and satirist, expressing himself in lucid, personal prose, he takes high place.

This study has several justifications, it aims at making a judicious and thorough study of Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh. Second, it studies the effect of the ironic, original enigmatic Samuel Butler, who said and wrote the most shattering things in demure casual manner, on the other writers and novelists. At last, it studies Butler as a rebel in the succession of Swift and how his rebellion affected the art of the novel in technique, and prose.

CHAPTER I

Introductory: A controversial Age

The Victorian age was an age of contradictions in some ways, it was an age of material progress and scientific advancement, commercial transactions, steamships, and railway constructions. In other words, it was an age which cultivated the notion of a utopia for mankind, but failed to establish it in reality because of poverty, misery and disease which the lower classes suffered from. Scientific progress made intellectuals hopeful of achieving a utopia. The faith in science as an essential means of abating social miseries was considerable. Nevertheless, the Victorian age remained an age of transition.

The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century are alike remarkable for the new powers, new ideas and new life thrown into society. The coming up of a high flood - tide of new forces seems to coincide with the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789 - when the overthrow of the Bastille marked the downfall of the old ways of thinking and acting.

It was indeed the dawn of a new day for the peoples of Europe. The ideas of freedom and equality - of respect for man as man - were thrown into popular form by France, they became living powers in Europe; and in England they animated

and inspired the best minds of the time Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelly and Byron. Along with this high tide of hope and emotion, there was such an outburst of talent and genius in every kind of human endeavour in England, as was never seen before except in the Elizabethan period. Great events produced great powers; and great powers in their turn brought about great events. The war with America, the long struggle with Napoleon, the new political ideas, great victories by sea and land - all these were to be found in the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Victorian age was one of energetic expansion, imperial ambition and profound optimism about the future of England and mankind. The Victorians were the first English men to take full account of the industrial Revolution and the new conditions for culture and society it implied. What had been for the Romantics an appallingly dehumanizing distribution of work and profit and the spur to prophecy of an imaginative and political revolution, was for the Victorians of unpleasant fact of life, to be dealt with not in terms of visionary poetry but rather through the careful consideration of human clarity working in the here and now of 19th century England.

The second half of the nineteenth century is distinguished by the enormous advance made in science, and in the

application of science to the industries and occupations of the people. Within the last twenty years, chemistry has remade itself into a new science, and electricity has taken a very large part of the labour of mankind upon itself. But the powers of imagination, the great literary powers of poetry and of eloquent prose, - especially in the domain of Fiction, have not decreased because science has grown. They have shown stronger developments.

Butler's thought was shaped not only by his rebellion against the hidebound orthodoxy of his forebears, but by the ferment of mid-nineteenth century scientific thought and religious reevaluation. He was born in 1835, was twentyfour when Darwin rocked the complacent Christian world with Origin of Species (1859).

But, although his skepticism about ecclesiastical institutions and dogma earned him the label of "The Earnest Atheist" from one biographer; Malcolm Muggeridge ¹ Butler's real enemy was never religion itself but only the cant, the self - righteousness, and the hypocrisy with which a materialistic generation marked its worship of the idol respectability. He wrote in his Notebooks (1930):

Does any man of science believe... that there is an unseen life and unseen kingdom which is not of this world... technically and according to the letter they are not; according to the spirit I firmly believe they are ²

Had he held no conviction of the existence of divine power transcending human reason, he might have been able to observe the bigotry of the orthodox with more amusement and less indignation; in fact he might have devoted himself entirely to painting and music, two art -forms in which he practised not without distinction. But like Carlyle, who said he never wrote for any other reason than the terrors of an ill conscience, Butler maintained that the subjects for his books came along and imperiously demanded to be written. Thus Butler and Carlyle often dealt with the controversial topics: social criticism in Erewhon (1872), religious belief in The Fair Haven (1873) and Erewhon Revisited (1901), Darwinian evolution - theory in LUCK or Cunning (1887), Carlyle³ wrote the most striking controversial book under the title of Heroes and Hero - Worship (1884). His most remarkable book is The French Revolution (1837).

Evangelical theology rests on a profound apprehension of the contrary states of Nature and of Grace; on meriting eternal wrath, the other intended for eternal happiness. Naked and helpless, the soul acknowledges its worthlessness before God and the justice of God's infinite displeasure, and then, taking hold of salvation in Christ, passes from darkness into a light which makes more fearful the destiny of those unhappy beings who remain without. This is vital

Religion. But the power of Evangelicalism as a directing force lay less in the hopes and terrors it inspired, than in its rigorous logic, the eternal microscope, with which it pursued its argument into the recesses of the heart, and the details of daily life, giving to every action its individual value in this life, and its infinite consequence in the next.

Evangelicalism had imposed on society, even on classes which were indifferent to its religious basis and unaffected by its economic appeal, its responsibility, and philanthropy, of discipline in the home, regularity of affairs, it had created a more effective technique of agitation. Butler tried to rid himself of the restraints which Evangelicalism had laid on the senses and the intellect, on amusement, enjoyment, art, on curiosity, on criticism, on science. Butler believed in the spirit of free inquiry in religious matters and of the scientific discoveries and believed in the change which was revolutionary one. Scientific discoveries were traits and tokens of this age which were casting doubt on some of the Christian beliefs.

Butler rejected the clerical career for which he had been brought up, and then proceeded from rejection to religious doubt. He has never ceased to profess himself a member of the more advanced wing of the English Broad

church. What those who belong to this wing believe, he believes. What they reject, he rejects. Butler's, hero Ernest Pontifex referred to the wave of religious revival and expressed his ideas and views in The Way of All Flesh (1903):

.. the year 1858 was the last of a term during which the peace of the church of England was singularly unbroken. Between 1844, when Vestiges of Creation appeared and 1859, when Essays and Reviews marked the commencement of that storm which raged until many years afterward ... The Evangelical movement, with the exception to which I shall revert .. had become almost a matter of ancient history. ⁴

The Evangelicals had established a certain level of behaviour for all who wished to stand well with their fellows. In moralizing society they had made social disapproval a force which the boldest sinner might fear. By the beginning of the Victorian age faith was already hardening into a code. Family prayers were described in The Way of All Flesh, in a vivid picture which explains how religion was turned into a code:

The drawing-room paper was of a pattern which consists of bunches of red and white roses, and I saw several bees.. fly to these bunches and try them ... As I thought of family prayers being repeated night and morning, week by week .. I couldn't help thinking how like it was to the way in which the bees went up the wall and down the wall. (127)

Evangelicalism at war with habit and indifference, with vice and brutality, with slavery and duelling, was a very different thing from Evangelicalism grown complacent, fashionable and superior.

Butler referred to the wave of religious revival which spread rapidly over Britain in his novel. This wave virtually created the victorian social ethos, colouring the beliefs and practices not only of all the sects of christianity but even of agnostics. It was challenged later in the nineteenth century by rationalism on the one hand, and by the Anglo - Catholic movement represented satirically by Pryer on the other. After Ernest had been ordained to accuracy in one of the central parts of London, he met Pryer, the senior curate. Ernest considered him a man of definite ideas. Pryer told Ernest:

If people read the Bible as the ordinary British church man or church woman reads it, it is harmless enough; but if they read it with any care - which we should assume they will if we give it them at all - it is fatal to them you believe the Bible when it tells you of such things as that Christ died and rose from the dead? (261)

In the Way of All Flesh Samuel Butler wrote of the Evangelical movement:

Mrs Cowey ... who were inclined to take part in the great evangelical movement which was then at its height she gave evening parties .. at which prayer was part of the entertainment. (69)

G.M. Young wrote in his book Portrait of An Age Victorian England (1936) about the Oxford Movement. "There was at the beginning of the nineteenth century a state of stable equilibrium which the political advance of the middle classes, the Oxford Movement, and the growth of the wesleyans destroyed".⁵ The growth of a new anti-Roman feeling was inevitable. Evangelicalism emphasized the points of difference and gave them alarming value for the individual soul. To be misgoverned in this world and damned in the next seemed to many thousands of sober English families the necessary consequence of submission to Rome.

The Oxford Movement created an Angelican self-consciousness, parallel to the self-consciousness of the protestant denominations, based on the assurance of apostolic descent, and inevitably, therefore, tending to sympathy, at least, with the one church whose apostolic origin could not be denied. Their object was to brace and fortify the church against the coming onslaught of liberalism and infidelity.

The Oxford Movement and the Young England Movement characterized Butler's age. The Oxford Movement's chief aim was the restoration of the ideals and practices of the seventeenth-century English church and it laid particular emphasis on tradition and on ritual, but also on active so-