Introduction to The Way of All Flesh

Theodore Dreiser
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I have long been convinced of the following: that where books are concerned, only genius makes a great one. And it is the temperament of the genius behind the book, shining through its pages, rather than plot or subject, that gives it that especial force and flavor which make it endure. Having said so much, I wish to add that a number of years ago, a very earnest and intelligent seeker after a knowledge of life, a man of forty, the father of a family, an engineer, and himself fairly well read and experienced, asked me if I knew of some one book that was, as he worded it, downright life, without cant or hypocrisy, or unbalanced sentiment; something into which a man of his years and experience could sink his mental teeth, and come away feeling that he had really profited. Knowing the man, I canvassed a list of favored books: *Crime and Punishment*, *Dead Souls*, *A Family of Noblemen*, *Fathers and Sons*, *The Growth of the Soil*, *Père Goriot*, *Madame Bovary*, *Nana*, *Tom Jones*, *Candide*, *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini*, *The Way of All Flesh*. But finally, after weighing this and that in connection with the inquirer, I fixed on *The Way of All Flesh*. 'You might read that,' I said, 'and tell me what you think of it.'

He went away, and for as much as six months I saw nothing of him. But when we met again, and by chance, on a street in San Francisco, almost his first words were: 'Say, that book you recommended, *The Way of All Flesh*.... Now there is a book! By George, I think it is one of the wisest and most honest books I have ever read.'

'No cant, no sentimentality,' I commented, 'no questionable theories to speak of.'

'Quite so,' he went on. 'I've been looking up his other works. But for a novel, that is one of the best, certainly the most truthful English novel. It almost makes life a little easier to endure.'

And with that I heartily agreed. Also with his assertion that it was the most truthful English novel. For although in my mind were George Moore's *Esther Waters*, Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*, Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, George Eliot's *Adam Bede*, Fielding's *Tom Jones*, and a few others, still, for downright sincerity, not among them, to my way of thinking, is to be found its equal. In England, at least, it is almost alone, the product and reflection of a very

special and, in the main, friendly and agreeable English temperament, informed, studious, witty, honest and yet critical as well as satirical, as who would not be in such a mysterious and puzzling world as this.

But while it is as good as this, it is also a puzzling book, since in the main it departs, and almost astonishingly, from so many of the customs and commonplaces of novel writing. It has no plot, and also no stirring action to speak of. Far from being a piece of fiction, it is little more than the thinly fictionized life of Butler himself, and most meticulously set down at that. Yet a novel it is, by reason of the care and charm with which Butler has pieced his own and his parents' lives together. On the other hand, it is really as much a book of philosophy as a novel or autobiography, since in the main, and fully enough, it sets forth the philosophic concepts of Butler, which are those of an agnostic, convinced of the truth of the Darwinian theory of evolution, but by no means satisfied, as he elsewhere shows (*The Fair Haven*) that it is all a process of natural selection, or, as Spencer phrased it, 'the survival of the fittest.' Rather, as he sees it, it is one of cellular or, even better, protoplasmic memory of various past states, compulsions, environments, necessities, and of the guides they offer to further protoplasmic or cellular adaptability, and by reason of that, development. And with this notion, the mechanists of today are certainly in full accord.

Not only that, but Butler had a free and original mind; one of the best and, like that of Nietzsche, it was beyond good and evil. For he seems never to have been able to make up his mind finally and fatally about anything. A thing might be evil, and again it might be good, like faith, like tradition, like social acceptances, taboos, rules. Indeed, this whole work, apart from its qualities as novel and autobiography, may well be termed a volume on agnostic thought, achieved through a series of personal and most disillusioning experiences.

For throughout his youth, if we can (and I think we can) safely accept this volume as a study as well as a report of his own life, his was by no means a strong or even a healthy temperament. He was too nebulous, shy, sensitive, and too uncertain of the significance or import of things he saw going on about him to reach any conclusion, even under instruction, as to what was his true relationship, let alone his duty to life and people. And, worse, or perhaps better for him, and for us, since this book is a product of what may best be described as his mental ambivalence, he was blessed or cursed by a father and mother who were anything but intellectually or philosophically equipped to deal with such a character. They were of a lesser mental content and worse, stupid,

humdrum, in at least their outward adherence to most of the duties and taboos of the doctrinaire, religious and educational world of which they were a part. Of course, it is Butler who is telling the story, and it is his lacerated temperament which is responsible for his at times acid presentation of the world he shows. None the less, because of the excellence of his mind and its reactions as compared with theirs, one cannot help sympathizing with him intensely. In short, it is the glitter as well as the color of his mind, with all its æsthetic selectiveness as well as its crotchets, that cause this book to remain sharp and perhaps ineradicable in the consciousness of those who read it. At any rate, to this hour, its fame is growing, not waning.

But what of Butler himself?

Well, here is his public record. Born in 1835, in a small town rectory in Nottingham, England. His father, the Rev. Thomas Butler, who, in the novel, is depicted as an irritable, confused and dissatisfied canon of the English High Church (he is not elsewhere described as other than that) was, in turn, the son of Dr. Samuel Butler, one time (1798–1836) headmaster of an English Boys' School, known as Shrewsbury, and, afterwards, Bishop of Lichfield. Samuel Butler, the author of this book, was the oldest of four children, and appears to have entered life under fairly favorable circumstances. That is, he lived in a comfortable home, had whatever local social standing goes with being the son of the rector of a small English parish, was carefully watched over, and primarily and, in his case, severely drilled intellectually and socially in whatsoever was becoming at that time to the manners, morals and mind of a young man, sometime possibly to be a canon or Bishop of the English High Church.

Yet if Butler's book is to be believed, there was not a little of the petty, penurious, irritating, and cruel in the attitude of his father, if not his mother, toward him if not toward all of the other children. At the same time, if this book is to be taken as a fair picture, Butler himself could have been of no essential delight to his disgruntled and yet socially ambitious father, since he was small, delicate, shy, and with unquestionably at least some early sproutings of those later fully developed erraticisms of tempearment and will which later caused him to hate his father, discard the nonsense masquerading as revealed religion, enthusiastically espouse the cause of evolution and, in general, flout such nonsensical social pretences and tenets as pretended to a divine and holy order and command. Also, these caused him to deal quite gently with the frailties as well as savageries of human life, as being as much ordered or divine as any of the more highly praised activities which he saw about him. Advisedly,

though, I suggest that the reader read the book before continuing with this introduction, since the things that I have to say will come with more force or meaning to one possessed of a fresh knowledge of the book than to one who has not read it. For by following such details of his later life as are now available, to say nothing of those in this work, one is compelled to deduce that he was as sensitive and love- and lifelorn a person as one shall find in literature. All through the home, school and college days depicted in this book, we find him eagerly and yet vainly seeking for affection and life from his mother, father, his school teachers, mates, or whomsoever, and yet not finding either. He was too shy, recessive; worse, with a mind quick to sense the merits or demerits of those about him.

In this book, which is a record and a brilliant one of all that he saw and felt between the ages of three and twenty-eight, Butler writes of Ernest Pontifex, his novelized self, that at twelve years of age he knew every page of his Latin and Greek grammars by heart. Also that he had been whipped into learning them. Also that he had read the greater part of Virgil, Horace and Livy, and I do not know how many Greek plays. He was proficient in arithmetic, knew the first four books of Euclid thoroughly, and had a fair knowledge of French. It was at that time that he was packed off to Shrewsbury school to prepare himself by some four years more of study for his entrance into Cambridge, which required still more years. Throughout this period, according to himself, the boys that he liked did not like him, or at least he thought they did not, and for the very nerve-racking reason that he thought himself unworthy of them. For instance, of his life at Shrewsbury, he writes,

> He did not like the boys whom he thought like himself. His heroes were strong and vigorous, and the less they inclined towards him the more he worshipped them.

Also, he believed in his own depravity. . . .

> never was there a little mortal more ready to accept without cavil whatever he was told by those who were in authority over him: he thought, at least, that he believed it, for as yet he knew nothing of that other Ernest that dwelt within him, and was so much stronger and more real than the Ernest of which he was conscious.

And again,

> With the masters Ernest was ere long in absolute disgrace. . . . Latin and Greek had nothing in them which commended them to his instinct. . . . The deadness inherent in these defunct languages themselves had never been [in his case] artificially counteracted by a system of *bona fide* rewards for application.

Besides, he had an instinct to be what he was not, more rugged and unconventional than the creative and yet more or less scholar type of which he was destined to make one. With 'passionate compunctions of conscience' he joined some of the less desirable boys, who used to go to the public houses, drank beer until he was pitiably sick, and smoked when he really did not enjoy it. He received low marks, lost most of his 'merit money,' and brought down on himself the rage of his father who appears to have been infuriated by his indifference to or his unfitness for the great advantages bestowed upon him.

Worse and worse, he dawdled through Cambridge, barely achieved a Master's degree, wrote one interesting paper on the Greek drama for a newly founded college magazine and, finally, after four years, was listed among the first three or four senior optimes and, a few weeks later, in the lower half of the second class of the classical Tripos. In 1858 he returned to Cambridge on the plea of reading for ordination, with which he was then face to face – that, or something.

Up to this point, in the life story of Butler, *The Way of All Flesh* is a better guide to his true early history than anything that has been written of him by biographers or critics, for he paints himself more truthfully, or, if you choose, critically or fairly than any one else had done it. Later, or from this point on, the book and his subsequent life story diverge. In the book, Ernest Pontifex, its hero, is by a single sermon of a London Evangelical minister, brought to Cambridge by the efforts of some poorer students of theology, then reading for ordination, converted to the thought of the beauty and the importance of the priestly profession, and is subsequently ordained, and goes to London as a curate to a certain Episcopal canon, with a view to working among the poor, and thus progressing more and more toward a helpful spirituality which should make the world better. His errors, follies and failures as a doubting and erring curate, coupled as these are with his slow but sure waking to the unfitness of himself for religious work, as well as the falseness and futility of dogmatic religious assertion in regard to life or his view of it, and his subsequent discovery of himself as a writer, constitute the engrossing final third of this novel.

In real life, Butler did differently. After St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1858, he did prepare for ordination by serving in a poor London Parish. I read that he was rather more expected than called upon to enter the ministry, but I prefer to believe that the pressure brought upon him by his father was exactly as outlined in this book. It is too realistic, too intense, too much resented by Butler as Ernest Pontifex, not to be true. Read the book and see. By then, also, his studies and life experiences had shaken his faith too much. First hand study

of the gospels, as well as plain everyday human nature, his own individual needs and compulsions, drove out 'revealed' and by the same token dogmatic truth.

Through with the university, he appears to have desired to become an artist, but his family would not hear of that. Arrestingly enough, though, he effected a compromise which permitted him to go to New Zealand and there, whether with his parents' approval or not, I do not know, entered on sheep-farming. As to that, all studies of him agree that he was a practical and successful sheep farmer. He not only made money, but established a cozy cottage on his ranch, in which, with a small staff of helpers, and a newly found friend, one Pauli, plus books, piano and whatever other joys the sheep ranch, or New Zealand, provided, he lived for five years. At the end of that time, having enough of farming, he caught the sheep market at flood tide, sold out for double his investment, and having then eight thousand pounds clear, invested that at ten percent, a figure which smacks of American profiteering to me, and, with that income secure, and his beloved Mr. Pauli, a young man who was sick as well as penniless at the time, returned to London. There he took an apartment in Cliffords Inn, and therein remained from 1864 until his death, 1902. During those thirty-eight years, he produced some sixteen volumes. Of them, I have read *Darwin Among the Machines*, *Erewhon*, *The Fair Haven*, *Unconscious Memory*, *Luck and Cunning*, and *The Way of All Flesh*. Of all those I have read, none approximates this volume in significance, nor again, all of them together. But all are rich in thought and humor, or, better, satire, and are vital and stimulating – very.

While Butler was living in New Zealand, Darwin's *Origin of the Species* appeared. It gripped his imagination, as it did that of the rest of the thinking world. In consequence, he began writing concerning it, even in New Zealand (see Contribution to *The Christ Church Press*, a New Zealand paper). *Darwin Among the Machines*, a brilliant skit and the forerunner of *Erewhon*, in which parts of it are embodied, is among these. Its central idea is the gradual evolution of super-machines that, with ever-increasing complexity of organism have, like the higher animals, developed consciousness. And how possible of realization that thought seems today! Only read the latest experiments of Clark L. Hull, of Yale, as well as those of his several assistants and associates, Norman B. Krim, Robert G. Kreuger, G. K. Bennett, and L. B. Warde. Also those earlier ones of Nikola Tesla. Butler's argument was that machines might come to dominate their creator. Pavlov, the great Russian scientist, seems to point in the same direction. Later, because Butler developed his own idea of 'Unconscious Memory,' as opposed to Darwin's 'Natural Selection,' he became one of Darwin's first

critics, accusing him not only of bad science but also of dishonorable conduct in failing to give due recognition to his precursors, including his own grandfather, Erasmus Darwin. Yet that seems to me a little forward and brazen, considering Darwin's real contribution. Yet of course we know that both Herbert Spencer and Alfred Russell Wallace claimed to be co-discoverers with Darwin. I read that the quarrel between Butler and Darwin was never made up, although Darwin's son, Sir Francis, later took the opportunity to express, before the British Association for the Advancement of Science, generous recognition of Butler's important contribution to the theory of evolution.

But this is a mere scrap out of his varied and effective thinking. He did much more. Once settled in Cliffords Inn, he wrote, for one thing, *Erewhon*, a really humorous and ironic, if not always brilliant or properly satiric presentation of the English people who had sense enough, at least in Erewhonia, to turn on their stultifying machines, yet only, and in their place, to erect other semi-valuable, semi-amusing and, in other instances, wholly conventional fetiches as, for instance, the worship of the Goddess Ydgrun (Mrs. Grundy), and the 'Musical Banks' (the churches), which dispensed sweet confidence or faith in place of anything more substantial. I cannot go into that more fully here, but there is the book. And it also is a classic of sorts, and, during his life, gave Butler his truest fame and claim to a permanent place in English letters. If you have not read it, add it to this book.

With no physical change of environment contemplated or achieved, Butler appears to have been perpetually busy not only with his ideas, his other books, and musical compositions and paintings, but with but two or three personalities whom he admitted to his confidence. One of these was that Pauli, brought on from New Zealand, to whom, for thirty-five years in all, he was devoted. Another was a certain Festing Jones, described as a satellite as well as a fan of Butler's, who arrived on the scene in 1877 and with whom he studied music, and in collaboration with whom he wrote a cantata, *Narcissus*, and an oratorio, *Ulysses*. His musical god was Händel, and he had no other, ranking him higher than Beethoven, for whom he cared nothing.

Previous to this, however, he studied painting and exhibited a few pictures at the Royal Academy. (One of them is said to hang in the Gallery of British Art of London.) Subsequently, he made several trips abroad to Italy, Sicily and Greece, and out of these trips came such books as *Alps and Sanctuaries*, *Ex Voto*, *The Humor of Homer*, *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, and translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. In 1873, the year of his mother's death, he

began and, in 1885, one year before his father's death, completed *The Way of All Flesh*, which, nevertheless, for family reasons, his sister being still alive, he decided not to publish. And so it rested until 1902, the year of his own death, after which his literary executor, Mr. Streatfield, decided that there was no need of further delay. It was published in 1903, but even so, was slow in attaining to any particular fame, its principle acclaim furthered by late (1910) if distinguished reviews, since when it has passed into the literature of the world. But as for Butler, is it not interesting that he never knew, and is never to know?

In connection with Butler's private life throughout this long period subsequent to his return from New Zealand, I, as well as many others, am puzzled and amused by his seeming if not real reactions to the mere business of living. Outwardly, he appears to have been decidedly methodic and practical, ordering his own if not the lives of his intimates, and, at the same time, printing most of his own books which in the main were not successful and had to be paid for by himself. Also, he was constantly and carefully watching over his expenses, regulating his working hours and the like, yet, inwardly, well, here is the puzzle. For he appears to have been half lost and really quite wholly tortured for the want of love, or at least affection. As his novel so plainly shows, he was from childhood on ever aching for that and yet, alas, never caring for it from women. Thus, in *The Way of All Flesh*, you soon detect his distaste for his mother's equivocal affection, his sister's presence and temperament, and, still later, any real love from Ellen, a former servant of his father's whom in the book he takes as wife, only to discard her. In real life, it is said, he evinced a marked dislike for marriage in general, if not as an idea (for others) then as a fact for himself. Close to him affectionately were only his two male friends, Pauli, the sick and penniless one, and Festing Jones; and finally, a certain young Alfred Cathie, an English cockney and valet of sorts, who appears to have won his confidence and extreme good will and to whom he made his second largest bequest, his largest going to a brother. Cathie, a smart, debonair, and highly sophisticated youth, seems to have cared for Butler about as might have a son. He was intensely interested in himself, yet also affectionately, if not exactly gratefully, interested in Butler as a patron.

On first arriving in London, Butler attended a certain Heatherleigh Art School, where very shortly he encountered Eliza Ann Savage, a young art student, who is described as a clever, witty, if not beautiful girl or woman, who from about 1870 to her death in 1885, is said to have been his 'literary guide, comforting philosopher, and merry friend,' and who saw him through the trou-

bles of composing *The Way of All Flesh*, which was finished in 1885. But she was no more than that, although there is some little evidence that she would have liked to be more. She died shortly after the novel was finished. Before her death, however, or around about 1877, there had arrived on the scene the above mentioned Festing Jones, plainly a lover of music, letters, and æsthetics in general, who proved, so it is said, and in the face of Mr. Pauli and Eliza Ann, not only a Boswellian hero-worshipper, 'who gave his hero the appreciation he missed in the unresponsive Pauli,' but created with him musically. Later (it was after Miss Savage's death and the practical desertion of him by Pauli, who turned on Butler, asked him not to follow or try to find him and only compromised to the extent of coming to lunch with him three times a week for pay) there was from 1887 on only Cathie and Jones. It is said of Cathie that he was so close to Butler socially that 'he could leave a note for his employer admonishing him to buy a new hat or there would be a terrible scene when he came home; or write to Jones to remember to take Butler to the theatre, as he was getting lonesome.'

What is missing in this picture, though, as in the story of Ernest Pontifex, in the book, is any reference to feminine love, if not marriage, since in the book, Pontifex does marry Ellen, but only to escape loneliness, and then leaves her. Ernest is described as being lonely and needing companionship, as well as sex relief, but of love, not a word. In real life, Butler is pictured as having, except for social amenities of the friendliest and wittiest sort, kept the merry Eliza Savage at arm's length. None the less, he once stated to a friend when congratulating him on his marriage, that he himself had never been in love, because his ideal had never appeared, though he could 'sympathize with those who had found the haven wherein their hearts could rest.' Elsewhere he wrote, 'It is love alone that gives life, and the truest life is that which we live, not in ourselves but vicariously in others.' One biographer, Frances Theresa Russell, points out that 'it was just that fate played the devil with his personal affections, from his childhood up, and forced him to love impersonal things, Italy, Händel's music, Greek Epic, and Shakespeare's sonnets.' But the personal record of his life makes it appear that fate added at least one male character, Pauli, and possibly (the evidence in this instance is not so clear) two, Festing Jones.

What causes me to consider Pauli in this light is the peculiar record. He appears as stated, to have been originally a penniless orphan in New Zealand, and to have lived with Butler there, by no means so much as an assistant as delighted-in companion, from whose presence and temperament he extracted

great and necessary happiness, so much so that it is described by more than one commentator as evoking a steadfast loyalty on Butler's part amounting to a fanatic devotion. And yet, in *The Way of All Flesh*, Pauli is said to be presented as that Mr. Towneley, whom Butler adored at Cambridge and elsewhere; in short, that this picture of Towneley is an exact representation of Pauli. If so, you have a devotion on Butler's part which appears to be based on qualities in Pauli which more closely approximate those of a handsome, light-tempered, idle, sophisticated, dress- and pleasure-loving dandy, than anything else. For in the book, Ernest is painted as being overawed as well as fascinated by this same Towneley, who

> 'belonged to one of the most exclusive sets in Cambridge, and was perhaps the most popular man among the whole number of undergraduates. He was big and very handsome – as it seemed to Ernest the handsomest man whom he had ever seen or ever could see, for it was impossible to imagine a more lively and agreeable countenance. He was good at cricket and boating, very good-natured, singularly free from conceit, not clever but very sensible.... Fortune,' writes Butler of this Towneley-Pauli, 'every now and then does things handsomely by a man all round; Towneley was one of those to whom she had taken a fancy, and the universal verdict in this case was that she had chosen wisely.'

In another place he writes of Towneley, 'He [Ernest] liked looking at him if he got a chance, and was very much ashamed of himself for doing so, but there the matter ended.' There are enough other references in the novel to this Towneley, the 'counterpart of Mr. Pauli,' to give one the impression that if he was Pauli, he was not so much a mental as a social and physical ideal, clever in all the social ways in which Butler was apparently not clever – fastidious, debonair, enticing, apropos. And this appears to have evoked a relationship so different to any of the others in Butler's real or autobiographic life (as presented in *The Way of All Flesh*) as to leave one wondering as to the real Pauli. For in all of the biography and criticism of Butler, I find that while in spite of his finances which fluctuated not a little in the years he lived with Pauli, he settled an annuity of 200 pounds on him, which was actually one fourth of his personal income. Yet, Pauli after a time was 'evidently bored with Butler, as Butler was with nearly everyone else' (Frances T. Russell) and finally moved away, leaving Butler to shift for himself.

Furthermore, as stated, he requested Butler 'not to try to find him,' although he did not break so completely as to refuse to further accept the annual allowance

of 200 pounds which appears to have been conditioned, however, on his coming to lunch with Butler three times a week, whenever Butler was in London. And at that, 'after nearly thirty-five years of this one-sided connection, Butler made the pleasant discovery, at the time of Pauli's death, in 1897, that he (Pauli) had left an estate of nine thousand pounds, but with no mention of his worshipper and benefactor in his will.' After discovering this, Butler wrote,

> I always hoped that as time went, and he saw how absolutely devoted to him I was, and what unbounded confidence I had in him, and how I forgave him over and over again for treatment I should not have stood for a moment from anyone else, I always hoped that he would soften and deal as frankly with me as I with him; but though for some fifteen years I hoped this, in the end I gave it up, and settled down into a resolve to do all I could for him, and to make the best of things for him and myself.

Love? Is this not the attitude of an adoring and yet defeated wife? Yet a very admirable love after its fashion, I think. Personally, I feel that it can only be explained in a paragraph in the latter half of chapter LII of *The Way of All Flesh*, in which Ernest Pontifex is mentally being led astray by that oily, perverse scoundrel, Pryer, who, along with Ernest, served as curate to the London English High Church Rector. The two are discussing celibacy, and the duty of the clergy to the laity, and Pryer has just said,

> the limits of vice and virtue are wretchedly ill-defined. Half the vices which the world condemns most loudly have seeds of good in them and require moderate use rather than total abstinence.

Whereupon Ernest asks timidly for an instance.

> "No, no," said Pryer, "I will give you no instance, but I will give you a formula that shall embrace all instances. It is this, 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 endeavour 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."
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> "But," said Ernest timidly, "is not this virtually doing away with all distinction between right and wrong, and leaving people without any moral guide whatever?"
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> "Not the people," was the answer: "it must be our care to be guides to these, for they are and always will be incapable of guiding themselves sufficiently. We

> should tell them what they must do, and in an ideal state of things should be able to enforce their doing it. . . ."

As for the clergy, he added, there must be "absolute freedom in experiment." I need only add in connection with Butler and Mr. Pauli's treachery that Butler confessed afterwards that he was upset by its iniquity, and thankful that he had been ignorant of it. 'Yet,' he added, 'the only decent end for such a white heat of devotion as mine was to him for so many years, was the death of one or the other.'

'A pathetic revelation of a surcharged and pent-in heart,' writes Frances Russell, 'denied its normal expression; in any case, hardly the behavior of "a well crusted curmudgeon, with no charity nor amiability" as he is diagnosed by Paul Elmer More.'

To sum up Butler, yet only from a reading of a fourth of his various works, I personally find him a brilliant and in the main satisfying if by no means complete or always generous compendium of life or knowledge. For one thing, there is missing from most of his work if not from his heart, I do not know as to that, any vivid let alone moving suggestion that he was greatly disturbed by either the inequity or the cruelty of life as visited on any other than himself. To be sure, there is the picture of the servant Ellen being turned out of his father's rectory for having allowed herself to become pregnant before marriage, and so going off to what fate is only subsequently shown. But at best, that is more of an affectionate and intimately tender picture, drawing its sympathy and sweetness from his previous knowledge of and admiration for Ellen, as a household fixture, than from any clear sense of or sensitivity to the fate of countless Ellens in the same predicament the world over. On the contrary, in the latter third of the book, where, after a lapse of four or five years, he encounters her as a street walker in London, and even though subsequently he marries her, there is plenty to show that even then he is not nearly so greatly moved by her own social change and decay as by his own, which automatically raises her to the place where she is a sufficiently worthy and suitable companion for himself for the time being, anyhow.

Similar his comment on the Simeonites, those wretchedly poor religious students at Cambridge, who, to use his own words, dwelt in a

> "labyrinth" (this was the name it bore) of dingy, tumble-down rooms, tenanted exclusively by the poorest undergraduates, who were dependent upon sizarships and scholarships for the means of taking their degrees... there dwelt men of all

> ages, from mere lads to grey-haired old men who had entered late in life. They were rarely seen except in hall or chapel or at lecture, where their manners of feeding, praying and studying, were considered alike objectionable; no one knew whence they came, whither they went, nor what they did, for they never showed at cricket or the boats; they were a gloomy, seedy-looking confrérie, who had as little to glory in in clothes and manners as in the flesh itself.

Yet beyond that, and apart from the fact that he was converted to a passing religious belief by hearing a certain Reverend Hawkes, who once came down from London, and at their request, to address these same Simeonites, there is no evidence that Butler was ever in any other way interested, let alone moved by their plight, or troubled to ponder their social misery let alone their social rescue. He seems principally, if realistically enough, to feel them to be beneath him mentally, physically and in every other way. Considering Butler's broad intelligence and sympathies, this is one of the curiosities of the book, yet explicably enough taking its rise, I feel, from his own life-long freedom from want.

And yet, over against this, must be set not only a number of moving passages in regard to his own predicaments and his reaction thereto, which you will encounter in this book, but others relating and certainly tenderly and illuminatingly not to any particular mishaps anywhere, but to the state of the human animal here on earth. In order to emphasize these, I prefer to give here:

> Fortune, we are told, is a blind and fickle foster-mother, who showers her gifts at random upon her nurslings. But we do her a grave injustice if we believe such an accusation. Trace a man's career from his cradle to his grave and mark how Fortune has treated him. You will find that when he is once dead she can for the most part be vindicated from the charge of any but very superficial fickleness. Her blindness is the merest fable; she can espy her favourites long before they are born. We are as days and have had our parents for our yesterdays, but through all the fair weather of a clear parental sky the eye of Fortune can discern the coming storm, and she laughs as she places her favourites it may be in a London alley or those whom she is resolved to ruin in kings' palaces. Seldom does she... completely fail a favoured nursling.
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> Loss of money indeed is not only the worst pain in itself, but it is the parent of all others. Let a man have been brought up to a moderate competence, and have no specialty; then let his money be suddenly taken from him, and how long is his health likely to survive the change in all his little ways which loss of money will entail? How long again is the esteem and sympathy of friends likely to survive ruin? People may be very sorry for us, but their attitude towards us hitherto has

been based upon the supposition that we were situated thus or thus in money matters; when this breaks down there must be a restatement of the social problem so far as we are concerned; we have been obtaining esteem under false pretences. Granted, then, that the three most serious losses which a man can suffer are those affecting money, health and reputation. Loss of money is far the worst, then comes ill-health, and then loss of reputation; loss of reputation is a bad third, for, if a man keeps health and money unimpaired, it will be generally found that his loss of reputation is due to breaches of parvenu conventions only, and not to violations of those older, better established canons whose authority is unquestionable. In this case a man may grow a new reputation as easily as a lobster grows a new claw, or, if he have health and money, may thrive in great peace of mind without any reputation at all. The only chance for a man who has lost his money is that he shall still be young enough to stand uprooting and transplanting without more than temporary derangement, and this I believed my godson still to be.

I suppose after all that no one whose mind was not, to put it mildly, abnormal, ever yet aimed very high out of pure malice aforethought. I once saw a fly alight on a cup of hot coffee on which the milk had formed a thin skin; he perceived his extreme danger, and I noted with what ample strides and almost super-muscan effort he struck across the treacherous surface and made for the edge of the cup – for the ground was not solid enough to let him raise himself from it by his wings. As I watched him I fancied that so supreme a moment of difficulty and danger might leave him with an increase of moral and physical power which might even descend in some measure to his offspring. But surely he would not have got the increased moral power if he could have helped it, and he will not knowingly alight upon another cup of hot coffee. The more I see, the more sure I am that it does not matter why people do the right thing so long only as they do it, nor why they may have done the wrong if they have done it. The result depends upon the thing done and the motive goes for nothing.

In addition to these, though, he is capable of really colorful, if by no means emotional character presentations, such as:

He lived among the poor, but he did not find that he got to know them. The idea that they would come to him proved to be a mistaken one. He did indeed visit a few tame pets whom his rector desired him to look after. There was an old man and his wife who lived next door but one to Ernest himself; then there was a plumber of the name of Chesterfield; an aged lady of the name of Gover, blind and bed-ridden, who munched and munched her feeble old toothless jaws as Ernest spoke or read to her, but who could do little more; a Mr. Brookes, a rag and bottle merchant in Birdsey's Rents, in the last stage of dropsy, and perhaps half a dozen

> or so others. What did it all come to, when he did go to see them? The plumber wanted to be flattered, and liked fooling a gentleman into wasting his time by scratching his ears for him. Mrs. Gover, poor old woman, wanted money; she was very good and meek, and when Ernest got her a shilling from Lady Anne Jones's bequest, she said it was "small but seasonable," and munched and munched in gratitude.
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> He talked to the fishmonger in Leather Lane, where he went to buy a bloater for his tea, casually as though from curiosity and without any interested motive. "Sell," said the master of the shop, "why, nobody wouldn't believe what can be sold by penn'orths and twopenn'orths if you go the right way to work. Look at whelks, for instance. Last Saturday night me and my little Emma here, we sold £7 worth of whelks between eight and half past eleven o'clock – and almost all in penn'orths and twopenn'orths – a few hap'orths, but not many. It was the steam that did it. We kept a-boiling of 'em hot and hot, and whenever the steam came strong up from the cellar on to the pavement, the people bought, but whenever the steam went down they left off buying; so we boiled them over and over again till they was all sold. That's just where it is; if you know your business you can sell, if you don't you'll soon make a mess of it. Why, but for the steam, I should not have sold 10s. worth of whelks all the night through."

Only where tenderness in regard to, or sorrow because of the ills of others should come into service as an aid to human interpretation, does Butler appear to lag if not exactly fail, for at times he does well enough. However, in connection with his very best dramatic scenes in this book – really some of the finest – (as when he enters the room of Miss Maitland in the house of Mrs. Jupp, with anything but moral intentions and finds her to be someone whose character he has entirely mistaken) he either neglects or is not capable of putting down the really unescapable thoughts and actions of those involved. Rather and only later he seems to prefer – and dimly and in retrospect – to indicate what they were, a neglect which, in the main, appears to spring from his opposition to sex as that on occasion dramatizes itself between men and women.

The answer to all of which and to Butler is what? In my judgment, a man and writer of really marvelously clear understanding of himself – all his moods, dreams, weaknesses, strengths, defects, plus those of the world, to which none-the-less he was able to oppose only a portion of the great strength required to endure it without complaint. Indeed, as I see him at last, he was little other than a troubled, brooding philosopher, slightly awry sexually, but with a strong impulse toward creative writing yet with no natural, easy scriptic flow and small

flavor of high poetry. For where, anywhere in his books, but more especially in this book, which is his one and valid claim to æsthetic fame, are there those soaring imaginative qualities which go with great art? You will not find them. None the less, absent or present, this book is a great one, very great, for it presents and perfectly – not unlike a fly in amber – this brooding, semi-poetic thinker, almost entirely absorbed by his own life, as the same was favored, modified, or troubled by his father and mother, grandfather, brother and sister, his parents' home, his schools, and his struggles to think out his place in life and his proper means of being not as his superiors wished him to be, but as he himself was, and in the England of his day. And that is important, very. And yet how plain it is that he literally slaved over that! One can actually feel him trudging after the data of every phase of it; his own moods and actions on this and that occasion, those of his parents and teachers, the validity of their various viewpoints and his, the mystery of his own temperament and theirs, of their reactions and his, their beliefs as opposed to his, and the beliefs of England and the world and his personal reactions to those beliefs at that time.

Ah me! The mental wretchedness and weariness that is here at times – even the mental despair and tragedy; the questioned and often suppressed hates as well as resentments of loves, even, because always he was so sensitive to and yet so uncertain of all that he felt and saw. One actually sighs and even winces, as hand in hand one goes with him into the darkest corners of his own heart, follows the puzzled fumblings and questionings of his own mind, the youthful awes and even tremblings before this or that authority, this or that lie, this or that pretence, backed as these shadows were and so often are by armies and navies, thrones and palaces, halls of 'learning' and halls of legislation and law. And with this and that ghost of fame or force moving here and there in robes or armor, or cap and gown, and declaring this and that to be true, inevitable, unescapable, and asking of all not only obesience but obedience. And Butler thinking, as did Kipling before him, 'The 'eathen in his blindness bows down to wood and stone.'

Personally, I love this book because it is such an honest, humble and yet fateful picture of a male Alice, wandering in a true Blunderland which most certainly this world is. And in the end, waking to what? Sinking into what?

Pray, do ask this of yourself, for I know not what to say to you.