**Samuel Butler**

Edmund Gosse

(*Aspects and Impressions*, 1922)

Let it be said at once that Mr. Henry Festing Jones's *Life of Samuel Butler* tells the history of a very remarkable man with a vividness which leaves nothing to be desired. This is not a vain compliment; it is a tribute which common justice demands on an unusual occasion. There were ninety-nine chances in a hundred that Butler's life would never be adequately, or even intelligently, recorded. Nature and circumstance had done their best to make him obscure and incomprehensible. The situation has been saved by two facts: the first, that Butler was excessively interested in himself; the second, that Mr. Jones was always – not merely since Butler's death, but always – excessively interested in Butler. These are not conditions which are essential to the success of biography in every case, especially when the general unanimity of admiration has made all the contemporaries of a great man in some sort his biographers, but they are absolutely required to preserve for us the features of an eccentric and isolated person who failed almost all through his life to attract admiration, and who laid himself out to be completely misunderstood when the tide should at last turn in his favour. We are preserved from such a loss by the meticulous attention which Samuel Butler paid to himself, and by the infatuated zeal with which Mr. Jones adopted, continued, and developed that attention. Butler lives twice over, or rather has never ceased to live, in the mind and humour of Mr. Henry Festing Jones.

We move in an age which prides itself more and more on being able to see the mote in the eye of its immediate predecessor. But Samuel Butler was the precursor of this rebellion, and is historically notable as the earliest anti-Victorian. He was born at a moment which was to prove less rich than almost any other of the remarkable nineteenth century, in producing men who were to be eminent for intellectual talent. It almost looks as though Nature, which had been so profuse, and was presently to become so liberal again, paused for a few years, while she prepared to let the Victorian Age proper wear itself out. The immediate contemporaries of Butler were Shorthouse, whose *John Inglesant* started a new sentimentality, and William Morris, who combined a fresh aspect of romance with an investigation of the bases of society which was essentially revolutionary; with these were T. H. Green, who introduced a new

Hegelian spirit into philosophical speculation, and John Richard Green, who re-examined the foundations of our history. But none of these men displayed any real parallelism with Butler, by whose work they were none of them at any time affected, and of whom perhaps none of them ever heard. The only other name which can be quoted in this connexion is that of Lecky, who may indeed be regarded as the exact opposite of Butler in almost every respect – successful from earliest youth, at peace with the world, reverently acceptive of every Victorian formula, and blandly unconscious that everything was not permanently for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Butler is a curious example of a man of something very like genius, who passed through a long life in the midst of intelligent fellow-men, not rebuffing their attentions, but encouraging them; not escaping by a mordid modesty from criticism, but doing everything in his power to exasperate it; and yet failing to be observed. The strange thing about his case is that he lived, mostly in London, for sixty-six years, and that until nearly the close of that time scarcely anyone felt more than the most tepid and casual curiosity about him. The only similar case that occurs to the memory in the history of nineteenth-century literature is Borrow, who in like manner, but not with a like desolating completeness, simply was unable to catch the eye of criticism. When each of these writers died, it seemed impossible that either of them would ever occupy half a page in any history of literature. It now seems equally difficult to suppose that any such history, if possessing the least pretension to completeness, will in future omit either of them. This is quite apart from any question which may present itself as to the probability of a decline in the present "fashion" for them both. It merely expresses the fact that while Borrow and Butler alike walked all through their lives invisible, for the rest of time they must both be patent, whether liked or disliked.

Borrow affected a certain disdain for the laudation which would not come his way, and in later life seemed to have relinquished any desire to move in the mouths of men. But Butler never ceased to long for fame, and probably to expect it. Towards the close of his life, whenever he was asked what new work might be expected from his ingenious pen, he used to look demure and answer, "I am editing my remains; I wish 'to leave everything in order for my executors."' This was looked upon as a joke, but it turns out to have been strictly true. No one ever laboured more to appear at his best – in strict accordance with truth, but still, at his best – to the world after his decease. His assiduities were like those of the dying Narcissa –

And Betty, give those cheeks a little red,
One wouldn't, sure, look horrid when one's dead!

He recovered as many of his own letters as he could and annotated them; he arranged the letters of his friends; he copied, edited, indexed, and dated all this mass of correspondence, and he prepared those "Notes" which have since his death provided his admirers with their choicest repast. In doing all this he displayed an equal *naïveté* and enthusiasm. Mr. Festing Jones, to whom all this industry has of course been invaluable, puts the matter in a nutshell when he says that Butler "was not contemplating publication, but neither was he contemplating oblivion." He was simply putting the rouge-pot within Betty's reach.

Here is Butler's own account of the matter, and it throws a strong light upon his character:

> People sometimes give me to understand that it is a piece of ridiculous conceit on my part to jot down so many notes about myself, since it implies a confidence that I shall one day be regarded as an interesting person. I answer that neither I nor they can form any idea as to whether I shall be wanted when I am gone or no. The chances are that I shall not.

But he was not inclined to take any risks. He was the residuary of his own temperament, and if by chance posterity were to wake up and take a violent interest in him, he personally would be to blame, and would incur a very serious responsibility, if there were no documents forthcoming to satisfy the curiosity of the new generation. It is to his frank response to this instinct of self-preservation that we owe the very exhaustive and faithful narrative of Mr. Festing Jones, as we did the precious *Note-Books* of 1912.

In consideration of the eagerness and sympathy with which Butler is followed by an active group of admirers among the young writers of to-day, it may be doubtful whether the extraordinary minuteness of Butler's observation, continued as it is with an equally extraordinary fullness by his biographer, may not have an evil effect in encouraging a taste for excessive discursiveness in authorship of this class. There have been very distinguished examples lately of abandonment to an unchecked notation of detail. It is scarcely necessary to refer to the texture of the later novels of Henry James, or to the amazing *Côté de chez Swann* of M. Marcel Proust, which latter is one of the most characteristic successes of the moment. This widespread tendency to consider every

slight observation, whether phenomenal or emotional, worthy of the gravest and tenderest analysis, develops at an epoch when the world is becoming congested with printed matter, and when one might imagine that conciseness and selection would be the qualities naturally in fashion. Neither Samuel Butler nor his biographer conceives it possible that anything can be negligible; to them the meanest flower that blows by the wayside of experience gives thoughts that cannot be brought to lie within one or even within ten pages. The complacency with which Butler annotates his own childish letters to his mother is equalled only by the gravity with which Mr. Jones examines those very annotations.

Not without a qualm, however, do I note this redundancy, since it is a source of pleasure to all but the hasty reader, who, indeed, should be advised not to approach Butler at all. The charm of his mind lies in its divagations, its inconsistencies, its puerile and lovable self-revelations, and all these are encouraged by the wandering style common to the author and to his biographer. One of the most clear-sighted of his friends, trying to sum up his character at his death, said that "he was too versatile a genius ever to be in the front rank of one particular line, and he had too much fun in him to be really serious when he ought to have been." But why ought he to have been "really serious," and why should he have sought "front rank" in one particular line? This is the inevitable way in which a man of ingenious originality is misjudged by those who have loved him most and who think they understood him best. Butler was not remarkable, and does not now deserve the reputation which his name enjoys, on account of the subjects about which he chose to write, nor on account of the measure of decorum with which he approached those themes, but in consequence of the sinuous charm, the irregular and arresting originality of his approach itself, his fame having been indeed rather delayed, and the purgatory of his obscurity prolonged, by the want of harmony between most of the subjects he selected and the manner in which it was native to himself to treat those subjects. In other words, what makes Butler a difficult theme for analysis is that, unlike most authors, his genius is not illuminated, but positively obscured for a student of to-day, by the majority of his controversial writings. He was not a prophet; he was an inspired "crank." He is most characteristic, not when he is discussing Evolution, or Christianity, or the Sonnets of Shakespeare, or the Trapanese Origin of the "Odyssey," but when he is meandering along, endlessly, paradoxically, in the act of written conversation about everything at large and nothing in particular, with himself as the central theme.

The most valuable of Butler's imaginative writings, and indeed the most important from almost every point of view, are the two romances which stand respectively at the opening and at the close of his career, like two golden pillars supporting the roof of his reputation. His earliest publication (for the slight and brief budget of letters from New Zealand was not published by himself) was *Erewhon* – or "Nowhere" – a fantastic Utopia of the class started a century and a half ago by Paltock in his fascinating adventures of *Peter Wilkins*. Like Wilkins, the hero of *Erewhon* flies from civilization, and discovers in the Antarctic world a race of semi-human beings, who obey a strict code of morals consistent in itself, but in complete divergence from ours on many important points. I discover no evidence that Butler ever saw Paltock's romance, and he would probably have been scornful of the Glums and Gowries, and of the gentle winged people wrapped in throbbing robes of their own substance. But I think some dim report of an undiscovered country where ethics were all turned topsy-turvy may have started him on *Erewhon*. The other novel, that which closes Butler's career as a writer, is *The Way of All Flesh*, without a careful consideration of which, by the light of information now supplied by Mr. Festing Jones, no sketch of Butler's career can, for the future, be attempted.

As early as 1873, Butler confided to Miss Savage – of whose place in his life and influence upon his genius I shall presently have to speak – that he was contemplating the composition of an autobiographical novel. She read the opening, and wrote, "as far as it goes it is perfect, and if you go on as you have begun, it will be a beautiful book." In case he got tired of it, what he had already written might make "a very nice finished sketch for a magazine." Evidently Miss Savage, who had an almost uncanny penetration into Butler's nature, had little confidence in his perseverance in the conduct of so large a design. She urged him on, however, and it very early occurred to her that the value of the story would consist in its complete veracity as an autobiography. She faced Butler with the charge that he was not being faithful to himself in this matter, and she said, "Is the narrator of the story to be an impartial historian or a special pleader?" Butler wriggled under her strictures, but failed to escape from them. Finally she faced him with a direct question:

> You have chosen the disguise of an old man of seventy-three [exactly double Butler's real age at that time], and must speak and act as such. An old man of seventy-three would scarcely talk as you do, unless he was constantly in your company, and was a very docile old man indeed – and I don't think the old man who is telling the story is at all docile.

Young or old, Butler was never "docile," and he was not inclined to give up his idealism without a struggle. But Miss Savage was indomitable. She continued to undermine what she called "the special pleader," on the ground that "I prefer an advocate in flesh and blood." Under this pressure, and stimulated by Miss Savage's ingenuous annotations, Butler adopted more and more a realistic tone, and kept the story more and more closely on autobiographic lines. It was progressing steadily when Butler had to go to Canada on the business expedition which cost him so many months of his life, and when he returned to London he did not resume the novel. He took it up again in 1878, and disliked it; it needed Miss Savage's energy to start him again with proper gusto. Mr. Festing Jones was by this time upon the spot, and though he does not say so, he probably supported Miss Savage. They were the Aaron and Hur who held up the arms of this incorrigible "special pleader," and insisted that he should stick to the truth, and not embroider it. In 1884 *The Way of All Flesh* was finished; in 1885 it underwent some revision, and after that was not touched again.

So long as Butler was alive, the uncompromising revelations of his family life, and the bitterness of the censure of living persons, which the novel contained, made it impossible to dream of issuing it. To do so would have been to break a nest of hornets over Butler's pate. But the moment he was dead, his executor, the late Mr. R. A. Streatfeild, acting upon the author's known wishes, published *The Way of All Flesh*. This was in 1903, and the publication synchronized with the surprising burst of critical appreciation which the announcement of Butler's death had awakened in the Press. In almost all unprejudiced quarters the value of *The Way of All Flesh* as a sincere and masterly contribution to imaginative literature, was acknowledged, although it took five years more for a second edition of the book to be called for. Butler, however, was recognized at last as an author of distinguished merit, and there was a reverberation of curiosity concerning so remarkable a man who had walked about among us for nearly seventy years without attracting any particular attention. This curiosity, it was indicated by his admirers, could now be assuaged by a study of *The Way of All Flesh*, which was a faithful portrait of the writer, and of all the persons who had checked his growth or encouraged his development. So the legend was started that no real *Life of Samuel Butler* was required, because in *The Way of All Flesh* we already possessed a complete one.

Apart from the fact that the best of autobiographies can never be the "real life," because it can never depict the man quite as others saw him, it now transpires – and this is perhaps the most important feature of Mr. Festing Jones's

admirable volumes – that the novel cannot be accepted as an autobiography sound at all points. In spite of the warnings of Miss Savage, and, oddly enough, most of all in the person of Miss Savage herself, Butler was incapable of confronting the incidents of his own life without colouring them, and without giving way to prejudice in the statement of plain facts. He disliked excessively the atmosphere of middle-class Evangelicism in which he had been brought up, and we must dislike it too, but we need not dislike the persons involved so bitterly as Butler did. It was narrow, sterile and cruel, and it deserved no doubt the irony which Butler expended upon it. So long as we regard *The Way of All Flesh* as a story, invented with the help of recollections which the novelist was at liberty to modify in any way he thought desirable, there is no quarrel to be picked with any part of it. But when we are led, as we have been, to take it as a full and true record of Butler's own life, with nothing changed but the names of the persons, we see by the light of Mr. Festing Jones that this is an absolutely untenable position. *The Way of All Flesh* is not an autobiography, but a romance founded on recollection.

The author of *Erewhon*, who was christened Samuel, not in honour of the author of *Hudibras*, but in memory of his own grandfather, the Bishop of Lichfield and Coventry, was the son of Canon Thomas Butler, incumbent of Langor-with-Branston, in Nottinghamshire, where the younger Samuel was born on the 4th of December, 1835. Readers of *The Way of All Flesh* may recognize the Butler family at Langor in the very unflattering picture of the Pontifexes in that novel. The Bishop's grandson disliked him very much indeed – "bullying, irritable, stupid old turkey-cock" – until 1887, when he got hold of the Bishop's letters and papers, "and fell over head and ears in love with him." He excused his earlier sarcasms by saying – "When I wrote harshly describing him, I knew nothing about my grandfather except that he had been a great schoolmaster – and I do not like schoolmasters; and then a bishop – and I do not like bishops; and that he was supposed to be like my father." For the latter, who is Theobald Pontifex in *The Way of All Flesh*, he never expressed any leniency whatever, yet it is impossible to avoid hoping that if he had studied his father, as at the age of fifty he studied his grandfather, he might have relented a little in that instance also.

Ernest Pontifex says, in *The Way of All Flesh*, that he could remember no feeling towards his parents during his childhood except fear and shrinking. To Butler, fathers in general, as a class, were "capable de tout," like the prophet Habakkuk. Mr. Festing Jones prints a very explicit paper he has found on

this subject, the least distressing paragraph in which is the last, where Butler says, "An unkind fate never threw two men together who were more naturally uncongenial than my father and myself." Canon Butler was an evangelical clergyman of the Simeonite type, which flourished so intensely before and during the development of the High Church revival. He believed in bringing up children rigidly, from their infancy, in the strict practice of external religion. If they were recalcitrant, the love of God must be driven into them by their being whipped or shut up in a cupboard, or docked of some little puerile pleasure. Samuel Butler secretly rebelled, from babyhood, against this stern evangelical discipline, and the Canon, who had no imagination, simply redoubled his severities. It is an amusing touch, in this record of a dismal childhood, to learn that Samuel was excessively pleased, at the age of eight, by hearing an Italian lady in Naples say that a dear young friend of hers – poor unfortunate fellow, *povero disgrasiato*! – had been obliged to murder his uncle and his aunt. Probably the pleasure the little boy felt in hearing of this "misfortune" was the earliest expression of that rebellious and fantastic dislike of conventionality which was to run through the whole series of the man's works.

In the letters from Butler to his family, written at school and at college, there is, however, no trace of the violent antagonism which he afterwards believed that he had always felt. It is true that a boy who writes to his father and mother, and indeed in similar circumstances a man too, is constrained to resign himself to a certain innocent hypocrisy. Very few children are able to send to their parents, and very few parents are able to endure from their children, a perfectly sincere description of their crude sentiments during adolescence. But if Samuel Butler was really tormented at home, as Ernest Pontifex was, it is odd that some note of hostility should not have crept into his juvenile correspondence. However, Mr. Festing Jones, who is as judicious as a Lord of Appeal, seems to entertain no doubt that Canon Butler was a holy horror, so that we must bow to his opinion.

The earliest overt evidence of a falling out between father and son is delayed until, in Mr. Jones's unfaltering narrative, we reach the son's twenty-third year. He does not seem, at first, to have combated his father's obstinate demand that he should take orders in the Church of England. That Canon Butler, a clergyman of clergymen, should have desired to see his Samuel take this step, ought not to seem unreasonable, though it certainly proved unlucky. In the novel, it will be remembered, Ernest Pontifex actually was ordained, but to this length Samuel Butler never proceeded. He went to a parish in the east of

London to work with a parson who had been one of his grandfather's pupils at Shrewsbury. There his faith in the efficacy of infant baptism was shaken, and presently falling, brought down about his ears the whole fabric of Simeonite Christianity in which he had so assiduously been trained. He suddenly, and no doubt abruptly, wrote to the Canon and said that he "declined to be ordained." From a carnal as well as a spiritual point of view this must have been a nasty shock for his parents, and Mr. Festing Jones tells us "there was a long and painful correspondence." This he mercifully spares us, but refers us to *The Way of All Flesh*, where Butler made dauntless use of it.

The financial situation was difficult. Canon Butler was fairly well-to-do, but he had other children to provide for, and Samuel, who refused to be a clergyman, went on refusing, as it must have seemed to his father, to be anything at all. Like the poet Cowley, he

> neither great at Court nor in the War,
> Nor at the Exchange would be, nor at the wrangling Bar.

All professions were suggested, and each in vain. At last it was decided that Samuel should emigrate to New Zealand, and become a sheep farmer. Only nine years earlier, a Church of England colony had been founded at Canterbury, in the South Island, and the town of Christchurch had been founded. It had enjoyed a great success, and by the year 1859, when Butler landed, almost all the sheep lands had been already taken up. At last he found an unoccupied run at the "back of beyond," and built a little homestead for himself, which he called Mesopotamia. It is needless to dwell on this episode of Butler's life, further than to point out that it proved him capable of sustained physical industry and of considerable financial adroitness. The remainder of his career hardly suggests the possession of either. The New Zealand episode is sufficiently dealt with in Butler's own book, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, which, by the way, shows no trace of the author's subsequent merit as a writer. In June, 1864, he sailed homeward from the port of Lyttelton, but not alone, and we now approach the strangest incident of his life.

It was to be expected that the £4,400 which Butler had received from his father in 1859 would by this time have dwindled to zero. Not at all; it had swelled to £8,000. But just before he left New Zealand a young man, called Charles Pauli, whom he had known but very slightly as a journalist in Christchurch, and who had no claim upon Butler of any sort or species, came to him and asked him to pay for his passage back to England, and to advance him £200 a year for

three years. "To me," wrote Butler in 1897, "in those days this seemed perfectly easy; and Pauli, I have not the smallest doubt, intended and fully believed – for his temperament was always sanguine – that he should be able to repay me." Butler had very little insight into the "temperament" of Pauli, and the whole of the extraordinary story increases our conviction that this sardonic and sarcastic analyst of imaginary life was as powerless as a child in face of reality. The dreadful Pauli adventure, told for the first time by Mr. Festing Jones, in his deliberate, unimpassioned way, is the most amazing revelation of simplicity traded upon by fraud that it is possible to imagine.

There soon proved to be a complete absence of harmony in the tastes of Butler and Pauli, who had really nothing in common. Yet they settled together, when they arrived in London, in rooms in Clifford's Inn, Fleet Street. There Butler lived for all the rest of his life, thirty-eight years; but presently Pauli went elsewhere. Then the relations of the two became incomprehensible. Pauli was very irritable, and constantly found fault with Butler. He refused to let Butler know his address, and yet was continually sponging upon him. He said that he could get no help from his own parents, and that Butler stood between him and starvation. For three years Pauli did not attempt to work. At last, in 1867, he was called to the Bar. He lunched with Butler three times a week, when he always said that he was earning nothing. Butler's own statement, written in 1898, the year after Pauli's death, is as follows:

> I have no means of ascertaining how much Pauli had from me between the years 1864 and 1881 (but it exceeded £3,500). I kept no accounts; I took no receipts from him; the understanding was that he would repay me when he came into his reversion.... In 1879 I only admitted to my father having helped Pauli from time to time; the fact was, I had done everything.... I had more than shared every penny I had with him, but I believed myself to be doing it out of income, and to have a right to do it.

Throughout the long periods in which Butler was hard pressed for sufficient money to exist – times in which there were painful and unseemly squabbles about an allowance between his father and himself – he was supporting Pauli, whose means of subsistence he took no pains to investigate, and who, in full cognition of Butler's attenuated sources of income, punctually took half for himself. Mr. Festing Jones's statement is amazing:

> Pauli was called to the Bar in 1867, and took chambers in Lincoln's Inn for his work. He told Butler where they were, so that he could write if he had any

communication to make to him that would not wait till they met; but Butler was not to go there. Of course, he could have gone, but he did not. He could have found out in a hundred ways where Pauli lived if he had set about it; but, knowing that Pauli did not wish it, he did nothing.

At last, in 1897, after having shared his poverty with this strange friend for thirty-three years, Butler read in *The Times* that Pauli was dead. Then, at last, he made inquiries, and found that for a great many years past Pauli's income from the law had exceeded £700 a year, and for nearly twenty had been over £1,000. Pauli left £9,000, not a penny of it to Butler, whose parasite he had been for the greater part of his life, when every five-pound note was of consequence to Butler. One knows not which to be more astounded at – heartless greediness on the one side, or fatuous simplicity on the other. When all the evidence came out at last beyond all further concealment, Butler wrote: "I understand now why Pauli preserved such an iron silence when I implored him to deal with me somewhat after the fashion in which I had dealt with him." [That is to say, in telling him precisely what Butler's exact financial position was.] "The iniquity of the whole thing, as it first struck me in full force, upset me."

This "squalid and miserable story" is told with inexorable fullness by Mr. Festing Jones. What is very remarkable about it is the evidence it gives of Butler's irregular penetration into character. He could be extremely acute in one direction and absolutely obtuse in another. The incredible indulgence which permitted him to be the dupe and victim of a scoundrel like Pauli for more than thirty years seems incompatible with the intense and suspicious analysis which he expended on the motives of his father. After all, when the worst of Canon Butler is admitted, he was a Christian and a gentleman by the side of the appalling Pauli. Yet Butler would sacrifice his father, and actually tell falsehoods, for the purpose of screening and enriching Pauli (see Vol. I., p. 114), of whose villainy he could at any moment have assured himself, and with whom he practically admits that he had nothing in common.

The Pauli episode is valuable in supplying light on certain defects in Butler's intellectual composition. In measure, it tends to explain the inconsistencies, the irregularities of his mental life, and of his action as a scholar. He was the opposite of those who see life steadily, and see it whole. He had no wide horizons, but he investigated a corner or a section of a subject with a burning glass which left all other parts of the surface in darkness. There were Paulis on his mental horizon; there were in almost everything he approached passages where his want

of appreciation, his want (let us boldly say) of elementary insight, produced the oddest effect of imperfection. His literary judgments were *saugrenu* to the last extreme. What are we to think of a man who lays if down that "Blake was no good because he learnt Italian to study Dante, and Dante was no good because he was so fond of Virgil, and Virgil was no good because Tennyson ran him; and as for Tennyson, well, Tennyson goes without saying"? There is no critical meaning in such outbursts; they would be almost imbecile in their aimless petulance if we did not understand that Virgil and Dante and Blake lay in the dark segment of Butler's vision, and that he had not so much formed an adverse opinion of their merits as no opinion at all. If, as surprisingly he did on every occasion, he heaped contempt on Virgil, it was simply because he wanted to get Virgil well out of the way of Homer, on whom his enthusiasm was concentrated.

It was so in all things. Butler despised the great Venetian painters, not because he had devoted attention to their faults, but because they stood in the way of Giovanni and Gentile Bellini, to whom he had dedicated a frenzied cult. "Titian, Leonardo, Raffaelle and Michel Angelo, well, to speak quite plainly, I like none of them," he wrote in the last year of his life. In music it was just the same. Butler attached himself, from early youth to the grave, to Handel in an almost maniacal infatuation. In order to clear a space, as it were, round this solitary object of his worship, he covered Beethoven and Bach with contempt; and if anyone forced him to listen to the *Requiem* of Mozart, he stopped his ears and hummed "Loathsome urns, disclose your treasure," to drown the hideous Austrian discord. For Butler, "Bach wriggles; Wagner writhes." All the masterpieces of the world of music he sweeps together in a universal disapproval as "heartless failures," whereas of Handel's least remarkable passages he calls out, "Can human genius do more?" The result is that Butler is interesting and sometimes valuable when he praises; when he blames, he is sometimes amusing, but more often impertinent and tiresome. What is the point of calling Plato one of the "Seven Humbugs of Christendom," or of talking of "that damned *Republic*"? To pretend to admire these peevish outbursts, however much we may be stimulated by the better sides of Butler's intelligence, is abject.

No section of Mr. Festing Jones's biography is more interesting than that in which, in the patient, judicious manner in which he so eminently excels, he depicts the relation of Butler to Miss Savage. Readers of *The Way of All Flesh* are familiar with the figure of Alethea Pontifex, who occupies the position of heroine in that novel. It has long been known that this was the portrait of

a friend whom Butler had studied, confided in, and deeply valued. In what degree it was an accurate portrait has not hitherto been known. I have no hesitation in saying that the chapters which deal with this situation – and they are executed with as much delicacy as realism – form the most unhackneyed and the most exciting section of Mr. Jones's volumes. They illuminate in portions, and they leave darker than ever in other parts, the rugged surface of Butler's extraordinary character; and I regret that exigencies of space do not permit me to do justice to documents so remarkable. But yet, something I must say.

The Alethea of the novel was so far from being an exact portrait that the sitter, after studying every line and touch of it, is supposed, was supposed by Butler himself, not to have perceived that it was intended for her. This, however, we must regard as hardly possible in the case of one so passionately clear-sighted, but there were many reasons why she should adopt such an attitude. Eliza Mary Ann Savage was a governess, whom Butler met about 1870, when he and she were art students together at Heatherley's. They were nearly of the same age, which at that time would be thirty-four. They were immediately drawn together by a singular parallelism in temper and sympathy. Miss Savage read the MS. of *Erewhon*, and minutely criticized it. From this time, 1871 to 1885, when she died, Butler submitted to her everything he wrote, and, obstinate as he was in the face of all other censures, invariably remodelled his work in accordance with her criticisms and suggestions. She supported him in all his enthusiasms, and shared all his prejudices. She was a very well-read woman, and was able to follow Butler into the remotest recesses of his studies. She responded to his lightest touch like a delicate musical instrument, and yet was rigid in opposing any divergence from what she conceived to be the normal line his talent ought to take. She was as stringently hostile to Christianity, as contemptuous of Darwin and Huxley, as infatuated about Handel, as haughtily an enfant terrible of the intelligence as he was, and the degree to which the admirers of Butler's books are indebted to her can never be definitely known, but is certainly very great.

Alethea Pontifex, in *The Way of All Flesh*, is tall, handsome, with fine blue eyes. Miss Savage was short, insignificant, and plain, with brown eyes; she suffered from hip disease; physically, she was quite unattractive. This introduces into the real history an element of pathos and of pain which raises it to a far higher level of human interest than the novel has to offer us. To Miss Savage, in her isolated state, Butler was the whole world; and it is perfectly evident – Mr. Festing Jones need not hesitate so conscientiously in admitting it – that she was absorbingly, unalterably in love with Butler. She lived, quite unupbraiding,

in the intermittent light of his countenance. For nearly twenty years they were, mentally, like a devoted husband and wife, yet the anomaly of their relations never struck Butler, to whom Miss Savage was a comrade of perfect sympathy, and no more. He did not observe, until Miss Savage was dead, that she had felt towards him otherwise than he felt towards her. He wrote, "I valued her, but she perfectly understood that I could do no more." Did she? Mr. Festing Jones prints a sonnet of Butler's, written in 1901, which seems to me to be one of the most amazing pieces of self-revelation that I know:

> And now, though twenty years are come and gone,
> That little lame lady's face is with me still;
> Never a day but what, on every one,
> She dwells with me as dwell she ever will.
> She said she wished I knew not wrong from right;
> It was not that; I knew, and would have chosen
> Wrong if I could, but, in my own despite,
> Power to choose wrong in my chilled veins was frozen.
> 'Tis said that if a woman woo, no man
> Should leave her till she have prevailed; and, true,
> A man will yield for pity if he can,
> But if the flesh rebels, what can he do?
> I could not; hence I grieve my whole life long
> The wrong I did in that I did no wrong.

Such fragments of Miss Savage's letters as Mr. Festing Jones prints show that she was an admirable correspondent. Butler put her letters together in a separate collection, edited, annotated, and ready for the Press. This is to be published some day in a volume by itself, and will have a pathetic value. But I confess to a certain feeling of regret that the inner being of this obscure, pathetic, and self-sacrificing woman should be immolated any further on the altar of Butler's egotism. My own instinct would be to say: Let poor Miss Savage, out of whose painful and imperfect existence so much "copy" has already been made, sleep on undisturbed under her mouldering headstone at Finchley. But Mr. Festing Jones knows best.

The most agreeable parts of this biography, at all events those which give us the most genial impression of Butler as a companion, deal with his repeated visits to Italy. These tours inspired, or were used to produce material for, a very pleasant section of his literary work. If we distinguish between the wit

and picturesqueness of the ornament in Butler's controversial writings, and the actual basal texture of those writings, I do not see how a reasonable criticism can any longer pretend to set high value on his angry denunciations of the whole Darwinian theory of evolution, or on his diatribes about *Unconscious Memory*. There is a terrible work of his, published in 1887, called *Luck or Cunning as the Main Means of Organic Modification*; there is another, of 1882, called *Evolution, Old and New*. They are unreadable. His religious polemic was even more disagreeable than his scientific, and the lumbering sarcasm of the attack on Christianity, called *The Fair Haven*, is an epitome of all that is most unpleasing in the attitude of Butler. Unctuous sarcasm so sustained as to deceive the very elect, and "affectation of the tone of indignant orthodoxy," have a tendency to grow rancid in the passage of years, and to become exceedingly unappetizing. Samuel Butler, whose rashness was astounding, had the courage to call his homonym of the *Analogy* a "poor creature"! What would Joseph Butler, revisiting the glimpses of the moon, think of the author of *The Fair Haven*?

There is nothing of this incongruity in the books which are founded on memories of Italian travel. Here the charm of Butler's style is expended, with a thousand oddities and playfulnesses, on subjects which blossom in its atmosphere. It is very strange that *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1882), and *Ex Voto* (1888), should share the neglect which was so unbrokenly the fate of Butler's publications, for these were charming and original to a high degree, and they illustrate, without any disadvantage, the whimsical penetration of his mind and the playful melody of his style at its best. *The Authoress of the Odyssey* (1897), which Hellenists found it impossible to take as a serious contribution to scholarship, was another of these by-products of travel in Sicily, and contained very numerous pages, which, whether convincing or no, were exceedingly picturesque and entertaining. No cultivated man or woman will, in the future, visit Trapani or ascend to the platforms of Mount Eryx without remembering how Butler was taken to the grotto where Ulysses hid his treasure, or how the Sicilian descendants of the Cyclopes treated him as a royal personage.

Not much new light is thrown on the purely literary characteristics of Butler by Mr. Festing Jones's biography. He has not dwelt at length on the individual works, nor at all on the general position of their author among his contemporaries. He left himself no space to go into such questions, being fully occupied with the task of interpreting and illuminating the personal characteristics of his subject. He is an unflinching portraitist, and in a painting of Oliver Cromwell

from the life would be sure to do full justice to the wen. The rugged surface of Samuel Butler lends itself to such realism – and I will not say that Mr. Jones does not approach the confines of the superfluous in the excessive minuteness of his notes. We are assured that Butler took eight handkerchiefs and three pairs of socks with him when he went abroad, and that he very wisely carried diarrhœa pills in the handle half of his Gladstone bag. When Butler bought himself a new wash-hand basin, in 1887, the fact is duly recorded. We are told that once, in 1886, he swept every corner of every room of his lodgings with tea-leaves, and that it made him perspire freely. That there will be readers who do not care how many times Butler brushed his hair every day, nor on what occasion he wore "the high hat which appears in the corner of the picture in his room," I am not inclined to deny, but I am not of them. These little things, recounted with Mr. Festing Jones's humorous serenity, are my delight. If some contemporary had recorded the fact that Shakespeare habitually soaked the crust of his manchet in his last mouthful of sack, or that he wore out his left shoe faster than his right, how grateful we should be for the information. Only, there must come into our consideration: Are Butler and Shakespeare figures of equal significance, apart from their shoes and their hair-brushes?

There is less room for divergence of judgment on the question of the way in which Mr. Jones has revealed the moral and social characteristics of his hero. Here he could hardly be excessive. The amiability, the ruggedness, the nervous instability, the obstinacy as of a rock, the tenderness and the sardonic bitterness which made up so strange an amalgam, are all frankly revealed. It is for us to arrange them, if we can, into a consistent portrait of a most inconsistent figure. Here is, taken at random, an entry of Butler's own, which gives a good example of several of his characteristics:

> 17th April 1895. I travelled from Patros to Athens with a young Turk, about thirty years old, and his dog – an English terrier. We were alone in the carriage the greater part of the time, and I suppose the poor dog was bored; at any rate, after a while, he made up to me. He licked me all over my face, and then began to pretend that my coat pocket had got a rat in it which he must catch. I was so flattered at being made up to by anyone or anything who seemed to tell me I was a nice person, that I let him go on and hunt for rats all over me, till at last his master interposed in beautiful English, and then we talked. He was a Secretary to the Turkish Legation, and was very clever and nice.

The incident could hardly be more trifling, but it is inimitably told; and it reveals not merely a mastery of minute description, but the self-tormenting

temperament of a man of extraordinary talent who, for some unfathomable reason, though love was in his heart, was for ever out of harmony with the world, and suspicious of those whom he would fain have ingratiated. Those are the main lineaments which Mr. Festing Jones's biography reveals, and they are those of a miniaturist touching his ivory with a fastidious brush, and of a "born orphan" who could not find a home in the wilderness of jarring humanity.