Two Reviews by Bernard Shaw

SAMUEL BUTLER: THE NEW LIFE REVIEWED*

In the great tradition of British criticism a book to review is an occasion to improve. Even if it were not so, the life of Samuel Butler would be an irresistible temptation to any writer with an ounce of homily in him. It is a staggering object-lesson in the villainy (no milder expression is adequate) of our conventional clergyman schoolmaster education, and of the family and class life to which it belongs.

Mr Festing Jones's memoir, though one of the most complete ever written, is nevertheless not quite complete. Butler told the story of his childhood so frightfully well in his novel, The Way of All Flesh, that Mr Festing Jones has recognized the hopelessness of attempting to do that work again and do it better. It cannot be done better: The Way of All Flesh is one of the summits of human achievement in that kind; and there is nothing for it but to require from the reader of the memoir as a preliminary qualification that he shall read the autobiography in the novel. Indeed a good deal of Mr Jones's memoir will be only half intelligible to anyone who has not already come to know Butler's parents as the detestable Theobald and his Christina, whose very names proclaim that they had made their gods as hateful to their son as themselves. Butler is the only man known to history who has immortalized and actually endeared himself by parricide and matricide long drawn out. He slew the good name (and it was such a very good name!) of his father and mother so reasonably, so wittily, so humorously, and even in a ghastly way so charitably, that he convinced us that he was engaged in an execution and not in a murder.

But the moral of this memoir is that not even genius can come through such an education as Butler's with its mind unwounded and unlamed. It was his genius, always breaking through to the truth, that revealed to him, whilst he was still a boy, that this devoted father to whom he could never be too grateful, and this pious angel mother in whose watchful care he was so fortunate, were at best a pair of pitiably perverted and intimidated nobodies, and that he hated them, feared them, and despised them with all his soul. Unfortunately the matter could not stop there. Butler was naturally affectionate to the point of being gulled by heartless people with ridiculous ease. As a child

**Samuel Butler, Author of Erewhon (1835–1902): A Memoir*, by Henry Festing Jones (*Manchester Guardian*, 1 November 1919).

he had sought for affection at home, only to have his feelings practised on by his mother to wheedle confidences from him and have him beaten by his father, who trained him exactly as if he were a performing animal, except that he did not teach him anything amusing. But the child went on assuming that he loved his dear parents, and that they were all happy together in their domestic affection, spotless respectability, and unchallenged social precedence. When he realized how he had been duped and how he had duped himself, he reacted to the opposite extreme with such violence that he set up as a rule in the art of life that the stupidest and most mischievous of mistakes is to force yourself or humbug yourself into liking things that are really repugnant or uninteresting to you. Accordingly, all through this memoir we find Butler "hating," on principle, everything that was not immediately congenial and easy to him at the very first taste. He "hated" Plato, Euripides, Dante, Raphael, Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, Blake, Rossetti, Tennyson, Browning, Wagner, Ibsen, and in fact everyone who did not appeal to his palate instantly as a lollypop appeals to the palate of a child. The exception was Handel, because he had learned to like Handel's music in the days of his childish illusion; but I suspect that if he had never heard Handel's music until after he had set up his rule he would have denounced him as a sanctimonious drum major, and classed him as one of The Seven Humbugs of Christendom.

It is true that these repeated denunciations of great men as impostors and humbugs are made with a tart humor which betrays a subconscious sense of their folly, and saves Butler from being classed as a vulgar nil-admirerist; but the trick is none the less tiresome and even sinister, because it is plain that Butler did seriously narrow his mind and paralyse his critical powers by refusing to take any trouble to find out what our greatest teachers were driving at, or to face the drudgery of learning their peculiar idiom. For a man with his love of music to begin with gavottes and minuets and never get any further (for that is what it came to) was monstrous. I risk his rising from the grave to smite me when I add, as I must, that he never said a word about Handel worth reading; he liked the hailstones running along the ground and the sheep going astray, every one to his own way; but Handel could hardly have said more to him on that than "Thank you for nothing." It is flatly impossible to believe that a man who could see no greatness in Bach was really admiring what is great in Handel, however sincerely he may have relished Handel's more popular vein.

Then, again, Butler's public manners were atrocious. Privately, he was most courteous, most considerate, if anything too delicate in his conscientiousness.

But if he did not like a man's public opinion and work, or the man did not like his: in a word, if he did not feel perfectly happy with him, he treated him as a moral delinquent, derided him, insulted him, and even cut him in the street. In other words, he behaved exactly as his father would have behaved if his father had had courage and wit as well as thoroughly bad civic manners. In the war of cliques which never ceases in London, he heaped scorn on the Darwin clique, and not only resented the shallow snobbery which led it to underrate him, and to persuade Darwin himself that it was beneath his dignity to clear up a very simple misunderstanding which had led Butler quite naturally to accuse him of controversial foul play, but retaliated in kind. For there was inevitably a Butler clique as well as a Darwin clique. Butler's bite was so powerful that he may be said to have been a clique in himself in so far as he acted in the clique spirit; but with Miss Savage, Festing Jones, Gogin, Pauli, not to mention Emery Walker, Sydney Cockerell, and the steadily growing outer ring of Butlerites of whom I was one, he was by no means alone contra mundum. As the best brains were always with Butler, Darwin, a simple-souled naturalist with no comprehension of the abyss of moral horror that separated his little speciality of Natural Selection from Butler's comprehensive philosophic conception of Evolution, may be pardoned for his foolish estimate of Butler as "a clever unscrupulous man," and for countenancing the belittling of him by Huxley and Romanes that now seems so ridiculous. They really did not know any better. But in the selfsame spirit, without the selfsame excuse, Butler and his clique belittled poor Grant Allen, one of the most amiably helpful men that ever lived, and one, moreover, who recognized Butler as a man of genius, and declared that he "bore its signet on his brow." Butler, with unconscious but colossal arrogance, simply damned his impudence, denying that there was any such thing as genius, and heaping scorn on Allen because he was not at once ready to declare that Butler was right about evolution, and Darwin a disingenuous sciolist. Miss Savage, pretending to forget Allen's name, wrote of him as Allen Grant; and Mr Festing Jones leaves the readers of his memoir to infer that he was an unamiable and rather contemptible man. All the more annoying this because Grant Allen had the same grievance as Butler: he could not live by his serious scientific work, and had to write novels and stories to keep himself and his family alive.

The truth is, we all did that sort of thing in those days; and we are doing it still. Nine-tenths of English criticism today is either log-rolling or bad manners; and at the root of the evil are pure snobbery, bigotry, and intolerance. I will not say that Butler was as bad as his father, because, with his greater powers and opportunities, he was very much worse. Ardent Butlerite as I am, I cannot deny that Butler brought a great deal of his unpopularity on himself by his country parsonage unsociability and evangelical bigotry. One does not get rid of that bigotry by merely discarding the Resurrection and making pious people laugh against their wills with such sallies as "Resist God and He will flee from you," or "Jesus: with all Thy faults I love Thee still." Bigotry in a parson is at least not unexpected, and not unnatural if he is in earnest about the 39 articles; but in a rampant anticlerical like Butler it tempts us to say that as he brought so much of the worst of the Church with him when he came out of it he might as well have stayed in it to please his father.

Still, when all is said that can be said against Butler, the fact remains that when he was important he was so vitally important, and when he was witty he was so pregnantly witty, that we are forced to extend an unlimited indulgence to his weaknesses, and finally to embrace them as attractions. His excessive and touchy self-consciousness; his childish belief that everything that happened to him, no matter how common and trivial, was interesting enough to be not only recorded for the sake of an authentic human document but sold to the public as belles lettres; his country parsonage conviction that foreigners with their quaint languages, and working-class people with their ungentlemanlike and unladylike dialects, were funny creatures whose sayings were to be quoted like those of clever children; his patronizing and petting of his favorites and his snubbing and cutting of his aversions: all these, with his petulant and perverse self-limitation and old-bachelorism, would have damned fifty ordinary men; yet they were so effectually redeemed by belonging to Butler, and in fact being Butler, that it never occurs to Mr Festing Jones to conceal, extenuate, or apologize for them.

Those to whom Butler was a stranger did not forgive him so easily. Take, for example, his Alps and Sanctuaries. We have to read it today not only for the promise and beauty of its title, but for the sake of the titbits it contains: in short, because it is by Butler. But barring those titbits it is surely the silliest book ever written by a clever man. Its placid descriptions of itineraries compared to which the voyages of a motor-bus from Charing Cross to Hyde Park

Corner are chapters of romance, and its promiscuous quotations from Handel, in which elegiac passages which might conceivably have been recalled by the beauty of an Italian valley are not distinguished from toccata stuff that reeks of the keyboard and of nothing else, explain only too fully why the book was refused by the publisher who had rashly commissioned it, and why its first sale did not reach 500 copies. No Butlerite was surprised or offended when, buying a later book with a title which suggested a pious pilgrimage, he had suddenly sprung on him a most irreverent onslaught on Sir Benjamin Layard, whose only offence was that he was a bigwig, and that to Butler a bigwig meant merely a silk-stockinged calf to fix his teeth in; but Butlerites were few and strangers many; and strangers could not be expected to know that when you bought a book by Butler you never got what you paid for. True, you got something better; but then you did not want something better. A bookseller who responded to an order for La Vie Parisienne by sending The Methodist Times might establish a reputation as a humorist, but he would hardly make a fortune in his business.

There were other ways in which Butler did not live up to his professions. In Erewhon he would have been tried for the serious offence of gullibility, and very severely punished. The Pauli case would have put him quite beyond the pale of Erewhonian sympathy. And Pauli would have been knighted for gulling Butler so successfully. It is all very well to call Butler's forbearance to Pauli delicacy; but in any other man we should call it moral cowardice. I am not sure that it was not something worse. The rectory-born lust for patronage and charity was in Butler's blood: he had absolutely no conscience as to how he demoralized other people provided he could make them his pensioners. If Pauli, infamously pocketing his pension of £200 a year under pretence of penury when he was making £900 as a barrister and a mendicant whilst Butler was on the verge of bankruptcy, had avowed and asserted his independence, I verily believe Butler would have quarrelled with him at once. As it was, when death revealed the fraud, Butler's only regret was that Pauli was not alive to be forgiven. In that Butler was his father all over. Well might he make his prototype Ernest, in The Way of All Flesh, put his children out to nurse with a bargee on the ground that, if he kept them with him, an inexorable heredity would force him to treat them as badly as his father had treated him.

If these things are not firmly said about Butler, his example will corrupt the world. From idiotic underestimate and neglect of him we are already turning to deify him, in spite of his own warnings, as one who could do no wrong. The reviews of Mr Jones's memoirs are as shameless in this matter as the memoir

itself. Mr Jones has, on principle, concealed nothing. He even gives the name of the witty and amiable French mistress whom Butler patronized incognito very faithfully but very cautiously for sixteen years, at the end of which he ventured to tell her who he was and where he lived, and admitted her to his circle (one gathers) for the four more years which elapsed before her death. Twenty years ago such a revelation might have pilloried Butler. Today we steadily refuse to overhear Mr Jones's communication. It is, by the way, a great pity that Butler did not carry out his intention of dealing with the question of marriage as he had dealt with evolution. His reiteration of the not very respectable old proverb that it is cheaper to buy the milk than to keep the cow did not, in spite of the French lady, do Butler justice, being obviously a relic of that shallow Hedonism which seemed to the mid-century Victorians to follow logically when they discovered that the book of Genesis is not a scientific account of the origin of species, and that the accounts given by the evangelists of the Resurrection do not tally so exactly as the depositions of police witnesses in Sinn Fein prosecutions. Instead of concluding that these things were not of the real substance of religion, and that it did not matter one straw to that real substance whether they believed or disbelieved this or that tradition or parable that had become connected with it, they still went on assuming that it mattered so tremendously that they could not get rid of the crudest and most utterly irrelevant miracle story without bringing down the whole ethical structure of religion with a crash. Those were the days when an army officer of my acquaintance said to me gravely, "I know for a fact that the rector's son behaved disgracefully with the housemaid; and you may tell me after that that the Bible is true if you like, but I shall not believe it." The alternative to believing silly things about God seemed to be blank materialist Hedonist atheism. Yet Rousseau had said a hundred years before, "Get rid of your miracles, and the whole world will fall at the feet of Christ." And there you have it. As Butler's education consisted in concealing Rousseau's religious discoveries from him, he imagined that he had lost his faith when he had only lost his superstitions, and that in getting rid of the miracles he had got rid of Christ, of God, of The Church, and of any obligations to pursue anything but his own pleasure. It was in this phase that he nicknamed his father Theobald and his mother Christina, and perhaps decided to buy his milk instead of keeping a cow. His mind was too powerful to be imposed on in that way for long: but it need not have been imposed on for five seconds if his University had treated Voltaire and Rousseau as classics and seers, instead of as "infidels." It was at Shrewsbury School and Cambridge that Canon Butler had

been taught to pretend to his son that his mother was killed by Erewhon. That is, his public school and university education had inculcated an ignorance more dense and dangerous than the ignorance of an illiterate ploughman. How silly it all seems now, except perhaps to the hundreds of Canon Butlers still corrupting their sons in our parsonages, and probably beating them if they catch them reading Butler – Butler! who stood for the very roots of religion when Darwin was "banishing mind from the universe"!

Dilettante Weaknesses

I cannot judge whether Mr Festing Jones's exhaustive and very cleverly documented memoir is going to be one of the great British biographies or not. It interests me throughout; but then I knew Butler and many of the other persons with whom the two volumes deal. For strangers, possibly, the death of Miss Savage at the end of the first volume will make it hard for the second to be equally amusing. She was a most entertaining woman who had caught Butler's comedy style so well, and even assimilated his art of life so congenially, that but for her alert feminine touch Butler might be suspected of inventing her letters. Her stories and jokes are all first-rate. Butler is not at his brightest in his remorse for having been occupied with his own affairs instead of with hers: his affectionate feeling that he had treated her badly was, as he would probably have admitted if some robust person had taxed him with it, priggish and childish.

Besides, Butler's bolt is shot in the first volume. In the second he is no longer the great moralist of Erewhon and the forerunner of the present blessed reaction towards Creative Evolution, but a dryasdust dilettante fussing about Tabachetti and Gaudenzio di Ferrara, Shakespear's Sonnets, and the authoress of the Odyssey. His shot about the Odyssey got home. All the pedants thought the attribution of the Odyssey to a woman monstrously improbable and paradoxical only because the Odyssey had always been thoughtlessly attributed to a man; but the moment the question was raised it became, to those who were really familiar with the two epics, not only probable but almost obvious that Butler had hit on the true secret of the radical and irreconcilable difference between the Odyssey and the Iliad. It was equally clear that he was right in his opinion that the first batch of Shakespear's Sonnets was the work of a very young man. But who cared, outside the literary fancy? To the mass of people whose very souls' salvation depended on whether Erewhon and Life and Habit

were sound or unsound it mattered not a dump who wrote the Odyssey, or whether Shakespear was 17 or 70 when he wrote the sonnets to Mr W. H. And though Raphael's stocks were down heavily and Michael Angelo's not what they had been, yet the stocks of Tabachetti and Gaudenzio di Ferrara, whose works are not visible to us in England, were not sufficiently up to induce anyone to exchange. His other heroes, Giovanni Bellini and Handel, were very far from being overlooked or needing his assistance in any way, unless, indeed, he had struck a blow at the horrible festivals at which the scattered wheezings and roarings and screamings of four thousand Crystal Palace holiday-makers were making Handel's oratorios ridiculous. He missed that chance of a hook hit at the white chokers. He had nothing new to say about his two pets: he was only a Don Quixote with two Dulcineas. Meanwhile the intellectual and artistic world to which he was appealing was intensely interested in two new giants: Richard Wagner and Henrik Ibsen, the latter carrying on young Butler's battle against old Butler's ideals most mightily. And what had Butler to say about them? "Ibsen may be, and I dare say is, a very wonderful man, but what little I know of him repels me, and, what is worse, bores me." After not only saying this, but actually writing it, could Butler pretend that the worst we can conceive of his father the Canon or his grandfather the headmaster-Bishop in the way of dull arrogance, insolence, snobbery, pomposity, Podsnappery, ignorance half genuine, half wilful and malicious, were not squared and cubed in their gifted son and grandson? And again, "Carlyle is for me too much like Wagner, of whom Rossini said that he has des beaux moments mais des mauvais quarts d'heure – my French is not to be trusted." Were we to be expected to listen to a man who had nothing better than that to say about the composer of The Ring twenty years after that super-Homeric music epic had been given to the world? Surely we were entitled to reply that if Butler was too gross a Philistine or too insular an ignoramus to be civil to Wagner, he might at least have been just to Rossini, who, with unexpected and touching greatness of character, earnestly repudiated the silly anti-Wagner gibes attributed to him, and said to Wagner himself – Wagner being then the worst-reviled musician in Europe, and Rossini classed as the greatest – that if it had been possible for serious music to exist in the Italian opera houses, he might have done something; for "j'avais du talent." How disgraceful Butler's sneer appears in the light of such sublime self-judgment! No doubt Butler did not know of it; but he could have found it out in less time than it cost him to learn Shakespear's Sonnets by heart. He could at least have held his tongue and concealed his ignorance and spite,

which, please observe, was not provoked spite, but sheer gratuitous insular spite for spite's sake. His own experience should have warned him. Why did nobody say this to him, and produce that conviction of sin to which he was certainly accessible? Mr Festing Jones, a serious and remarkable musician, must have known that when Butler went on like this he was talking and writing vulgar and uppish nonsense. Perhaps he did venture occasionally; but he is too loyal a biographer to tell us about it.

Nothing more is needed to explain why Butler made no headway with his books about art and literature, and his records of his globe trottings. He accounted for it himself by saying that failure, like success, is cumulative, and that therefore it was inevitable that the longer he lived the less successful he should be. But the truth is that he spent the first half of his life saying all that he had to say that was important, and the second half dabbling in painting and music, and recording the thrills of "a week in lovely Lucerne" (much as the sisters he derided might have done), without getting beyond mediocrity in painting and slavish imitation in music, or gaining knowledge and sense of proportion in criticism. It is really appalling to learn that this man of genius, having received the very best education our most expensive and select institutions could give him, and having withal a strong natural taste for music and literature, turned from Bayreuth in mere ignorant contempt, and yet made every Christmas a pious pilgrimage to the Surrey pantomime, and wrote an anxiously careful account of its crude buffooneries to his musician friend. Is it to be wondered at that when an investment in house property obliged him to engage a man of the people as his clerk, this recruit, Mr Alfred Emery Cathie, had to constitute himself his valet, his nurse, his keeper, and his Prime Minister and Executive all in one, and to treat him as the grown-up child his education had left him? Alfred is the real hero of the second volume, simply as a good-natured sensible Englishman who had been fortunate enough to escape the public schools and the university. To Butler he was a phenomenon, to be quoted with patronizing amazement and admiration whenever he exploded a piece of common sense in the Clifford's Inn lunatic asylum. What Butler was to Alfred (except a great man) will never be known. Probably a rare good old sort, quite cracked, and utterly incapable of taking care of himself. Butler was at least not ungrateful.

Throughout this later period we see Butler cramped and worried when he was poor, spoilt when he was rich, and all the time uneasy because he knew that there was something wrong, and yet could not quite find himself out, though his genius was always flashing through the fog and illuminating those wonderful

notebooks, with their queer strings of over-rated trivialities, profound reflections, witty comments, humorous parables, and family jokes and gibes to please Gogin and Jones or annoy the Butlers.

The Fault of Education

Now why, it may be asked, do I, who said, and said truly, that Butler was "in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century," now attack him in his grave by thus ruthlessly insisting on his failings? Well, I do so precisely because I want to carry on his work of demonstrating the falsehood and imposture of our "secondary education" and the mischief of treating children as wild beasts to be tamed and broken instead of as human beings to be let develop. Butler held up his father to ridicule and infamy, and exclaimed, "This is what your public school, your university, your Church, made of him." But the world replied, "Oh, yes: that is all very well; but your father was a rotter and a weakling: all public school and university men are not like him." Now if, as is at last possible with this ruthlessly faithful memoir of him in our hands, we can say, "This is what your public school and your university and your country parsonage made, not of a rotter and a weakling, but of a man of genius who was all his life fiercely on his guard against their influence," then we can go one better than Butler, and make his ghost cry "Splendid! Dont spare me. Rub it in; and more power to your elbow!"

For we must not deceive ourselves. England is still governed from Langar Rectory, from Shrewsbury School, from Cambridge, with their annexes of the Stock Exchange and the solicitors' offices; and even if the human products of these institutions were all geniuses, they would finally wreck any modern civilized country after maintaining themselves according to their own notions at the cost of the squalor and slavery of four-fifths of its inhabitants. Unless we plough up the moral foundations of these places and sow them with salt, we are lost. That is the moral of the great Butler biography.

MR GILBERT CANNAN ON SAMUEL BUTLER*

In choosing Mr Gilbert Cannan to write on Butler for his critical series, Mr Martin Secker has shewn either luck or cunning; for the book has style and wit, and does its work in a highly readable manner up to the point at which Butler must be left to speak for himself. Its presentation of Butler as a Character with an engaging literary talent and a racy vein of eccentric humor is complete and elegant. It does not present Butler as a man of genius, because Mr Cannan does not consider Butler a man of genius. I do. And I may as well explain the difference.

A man of genius is not a man who can do more things, or who knows more things, than ordinary men: there has never been a man of genius yet who has not been surpassed in both respects in his own generation by quite a large number of hopeless fools. He is simply a man who sees the importance of things. Otherwise every schoolmaster would be greater than Christ. Mr Cannan says that the nearest in spirit to Butler of any man of his time was W. S. Gilbert. This is a staggering statement, because on Butler's plane one does not think of Gilbert; and when we are reminded of him there we feel that Butler mattered enormously more than Gilbert, who in such a comparison seems not to have mattered at all. Yet, on reflection, one has to admit that they have something in common. The particular vein of wit which leads some men to take familiar and unquestioned propositions and turn them inside out so neatly as to convince you that they are just as presentable one way as the other, or even that the sides so unexpectedly and quaintly turned out are the right sides, is one in which Butler and Gilbert were natural adepts. But Gilbert never saw anything in the operation but a funny trick. He deliberately separated its exercise from his serious work, and took it off as a man takes off his hat in church when he attempted serious drama. Whenever Butler performed it he presently realized that the seeming trick was an inspired revelation. His very hoaxes were truths which Providence tempted him to entertain for fun until they made themselves indispensable. "Every jest is an earnest in the womb of time." That womb was incarnated in Butler's head, not in Gilbert's. Butler saw the importance of what he had hit on, and developed it into a message for his age. Gilbert saw it as a quip and left it at that: he could hardly develop a string of quips as far as a second act without petering out. Gilbert was a belittler: he jeered at old women like a street boy with a bad mother. Butler

Samuel Butler: A Critical Study, by Gilbert Cannan (*The New Statesman*, 8 May 1915).

tore off the mask and tripped up the cothurnus of many a pretentious pigmy, thereby postponing public recognition of him until the PPs of his generation had died or doddered out; but he was a man of heroic admirations, whereas the people whom Gilbert admired have yet to be discovered. Mr Cannan himself points out appreciatively that Butler made a Sybil of Mrs Jupp, which may in the books of the recording angel balance his making a booby of Sir Benjamin Layard. There is stuff enough in Trial by Jury and The Pirates of Penzance to set up an Ibsen in his business; but Gilbert, though he could penetrate to the facts, and saw the fun of their incongruity with the glamor through which most of us see them, could not see their importance. Thus Butler forged his jests into a weapon which smashed the nineteenth century, whilst Gilbert only made it laugh. No two men could have been more widely disparate in the scope of their spirit, though their specific humor reacted to the stimulus of human folly in the same manner. Gilbert with the word Chesterton added can turn things inside out and write amusing phrases as well as Gilbert; but he does it to high purpose. Oscar Wilde at his best knew that his gift was divine in its nature. In this they both stood far nearer to Butler than Gilbert did. Gilbert, in short, is an excellent illustration of how useless Butler's specific turn of humor would have been to him had he not been a man of genius; and in this capacity only has he the right to appear in a book about Butler.

Butler's great achievement was his perception, after six weeks of hasty triumph in Darwin's deathblow to the old Paleyan assumption that any organ perfectly adapted to its function must be the work of a designer, of the unspeakable horror of the mindless purposeless world presented to us by Natural Selection. Even with Butler's guidance those of us who are not geniuses hardly see that yet; and we babble about Nietzsche and Treitschke with Darwin's name written all over the Prussian struggle for the survival of the fittest. Mr Cannan, exquisitely appreciative of Butler as a British Worthy, and enamored of Mrs Jupp (who is, by the way, a reincarnation of Mrs Quickly), does not see it in the least, and thereby wholly misses Butler's greatness, being indeed rather ignominiously driven at the end, in spite of the evidence of the earlier chapters to which Butler has stimulated him, to deliver a half-hearted verdict of Spoiled Artist, and Failure, and to dismiss Butler's great vision as the effect of the terror inspired in the ex-evangelical by Darwin, "the greatest figure of the time." Here the word Figure seems well chosen to avoid calling Darwin the greatest man of his time (he was the greatest naturalist of his time, and a very amiable person to boot); but the phrase may be a mere cliché; for Mr Cannan does not follow up

the distinction it implies. "It became a passion with Butler," he continues, "to tell others not to be afraid; and this passion, as fear died down, was congealed into an obsession which is responsible for the tiresome reiteration of the evolution books." This is a settler. Mr Cannan has grasped neither the point at issue nor its importance. That is why he fails to see how Butler was a great man, and invents a silly-clever explanation of his quarrel with Darwin. Nothing that I have read in Butler, or gathered from his conversation, conveys the very faintest suggestion of terror or of the "who's afraid" attitude. On the contrary, he was distinguished by his derisive insensibility to the awe which conventional and pious reputations inspire; and as to Darwin, though it was considered very wicked in Butler's time to countenance Darwin in any way, Butler's attitude towards him was one of strenuous championship until he foresaw how the Darwinians, in their revolt against crude Bible worship, would empty the baby out with the bath and degrade the whole conception of Evolution by levelling it down to Natural Selection, which, though a potent method of adaptation, is not true Evolution at all. As a young man, Butler said, in Life and Habit, that Darwin had "banished mind from the Universe." As an old man, he said the same thing to me in private conversation with an intensity that flatly violated his advice to all of us to hold convictions lightly and cultivate Laodiceanism. Until Mr Cannan grasps the importance of that simple statement through an intuition that the difference between Butler's view of the universe and the Darwinian view of it as a product of Natural Selection is the difference between heaven and hell, he will not begin to imagine what Butler's life was about, though he may write very pleasantly and wittily about Butler's talents and accomplishments and foibles. Nor will he appreciate the grimly humorous satisfaction with which Butler on that occasion added, "My grandfather quarrelled with Darwin's grandfather; my father quarrelled with Darwin's father; I quarrelled with Darwin; and my only regret in not having a son is that he cannot quarrel with Darwin's son."

But Mr Cannan's book is the better in some respects for leaving Butler's message to be taken from Butler himself, especially as it will send people to Butler instead of scaring them off, as mere paraphrases of great writers do. To write a book about a man who has written books about himself is an impertinence which only an irresistible charm of manner can carry off. The unpardonable way of doing it, and the commonest, is to undertake to tell the public what a writer has already told them himself, and to tell it worse or tell it all wrong. Mr Cannan has not committed this outrage. Indeed he interferes too little: for instance, he says not a word of Butler's epoch-making suggestion that poverty

and ugliness should be attacked as crimes instead of petted and coddled like diseases. He just allows his mind to play round Butler, and thus makes him the attractive occasion of a book rather than its subject. Here are some samples of his play. "Butler could never respect Darwin when he found humor lacking in The Origin of Species. That was really the beginning and the end of Darwin's offence; and because of it Butler at last could not take anything Charles Darwin said or did seriously." Now this, though quite wrong – for Butler was the only contemporary of Darwin who took him really seriously – is much better than saying that Butler was terrified by Darwin; and it is amusing, anyhow. Again, "In Butler's world there is no freedom except freedom from humbug. He knows nothing of the proud insistence that volition shall proceed contaminated by desire. His view was that volition was in all probability contaminated by the interests of ancestors and posterity, and that there was no help for it." This is better still. And such literary frivolities as "I cannot believe in Butler's God, simply because he does not write about his God with style," have the merits of frivolity; for frivolity has merits: for instance, it is often pleasant. Besides, the laugh here is with Butler, who had the supreme sort of style that never smells of the lamp, and therefore seems to the kerosene stylist to be no style at all. I do not offer these quotations as at bottom more relevant to Butler than to Boccaccio; but a writer who can go on so is readable on his own account, Butler or no Butler; and if the samples encourage my readers to try the whole book, they can judge for themselves its stupendous demerits as a criticism of Butler the Great as distinguished from Butler the Character.

I am disposed to reproach Mr Cannan a little for saying in effect that Butler was no use except as a literary artist, and then giving him away to the so-called scientific people because he was an artist. If Mr Cannan chooses to allow himself to be humbugged by these ridiculous distinctions, he might at least give his own side the benefit of them. But he would do still better if he would revise his book in the light of a serious consultation with himself as to whether he really believes that a naturalist is always, and a thinker never, a man of science; and if so, why? Butler told us a great deal about life and habit, luck and cunning, that nobody had ever told us before, having an extraordinary talent for observing and interpreting both. Darwin told us a great deal about pigeons and worms that nobody had ever told us before, having a remarkable turn for watching pigeons and worms. Why is Darwin classed as a man of science and Butler as an artist of no science? Leonardo da Vinci remarked that the sun did not go round the earth. Galileo made the same remark. Why did nobody believe

Leonardo or regard him as a man of science; and why does everybody applaud Galileo as the great scientific discoverer of the fact that it is the earth that goes round the sun? Does anyone seriously suggest that these Galileos and Harveys and Darwins had greater minds than Leonardo or Goethe or Kant or Butler or any of the great artists and philosophers who have grasped the importance of science and applied their wits to its problems? Even Weismann, who was so much more speculative than Darwin that he developed Darwinism into an extravagant lunacy, and made some brilliant hits in the process, describes how the "discovery" of the cellular structure of living organisms was anticipated fully by a pure mystic whose very name nobody can recollect without referring to Weismann's History of Evolution. Why should Mr Cannan do less justice to the scientific importance of poets and prophets than a naturalist like Weismann?

The real distinction between the two classes is clear enough. The so-called discoverers have been the collectors of evidence and the demonstrators (by put-up jobs called experiments) of facts and forces already divined by men with brains enough not to be wholly dependent on material demonstration. St Thomas, with Christ staring him in the face, refused to believe that he was there until he had put his fingers into his wounds, thereby establishing himself as the prototype and patron saint of all the "discoverers" who, as the Irish say, "would guess eggs if they saw the shells." Darwin's was an exceptionally exasperating case, because he not only got the credit of having discovered Evolution, which had been promulgated and thoroughly established in the period of Goethe and Darwin's grandfather (1790–1830), but had actually substituted for this great general conception an elaborate study of that pseudo-evolution which is produced by external accident (as if a tree could be properly said to have been "evolved" into firewood by the storm which blew it down). This was not Darwin's fault: he did not call the process he demonstrated Evolution, but Natural Selection; still, Darwinism was none the less irritating and disastrous because Darwin was not a Darwinist. The intelligent people jumped wildly at Natural Selection because it knocked Paley and the Book of Genesis clean out. The stupid people took it up because, like St Thomas, they could understand a soulless mechanical process, but could not conceive a vital process like Evolution. The result was half a century of bedevilment, folly, pessimism, despair, and cowardice, of which we are now reaping the fruits in Flanders; and against this Butler stood for years alone; for one cannot count the belated pietists who wanted to go back to the Garden of Eden. In a word, Butler stood alone for science against the purblind naturalists and biologists, with their following of

miracle mongers, experiment jobbers, and witch doctors, all absurdly claiming to be the men of science. And I contend that Mr Cannan, belonging as he does to Butler's camp, should stand to his guns and defend the apprehensive mind and the intuitive imagination against the peering eyes and the groping fingers. Besides, Butler has won. Why does Mr Cannan, like Frederick at Molwitz, throw up the sponge for him?