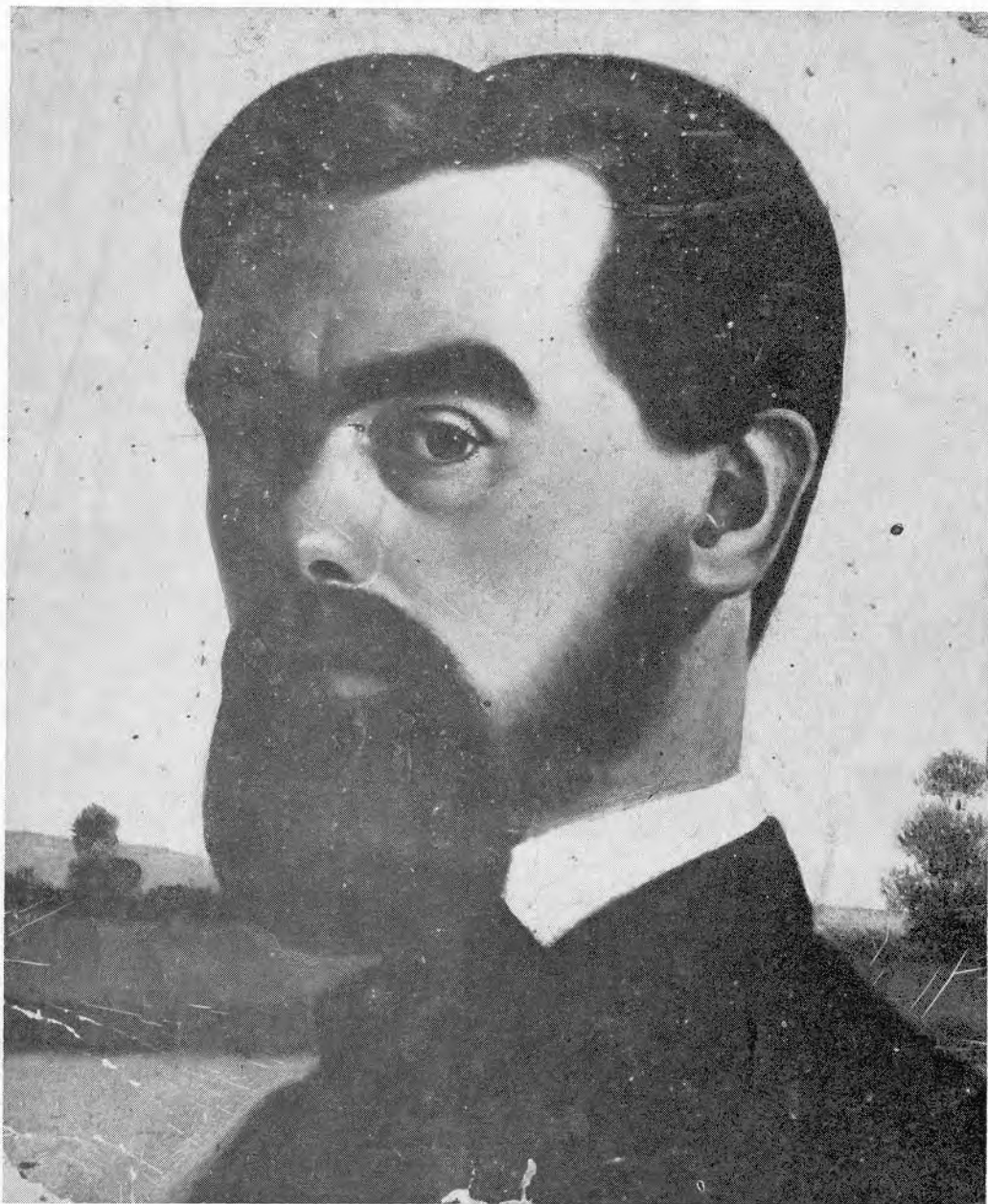


SAMUEL BUTLER



SAMUEL BUTLER, 'A Self-portrait in oils'. Original in the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
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SURVEY

MAY, 1972

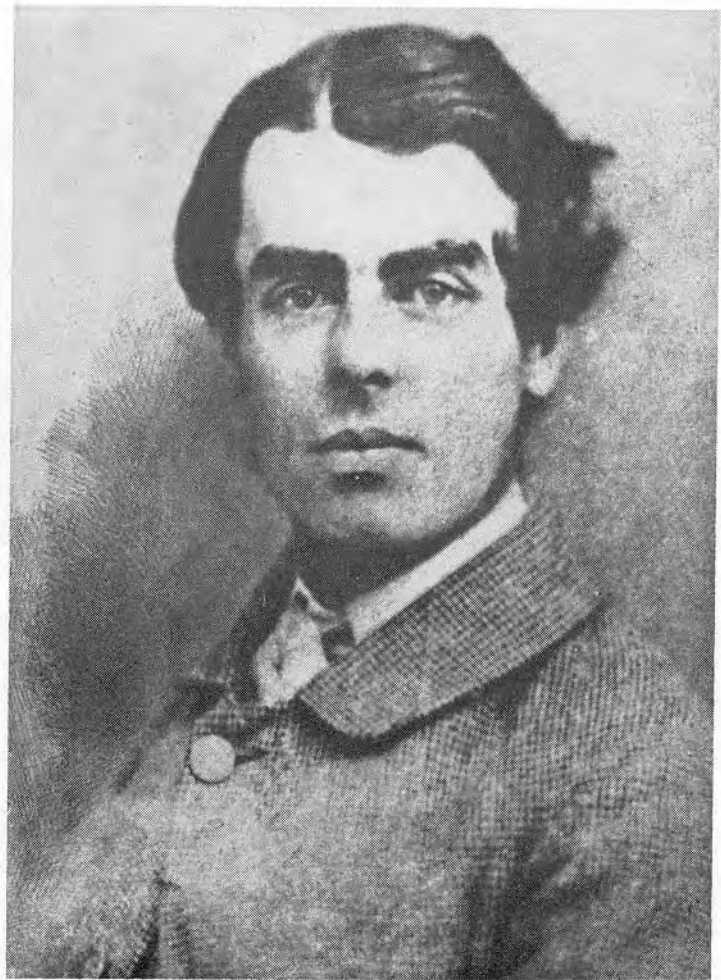
CHRISTCHURCH CITY COUNCIL
ROBERT McDOUGALL ART GALLERY

SURVEY : May 1972

Samuel Butler Commemorative Edition

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Photograph, Samuel Butler, about 1858.
Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*
Vol. I (Macmillan) 1920.

Introduction

THIS year marks the centenary of the publication of Samuel Butler's satirical novel 'Erewhon'. To commemorate the occasion, the Department of Extension Studies of the University of Canterbury has organised a seminar on the life and work of Butler. As part of this reappraisal a look is being taken at Butler as a painter.

I am very pleased to have been able to take this opportunity to study, at least in some small way, Butler's contribution to the field of art and to include the McDougall Art Gallery in this commemorative series.

This edition of the Gallery's publication 'Survey' is the result of my preparations for a small exhibition aimed at giving some idea of Butler as a painter. In reality it has become somewhat

more than just that. It became more obvious as time went on and the topic began to unfold, that Samuel Butler was not going to be an easy man to pin down. That realisation was, in fact, one of the most interesting things that happened along the way. It became obvious that a great deal of work would be required in order to gain any idea at all as to what Butler was trying to do and there has not really been anywhere near enough time to do him justice. What I have attempted to do is to set the man into his environment, especially in relation to what was happening in the way of painting in New Zealand at the time of his residence here and also to show something of styles then current in Britain and Europe. Into these, Butler seems not to fit anywhere with any

Samuel Butler's Old Homestead at Mesopotamia on the foothills of the Southern Alps, 1861. Reproduced by permission, Chief Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



comfort or ease. And that in fact was Butler, a man running very much against the currents of his age. He was perhaps a man ahead, or certainly out, of his time and yet in some ways very much a part of it.

The writings of Butler on the subject of art and art criticism are as valuable as anything else he produced in the way of art and it is for that reason that this edition has been prepared to accompany the exhibition. All of the material gathered needs to be seen and studied as a whole—the drawings, paintings, photographs and this publication—in order to gain some insight into this man and his work.

Butler's output in terms of painting seems to have been fairly small. As many works as could be traced in the time available, have been recorded. But for the purpose of the exhibition only those which are held in New Zealand collections (and where these have been available for borrowing) will be shown. For the remainder, reliance has to be made on photographs.

With the exception of two sketches which are now in the Canterbury Museum, Butler does not seem to have been active as an artist when he was in New Zealand. Although he had taken lessons in drawing before coming to Canterbury, he did not study painting until after his return to England in 1864. It is for that reason that the third section of the exhibition contains examples of the type of work which was prevalent in academic circles in Britain at that time. This section also provides a comparison with the less-conventional, more amateur, and perhaps early-Butler-like

approach to painting, which is evident in New Zealand colonial painting. Even here there were the convention-followers like J. C. Hoyte, but for the most part, New Zealand painting of the period, while it was less professional, was much fresher. Butler does not seem to have taken any interest in colonial painting. Perhaps he had little opportunity to see any. Anyway, he was more concerned at that stage with returning to England and learning to paint professionally, though this he was later to regret.

Most grateful thanks are extended to The Director and Staff of the National Art Gallery, Wellington, The Librarian, Mr Bagnall and Mr Tony Murray-Oliver, along with other members of the staff of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, Mr Michael Hitchings and Mr Gordon Brown of the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin, The Curator, City of Auckland Art Gallery, the Department of Extension Studies, University of Canterbury and Dr P. B. Maling of Christchurch, all of whom have played a considerable part in making this exhibition and event possible. Indulgence is mercifully craved for all of the shortcomings in this assessment of the work of a man who was perhaps as much of the universal 'Renaissance' man as any Victorian was or could have been. I hope, however, that at least some insight will have been gained by a greater number of people than previously into the life, the times and the work of Samuel Butler.

BRIAN MUIR,
Director.

Butler was remembered in Canterbury as "the small dark man with the penetrating eyes who took up a run at the back of beyond, carted a piano up there on a bullock dray . . . and who, when he emerged from his solitude and came down to Christchurch, was the most fascinating of companions."

Samuel Butler 1835-1902. *An Appreciation*

SAMUEL BUTLER has been one of the enigmas among writers of English, and during his lifetime he was something of a controversial figure, largely because of his expressed opinions in relation to Charles Darwin's theory of the evolution of the human species.

In an age when science came to supercede religion as the preoccupier of most thinking men's thoughts, Butler chose a most precarious position. He was not in the camp of science and he was not altogether in the camp of religion. He was certainly not on the side of religion in its established and institutional form, and that was mainly because he was brought up in it and was expected to remain in it against his will.

Butler did not wholly disagree with Darwin's theory, in fact at first he sided with it and praised it in print. On later analysis, however, he began to change his mind. Darwin was later to modify it somewhat himself, but as far as Butler was concerned they remained unreconciled. Butler's main challenge was over the idea of 'natural selection'. He could not believe that man had reached the stage of development which he had, merely by an accidental method of selection. Instead he substituted the idea of man having an unconscious memory bank which passed on from one generation to the next all that had been learned in the past. This, he said, would account for such inherited traits as learning to walk and to talk. Other learned and inherited traits lay dormant until they were sparked off and into action by some situation in which the memory of these abilities, or knowledge, was recalled and put to use. On to this inheritance Butler believed it was possible for each individual to build of his own free will and determination. It was not enough simply to take what had been handed on and not

do anything with it. It was this idea which led to his opposing the wishes of his father for him to follow in his own footsteps. Butler wanted the freedom to develop in his own way. Consequently he was opposed to any form of indoctrination and the laying down of conventions and formulae in any form, or in any field of human endeavour. That, he believed was the apposition of man's freedom and his evolution. An understanding of this belief is, I think, essential to any understanding of Samuel Butler as a man, and certainly as a writer, a thinker, and as a painter.

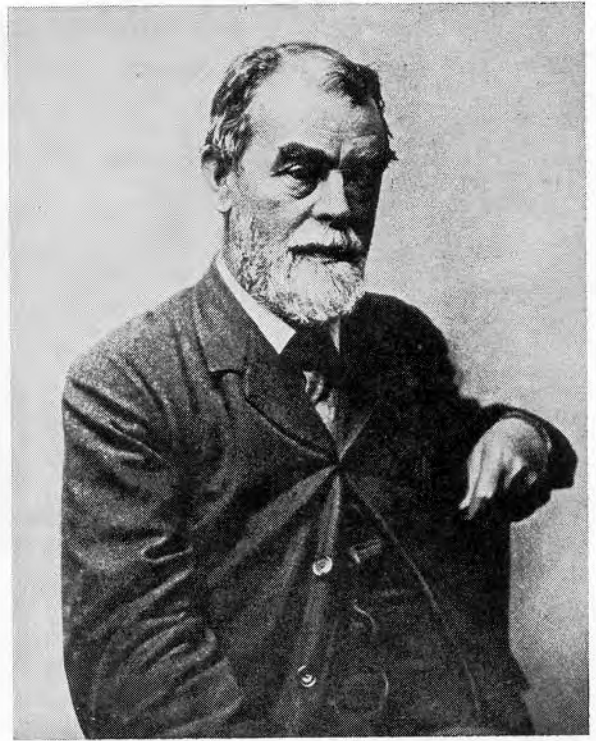
It was as a writer that Butler succeeded most. During his lifetime, however, his writings were not widely read, and of his books only *Erewhon* made for him anything like a financial return. Fortunately he was always (or nearly always) well enough off to be able to pay for the publishing of his books himself. It was not until after his death in 1902 that his most successful book was published, and that was *The Way of All Flesh* which had lain in a drawer for several years.

It is for *Erewhon* and *The Way of All Flesh* that Samuel Butler is best known and remembered today, but it is unfortunate that others of his writings and books, as well as his paintings, are not better known and appreciated for what they are. Overall they help to build a picture of the man and contribute to a greater understanding not only of him as one individual, but by so doing, they also help to create a better understanding of what art is all about.

Erewhon means 'Nowhere' and nowhere is really what it is. It is a satire on the values and attitudes of middle-class Victorian Britain in which, in typical Butler fashion, everything is turned back-to-front. It was an imaginary land



Samuel Butler, about 1859, shortly before going to New Zealand. This was taken while Butler was at Cambridge. Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*, Vol. I (Macmillan), 1920.



Samuel Butler. From a photograph taken by Pizzetta at Varallo Sesia, in 1889. Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*, Vol II (Macmilan), 1920.

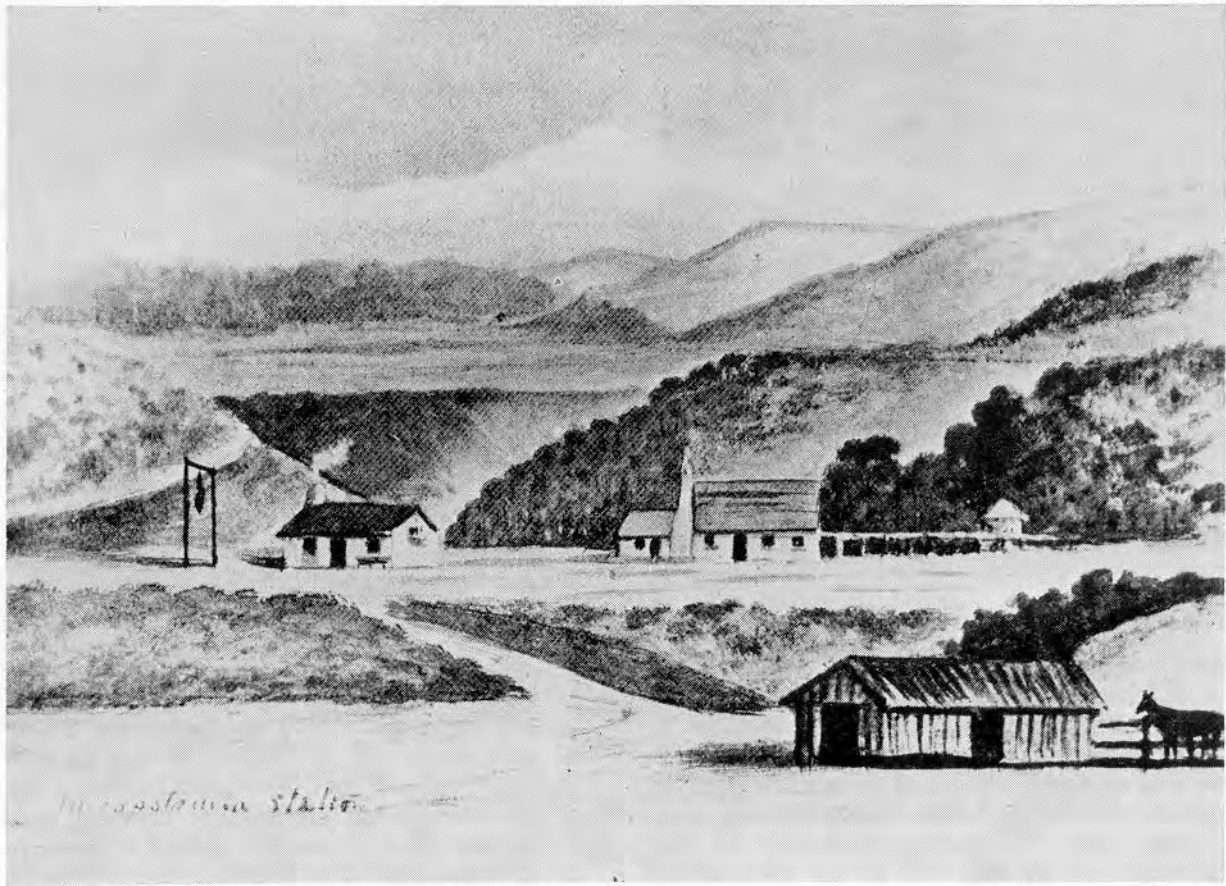
which had passed through a phase of industrialisation (such as Britain was then experiencing) which it had rejected, and closed itself off from the rest of the world, yet retaining its middle-class values and morality. It was these values that Butler, even though he was so much a product of them, held up to ridicule. Yet, while attacking a social order of which he was so very much a part, he still rather hypocritically enjoyed much of what it stood for. He always enjoyed moderate wealth and comfort. While he hated poverty, in reality he never experienced it. In fact a brief term in a poor London parish when he was preparing to be ordained, had only brought out his disgust for poverty. It was something that for the rest of his life he took very much for granted.

Refusal to be ordained incurred his father's wrath, from which—as was so often the case in those days—there were the colonies to escape to. Even in New Zealand, to which he came, while he had to rough it to some extent, he still had sufficient money to be independent and to live reasonably well. Even then he stayed for only four years — just long enough to make enough

to get safely back home again where he continued to live in comfort (with one or two momentary and unfortunate lapses).

Butler returned to do what he had always wanted to do, and that was to be an artist. That, rather than his refusal to be ordained, was what had most upset his father. So great was his father's opposition to his becoming an artist, that he threatened to cut him out of any inheritance he might eventually receive. That threat was another injustice as far as Samuel was concerned. He firmly believed that parents had a duty to be tolerant and understanding to their children and had no right to cut any of them out of the family inheritance simply because they did not do what their parents had planned for them.

Butler's mother seems to have been a more kindly soul than his father, for she seems to have had a hand in persuading her husband to finance their son to the colonies. Consequently Samuel set out for New Zealand with his father's financial support, if not his blessing, in 1859, at the age of twenty-three.



Painting, Mesopotamia Station. From R. B. Booth's *Five Years in New Zealand*, reproduced by permission, Chief Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

Samuel Butler in New Zealand

New Zealand was chosen for Samuel Butler to make his own way because, as his father thought, at least it had been established according to the best of Church of England practices and principles.

On arrival in Canterbury in 1860, ten years after it had been established, Butler found that the most profitable form of investment was to put one's money into land and sheep. With a bit of good management this would soon furnish a good return for whatever capital had been laid out.

In one of his letters home to his father, Butler quite bluntly stated that the only reason that people emigrated to New Zealand was to make as much money as quickly as they could. Later he was to say that in many of the things he had said about the colony he had shown too much

priggishness. Nevertheless, he found the new country little to his liking. Nothing, it seems, could have been culturally more barren and physically speaking it seems he would have been hard-pressed to have found any place more barren and unexciting. He saw it as a place of great unpeopled loneliness and desolation. It did, however, provide him with a store of material on which 'Erewhon' was later to be built.

Butler found that by the time of his arrival most of the land had already been laid claim to, and that what he had thought to be an easy means of acquiring property and the opportunity of wealth, was no longer so. Settlement was already spreading out over the plains and it was to the backcountry that he had to look in the hope that somewhere there was a piece of land that had



Drawing, Mesopotamia about 1862, by Samuel Butler, Canterbury Museum.

been overlooked. On horseback he set out to explore, and he went to places that no other European had been to. It was only by chance that he failed to find a route through to the West Coast, by way of a pass which was to bear the name of its later discoverer, Arthur Dudley Dobson.

After some disappointment, Butler did find what he was looking for. At the head of the Rangitata, on a plateau between Bush Creek and Forest Creek, he came across an area of about five thousand acres that had not yet been claimed. Because the property lay between the two rivers, he called it 'Mesopotamia'. Later he was able to add, by way of purchase, a further five thousand acres.

From Christchurch, Butler and the men he employed had to convey all of their belongings overland, making frequent river crossings, by bullock wagon. Overland went not only the necessary essentials for the maintenance of life itself, but also Butler's books, his pictures, and his piano, to create in the wilderness he had found and claimed, a haven of civilization. There, in between building himself a house and shearing shed and sheep pens and all the other facilities that go with any sheep-station, Butler found time to read, to write, and to think. When he could, he managed to get away to Christchurch to indulge a little in the cultural life of the Provincial capital.

Butler's letters back home were edited by his father and published in 1863 under the title of *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*. This volume has been regarded since as one of the

best accounts of the early years of the settlement's history. Butler, however, refused to acknowledge it, and was furious with his father for having taken liberties with his letters, as well as with putting them into print. According to his version of the story, some of the best passages were edited out. The reaction was another example of his fear and hatred of parental authority being exerted when it was not wanted. His father, on the other hand, seemed to have admired the letters and was endeavouring in his own way to give his son some encouragement.

Butler's investments, along with inheritances which he duly received, provided him with a comfortable life, so much so that he was able to take his time in all that he did, and had to please no-one in the process. Consequently his output was small, and as far as painting was concerned, uneven. It was restricted, too, because he tried to do so many things. Many of them he did very well. He was interested for example, in writing poetry, and wrote what are considered to be some good sonnets. Music, too, caught his attention, especially the compositions of Handel, which he emulated, and whom he regarded as the greatest of all composers.

Butler's writings cover a wide range of interests as well, extending from art, music and philosophy, to consideration of Homer's *Iliad*, Shakespeare's sonnets, Darwin's theories on evolution, and a great deal more. His early travels were recalled in a book called *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and Canton Ticino*. Published in 1881,



Watercolour, by William Packe, Samuel Butler's cottages at Mesopotamia c. 1868. Reproduced by permission Chief Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

this recorded his thoughts on art and art history as well as discourses on the best methods of going about painting. A later work, *Ex Voto*, is his discovery of a minor and long-forgotten Italian artist called Tabachetti.

In all of the things he did, Butler was very much an amateur in the truest, Victorian sense of the word—and that is not being in any way derogatory. He was truly a 'lover' of the arts, and devoted nearly his whole lifetime to them. Like most artists and critics, he had, or soon formed, very strong opinions about most things. He regarded most of the great painters of the past, for example, as being bad, or mostly bad. Some of the minor ones and forgotten ones, though, he found to be very good. What he tried to distinguish, however, was genuine labour of love from shallow imitation and affectation. In criticising, he also revelled in being criticised, though inwardly he would much rather have been openly acknowledged and praised in his own day. Since that was not to be the case, he settled for what he hoped would be eventual recognition, at least by a small group of learned men—perhaps in much the same way that he had discovered and momentarily brought to life again several lesser Italians whom he admired for their unconcealed honesty

and truthfulness even if it wore a coarsely-woven coat.

When he died in 1902, Butler's passing was hardly noticed. It remained for his close friend, Henry Festing Jones, to write his Memoirs, and for George Bernard Shaw to translate much of the Butler message to the twentieth century. It was something that perhaps only a wit like Shaw could have done. The year after his death, however, the book that he had put away when his friend Miss Savage died, was published, and the appearance of *The Way of All Flesh* caused those who had previously mocked to take a new and objective look at the man who had seemed to be a man of all trades and master of none. *The Way of All Flesh* could be regarded as his most successful book, at least in the sense of popularity, but that is hardly the way to assess any work of merit. Butler was at last hailed as one who sometimes had something worth saying and when he did, could say it well. Some, like Shaw, overstated Butler's greatness with sweeping generalisations. The result is, that with some whittling down, Butler has retained throughout this century, in the field of satirical criticism at least, a narrow but sturdy seat.

Samuel Butler as a Painter

While a considerable amount has been written about Butler the critic and Butler the writer, very little has been written about Butler the painter.

Perhaps Butler said all that could be said or needs to be said, about himself and his art. At least, that is what could easily be seen to be the case. That, however, would simply be to take Butler at face—and at his own—value. This is probably what he would have wanted least of all. All of his life—at least that is until he finally declared that it was all over as far as painting went and thereafter painted only for his own amusement—he wanted to be an artist. As he said himself, he spent probably more time on painting or learning to paint, than on any other form of art that he practised. Yet in spite of all that, he laid down his brush and formally proclaimed himself a failure as a painter.

“I am free to confess that in respect of painting I am a Failure”, he wrote of himself. “If I had approached painting as I have approached book-writing and music . . . I should have been all right. As it was, I have been all wrong. . . . I listened to the nonsense about how I ought to study before beginning to paint, and about never painting without nature, and the result was that I learned to study but not to paint . . . I have spent far more time on painting than I have on anything else, and have failed at it more than I have failed at any other respect. . . .”

Perhaps it is ironic that the man who wanted to be an artist, who opposed his father's wishes because of his ambition and who journeyed to the other side of the earth in order to assert his independence, and who then came home to enrol for lessons in his life-long ambition, could have failed so badly and admitted to such failure. Perhaps that admission was a part of his supreme honesty with himself. Perhaps it was only an imagined failure after all.

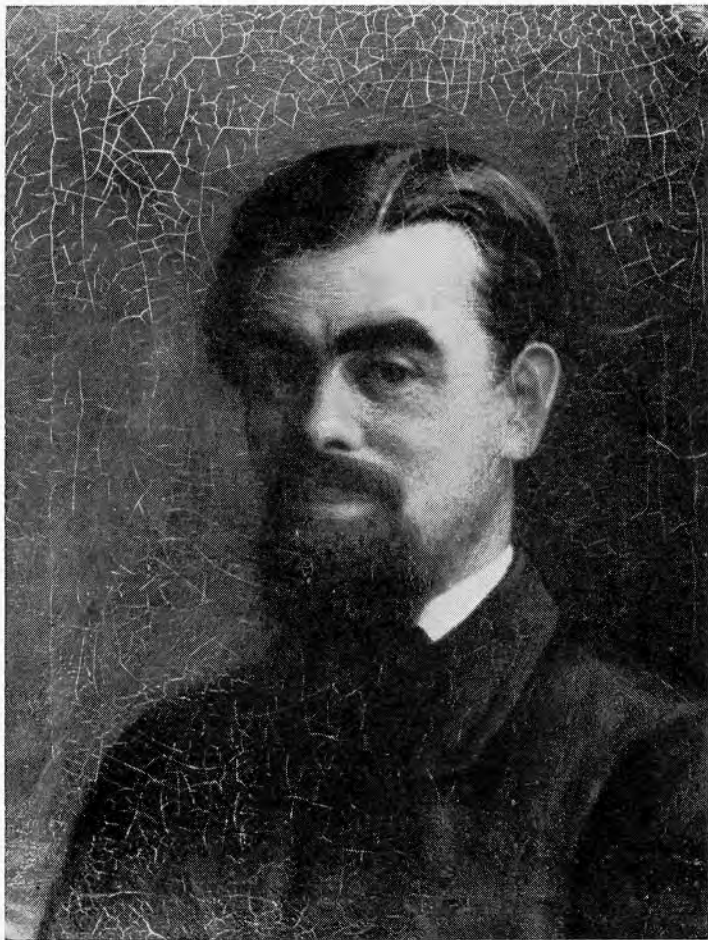
If he gave up trying to paint seriously, he fortunately did not give up writing and his books and notebooks contain a great deal of interesting and valuable comment on the subject of art. Looking back over his life, he knew, or thought he knew, just exactly where he had gone wrong, and why. He said that he had tried too hard to paint, because that was what he had wanted to do most of all. He had tried to do it, as he thought, properly. On returning to England from New Zealand in 1864, he took the advice offered to him

by friends and set about learning how to paint. He had already taken some lessons in how to draw before going to New Zealand and the two drawings that remain of what he did in Canterbury seem to show that he had mastered what he had learnt very well, for they are accomplished little works, economical and expressive.

Butler first of all enrolled at Heatherley's School of Art. It was there that he met Miss Savage, already referred to. With her he was to maintain, until she died in 1885, a steady stream of correspondence. From her he seems to have drawn strength and inspiration. It was she, for example, who was helping him to rewrite *The Way of All Flesh* when she died, and Butler put it away in a drawer, as though, without her guiding interest, he had not the will or the ability to complete it.

Later he was to study at the Royal Academy school and had paintings accepted by the Royal Academy for exhibition. The first of these was called 'Family Prayers' and depicted a subject with which he was most familiar. It was painted in a somewhat awkward and naive hand, obviously very much from the heart, and appears very akin to Italian primitive paintings. A portrait of himself, now in the collection of the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington, has much of the same rather innocent, iconoclastic clarity, simplicity and charm that marks most of his early work. The latter is an especially captivating work of great intensity and observation. The later paintings show an increasing degree of tonality and technical skill developing. This, of course, was what Butler thought he had wanted to learn. He was soon to realise that this was not him, and that this was not going to be the way he wanted to make his statements in paint. He was to call a halt, and to ever-after blame the conventions of academicism for having stifled his natural abilities as a painter and killed his creativity. By comparison with the Turnbull portrait, the self-portrait in the collection of the McDougall Gallery is very much of the academic type. It is not of the most accomplished academic painting, but it certainly comes nearest to it. It is also dated, August 1873—just three years before his work was no longer accepted by the Royal Academy.

“Fortunately for me there are no academies for teaching people how to write books, or I should have fallen into them as I did into those for painting,” he said, “and instead of writing, should have



Painting, Samuel Butler, Self-portrait. Oils on Canvas, 1873. Robert McDougall Art Gallery.

spent my time and money being told that I was learning how to write. The more I see of academicism, the more I distrust it."

Butler believed that the way to paint was to go at it and solve problems as they arose, not learn processes and stock techniques and make art rather in the manner of making a line of pots or pans. Rather, he said, to go about painting "... with the aim and objective of recording in the most effective way, some strongly-felt interest or affection. Where there is neither interest nor desire to record with good effect, there is but sham art or none at all. Where both these are fully present, no matter how rudely and inarticulately, there is great art". An artist's touches, he added, "... are sometimes no more articulate than the barking of a dog who would call attention to something without exactly knowing what—this is as it should be, and he is a great artist who can be depended on not to bark at nothing."

What Butler was getting at in his ideas on learning to paint was that it is better to begin by working from instinct and natural aptitude rather than by learning other people's tricks of the trade. The sole role of the creative artist as he saw it, was to say something that was worth saying. How it was said and how well it might be said was over to the individual artist to carry out as best he could, and to his own satisfaction. The artist, he contended, knows when his statement can communicate. Such an attitude put Butler very much in the forefront as far as thinking and developing artists were concerned at that time. Indeed, such thoughts would have been profoundly shocking to a great many people at the time, both within art circles and without. In fact, such attitudes were still shocking and scandalous to most New Zealanders in the nineteen forties when the painting by Frances Hodgkins 'The Pleasure Garden' created such an uproar in Christ-



Head of a Girl. Oil on Board. Samuel Butler, 1868. Reproduced by permission, Chief Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.



Portrait of an unidentified Woman. Oil on cardboard. Samuel Butler, c. 1865. Reproduced by permission, Chief Librarian, Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.

church and reverberated around the country. Perhaps it is not quite dead even yet. It takes a realisation such as this to feel something of the importance of Butler's statements and beliefs of a century and more ago. How easy and 'sensible' it must have been then, and how important, to have laughed him off as unscientific and a crank. Not so, Samuel Butler in his day was a revolutionary, at least in thought. Today, what he has to say seems so obvious and his intentions can still be quite readily understood. In fact as the study of the history of art has developed in this century, much of what Butler said has become commonplace. It is in fact the innovators who have captured the attention of art historians more than the academicians. It is the constant revolution from innovation to innovation, in an attempt to avoid exactly the type of stalemate and conventions that Butler spoke against, that art historians have concentrated upon, often very much at the alarm and total incomprehension of the public. How else could there have been such a thing as 'The Pleasure Garden Incident'?

While art moves from innovation to innovation and the thread spins on, fragile and sometimes difficult to see, fears continue and horrid warnings sound the knell of art, artists and society. What

utter rubbish, and how ironic it was that while Butler, seemingly in middle-class comfort and isolation, was propounding his ideas to an inattentive audience, great innovations and revolutions were taking place. The really important developments in painting in his time — pre-Raphaelitism and impressionism were already taking place. Butler wanted a break to be made with academicism, and there was a break. Butler, unfortunately was not involved with that break, largely perhaps because he was too fond of the very social position he so decried, and he grudgingly chose to remain a conservative when it really came to the crunch.

Butler's views on art follow quite closely his ideas on evolution, to the extent that they echo his belief in the latent ability in all of us to do most things if we but try, or are suddenly confronted with a situation where the need arises. He believed, therefore, that everyone could be an artist, if they would simply try, and trying to do something, and solving the problems as they arose, was to him the essence of all meaningful learning. "Any man who can write", he said, "can draw to a not inconsiderable extent. Look at the Bayeux tapestry; yet Matilda probably never had a drawing lesson in her life." (Matilda was the

Painting, Family Prayers. Oil. Samuel Butler, 1864. "I did this in 1864, and if I had gone on doing things out of my head instead of making studies, I should have been alright," S.B. Canvas, 20ins by 16ins. Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*, Vol. II (Macmillan), 1920.



consort of William the Conqueror and the making of the so-called 'tapestry' has been attributed to her.)

The apprenticeship system of learning was the one which was favoured by Butler as the best way to learn to do anything. "The academic system" he said, "consists in giving people the rules for doing things. The apprenticeship system consists in letting them do it, with just a trifle of supervision." He was thoroughly opposed, for example, to the way in which he said Michelangelo painted rocks, according to a conventional formula which he had been taught. Why, wondered Butler, had he done that, when there were rocks all around him that he could have closely studied and painted in his own way. And what rocks were to Michelangelo, the common occurrences of everyday life were, as far as he could see, to other great painters. The result of what he termed "this neglect to kiss the soil, of this attempt to be always soaring, is that these giants are for the most part now very uninteresting while the smaller men who preceded them grow fresher and more delightful yearly."

Butler's interests in a greater simplicity in painting led him to the discovery of the early Italian, so-called primitive, painters who were active before the Renaissance. Of course, the Renaissance itself was very much a reaction against this with a return to the inspiration of

the Greek and Roman periods of classicism. The highly-developed conventions evident in academic Victorian painting were, in a sense, the very end of what the Renaissance had set in motion, the stark end of extreme artifice in art. Butler might have called this almost total preoccupation with technical accomplishment, 'all dog and no bark'. Technically superb works with little to say, stand as silent testimonials to a very uncreative phase, which fortunately was already being buried by the development of 'plein air' and impressionism.

In the new quest for an escape from the straightjacket which academicism has placed on nineteenth century painting, was the beginning of that great twentieth century movement, a return to the simplicity and even the naivety of earlier ages beyond the Renaissance, and as far as the twentieth century was concerned, beyond even Greece and Rome, beyond the history of art in Europe itself, to other areas of the world where there had been more simple and direct means of expression through art.

Butler was not alone in his love for the Italian primitive painters. Prince Albert was a devotee at a time when there was little interest even among connoisseurs. Generally it was seen as child-like and amateur and undeveloped. It was a relic of an earlier stage of man's development, and Darwin's theory of evolution clearly indicated—as did the great development of industrial Victorian Bri-

tain upon whose growing empire the sun never set, that man was growing better and better and that all he undertook became better and better. Technically, academic painting by the end of the Victorian era had never been bettered. Creatively, it could hardly have been more dead.

Butler sensed that, but for him it was too late to do anything about it. "Academies," Butler stated, "can bring out men who can paint hair very like hair, and eyes very like eyes, but this is not enough. This is grammar and deportment, we want wit and a kindly nature, and these cannot be got from academies. The same . . . holds good with writing as with painting. We want less word-painting and fine phrases and more observations at first hand." Art, he believed, ". . . should be produced for the pleasure it gives the producer, and the pleasure he thinks it will give to a few of whom he is fond; but neither money nor people whom he does not know personally should be thought of."

"Such a society as I have proposed", Butler recorded, "would not remain incorrupt long . . . the members would try to imitate professional men in spite of their rules, or if they escaped this and after a while got to paint well, they would become dogmatic, and rebellion against their authority would be as necessary ere long as it was against that of their predecessors, but the balance on the whole would be to the good."

Butler did not state anything that is not now known by art historians, or even artists and art teachers, and such a 'balance' that he talks about does in fact pretty well operate today. His efforts to rid himself and others of conventions was as evident in his paintings as it was in other facets of his life. Such opposition does not seem to be entirely the result of his upbringing. The circumstances of his childhood certainly seem to have highlighted his independence of thought, and even though he is sometimes too damning and dogmatic, usually there is half-truth in what he says, and sometimes a good deal more. His ideas on the mental and creative freedom of the artist are certainly close to the mark, if, at times, a little too hard on the institutions of teaching and learning.

Having isolated the problem as far as his painting was concerned, what then went wrong? Part of Butler's trouble, perhaps, was that he was too unsure of himself and of his general direction. It was this uncertainty that seems to have made him such a dilemma and such a difficult person to come to terms with. This is also no doubt what makes him such an interesting person to study,

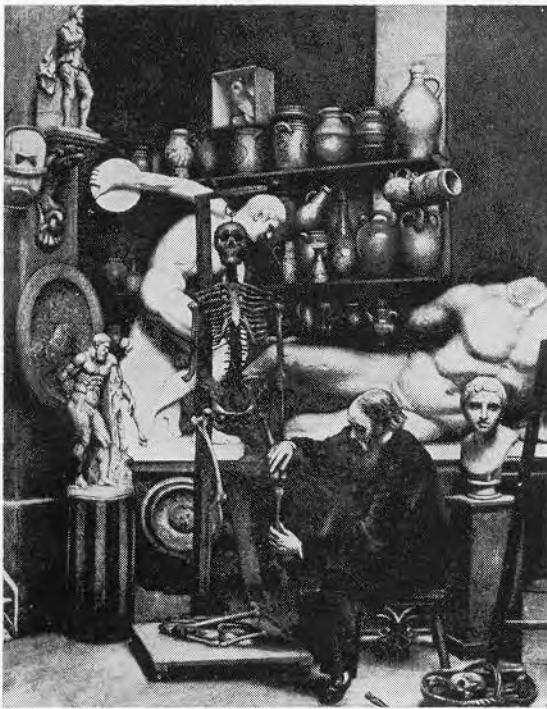


Painting, Old Fetter Lane, London. c. 1870. Samuel Butler. Watercolour. Mrs W. B. Tidy.

from any point of view. He was as one of his biographers, G. D. H. Cole has said, always trying to escape from some situation he had got himself into, and he was never really happy unless he was having to try to escape. He had to escape from parental control, yet he never really abandoned his family. He had to escape from New Zealand because he went there with only one purpose and hated the place from the start. Having finally embarked triumphantly upon his career towards being an artist he had to escape from that. The academies had done him in. His whole life might be summed up as one great effort to escape from convention—convention which he mischievously continued to court because he could not live without it.

When Butler said that he could not paint, that he had failed, perhaps the truth is that he no longer needed to paint. He had found by experience that what he wanted most to say, he was able to say through his writings. Such then, is the story of the progress of Samuel Butler towards being an artist.

The total view of any man can only be seen when all facets have been looked at and put together. Painting as we have seen was only one facet of Samuel Butler. Of all his facets, we know that it was his writings that aroused most atten-



Painting, Mr Heatherley's Holiday. Samuel Butler. Oil 1874. Canvas, 36ins by 28ins. Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*, Vol I (Macmillan), 1920.

tion and still continue to do so. He lives for posterity on a reputation gained as a satirist and critic of his times. He should also continue to be looked at as the man of many parts that he was. His attitudes towards painting really were an important part of him, but they were also very important in the context of his age. It would be safe to say that had not pre-Raphaelitism and impressionism been the ways out of the deadlock that Butler saw academicism imposing on painting, then had Butler been a persevering artist, his return to the simple and more direct approach of the primitive Italian painters might have brought a return to primitivism much sooner than it did occur. In that case Butler would have been as significant a painter as he was a satirist. He might even have been greater. That, however, is pure conjecture. What remains is that Butler produced a small number of paintings which clearly show his progression as a painter from a primitive, stylised mode of expression, to an increasing technical ability consistent with the study and the implementation of academic conventions and principles of painting. For the most part these works still hold a considerable and varying degree of interest. Some are very good, both as rather primitive, or naive works of great conviction, and as examples of academic portraiture. He

was not a significant painter, but he could paint well, and there are sufficient extant examples to support this assessment. His development may have suffered from the fact that the will was not matched by the need to succeed.

In summing up, I have the feeling that Butler would rather like us to treat him as he treated the lesser Italian painters whom he discovered himself in *Alps and Sanctuaries*. That is rather how he does emerge—a rather strange and unfamiliar figure, and that probably is how he would have wanted it. In relation to his writings, he rather thought of himself as a novelist. Ultimately he turned out, during the process of evaluation and assessment, to be more of a satirist and a critic. As far as his art is concerned it could be said that while he would have thought of himself as a painter, had he lived in the twentieth century he might, with a touch of encouragement and guidance, have turned out to be an art historian.

FOOTNOTE:

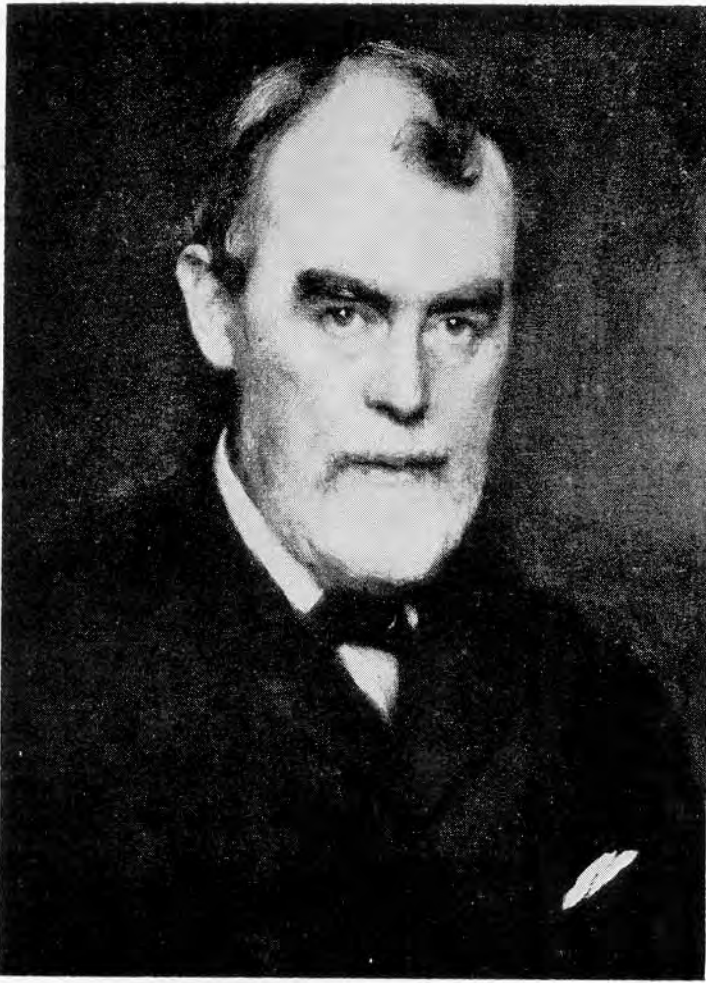
The quotations used have been taken from Butler's own book, *Alps and Sanctuaries of Piedmont and Canton Ticino*.



Photograph. No. 15, Clifford's Inn; Butler's Sittingroom. Photograph by Samuel Butler. Reproduced from H. F. Jones's *Memoir*, Vol. I (Macmillan), 1920.

A Brief Biographical Chronology

- 1835 Born 4 December at Langar, near Bingham, Nottinghamshire. His father was Thomas Butler, Rector of Langar. His grandfather, Dr. Samuel Butler was headmaster of Shrewsbury School, and later Bishop of Lichfield.
- 1843 First visited Italy. He was later to make many visits.
- 1846-48 Attended school of Allesley, near Coventry.
- 1848-54 Second visit to Italy.
- 1854 Attended St. John's College, Cambridge.
- 1858 Bracketed twelfth in Classical Tripos.
- 1858-59 Contributed to 'The Eagle', the College magazine. Had a taste of parish work in London and prepared for ordination. Took lessons in drawing.
- 1859 Refused to be ordained. Emigrated to New Zealand.
- 1860 27 January, arrived at Lyttelton, Canterbury.
- 1860-64 Studied Darwin and Christian evidences while in New Zealand. 'Forest Creek' manuscript written, and contributions made to the *Press* on Darwinism.
- 1864 Returned to England, settling in Clifford's Inn. Began taking lessons in painting. Painted 'Family Prayers'.
- 1867 Studied at Heatherley's School of Art. Met Miss Savage.
- 1869-76 Exhibited at the Royal Academy.
- 1870 Began writing *Erewhon*.
- 1872 Began writing *The Way of All Flesh*.
- 1873 Death of his mother.
- 1874 Financial difficulties through collapse of his investments. Went to Canada (1873-74).
- 1876 Met Henry Festing Jones who was to remain a close friend and later to be his biographer.
- 1880-83 *The Way of All Flesh* being re-written.
- 1881 Financial stability restored.



Painting, Portrait of Samuel Butler by Gogin. In the National Portrait Gallery, London. Reproduced from H. F. Jones' *Memoir*, Vol. II (Macmillan), 1920.

- 1883 Began to compose music in the style of Handel.
- 1885 Death of Miss Savage—they were already becoming estranged.
- 1886 Death of his father—they had always been estranged.
Inherited his father's legacy.

- 1887 Began translating *The Odyssey* and formulating theories on Homer.
- 1896 Portrait painted by his friend Gogin (who had accompanied him in Italy). Now in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
- 1901 Wrote sonnets on Miss Savage.
- 1902 Died on 18 June after an illness.

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List of known Sketches, Drawings and Paintings by Butler

This list is based on that prepared for the Samuel Butler Collection, St. John's College, Cambridge by Henry Festing Jones and A. T. Bartholomew (Publishers: Heffer and Son Ltd., Cambridge, 1921.) It includes a number of additions and minor alterations. In the introduction to *The Samuel Butler Collection*, Jones wrote:

"By his Will, Butler bequeathed his pictures, sketches and studies to his executors to be destroyed and otherwise disposed of as they might think best, the proceeds (if any) to fall into residue. They were not sold: some were given to Shrewsbury School, some to the British Museum; one, an unfinished sketch of the back of the house in which Keats died on the Piazza di Spagna, Rome, to the Keats and Shelley Memorial there; many were distributed among his friends, Alfred Cathie taking fifteen and I taking all that were left over."

Later, in 1917 anxious to have the paintings in a place of safety away from German air-raids, Cathie arranged for Jones to buy his share. Learning that he intended to give his collection to St. John's College, Cathie then asked Jones not to buy all of them as he would like to give two of them to St. John's himself. Jones later gave his collection to the College.

There are very few sketches or pictures by Butler between 1888 and 1896, because at that time he was pre-occupied with photography. It was not until 1896, when 'The Life of Dr. Butler' appeared that he was able to return seriously to sketching, and by that time he was over sixty and too old (according to Jones) to be burdened with the paraphernalia necessary for oils; he therefore confined himself to watercolours.

- 1854 *Civita Vecchia*. Black and white outline sketch drawn during Butler's second visit to Italy.
- A View in Cambridge*. Watercolour. Probably done while Butler was an undergraduate.
- c. 1862 *The Cottages at Mesopotamia*. Pen and ink

sketch. Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand.

Mesopotamia. Pen and ink sketch. Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand.

- 1864 *Family Prayers*. Oil. Reproduced as the frontispiece of Vol. II of Henry Festing Jones's *Memoir* (1919).

- c. 1865 *Head of a Woman*. Oil on board. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand.

- 1865 *His own Head*. Oil. Inscribed 'S.B. Feb. 18, 1865.' Jones states: "He painted at home as well as at Heatherley's and by way of a cheap model hung up a looking glass near the window of his painting room and made many studies of his own head. He gave some of them away and destroyed and painted over others, but after his death we found a number in his rooms—some of the earlier ones very curious (*Memoir* Ch. VIII). This is one of the earlier ones. It is inscribed 'S.B. Feb. 18, 1865'. We found also a still more curious one which was given to Gogin who was interested in it as being the work of an untaught student."

- Corner of Butler's Sitting Room, 15 Clifford's Inn*. Oil. Reproduced in the '*Memoir*' Vol. I p. 246. Believed to be dated Aug. 1865, and signed 'S.B.'

- 1866 *Dieppe, The Castle*. Watercolour. Butler visited Dieppe that year.

Dieppe. Small watercolour drawing.

Two Heads done as a Study at Heatherley's. Oil. Dieppe is in the background. Jones believed he used the two previously-listed watercolours done in Dieppe. The idea of the painting was to make portraits of two heads with a landscape background in the manner of Giovanni Bellini.

- 1868 *Head of a Girl*. Oil. Signed and dated upper right. Alexander Turnbull Collection, Wellington, New Zealand.

- Drawing of a Cast of the Antinous as Hermes.*
Dated December 28th, 1868.
Drawing of a Hand and Foot.
Thomas Cass. Oil. Signed and dated 'S. Butler, 1868' right centre. Canterbury Museum, Christchurch, New Zealand. There are close similarities between this and the self-portrait in the McDougall Collection.
- 1869 *Miss Atcheson.* Accepted by the Royal Academy.
c. 1870 *A Fir Tree.* Black and White drawing.
Old Fetter Lane, London. Watercolour. Signed on poster at right of scene. Original in the position of Butler's great-niece, Mrs W. B. Tidy.
The Valle di Sambucco. above Fusio. Oil.
Four Watercolour Notes in One Frame. Supposed to be all on the South Downs.
- 1871 *A Reverie.* Oil. Accepted by the Royal Academy.
The Rocca Borromes, Angera, Lago Maggiore. Entrance to the Castle, 1871. Watercolour.
The Rocca Borromes. A Room in the Castle. Watercolour.
Amsteg. Watercolour.
Fobello. A Christening. Watercolour.
Varallo - Sesia. The Washing Place. Watercolour.
- 1873 *Self-Portrait.* Oil on canvas. Signed and dated. 'Samuel Butler, Aug. 1873, middle right side.' McDougall Art Gallery Collection, Christchurch, New Zealand. Formerly Canterbury University College, Christchurch, to which it was presented after Butler's death.
- 1874 *Mr Heatherley's Holiday.* Oil. Exhibited at the Royal Academy, 1874. Now in the National Gallery of British Art (Tate), London. The *Notebooks* (1912) p.12. Reproduced in photogravure, in the *Memoir* Vol II, p. 211.
A Child's Head. Oil. Accepted by the Royal Academy.
- 1876 *Don Quixote.* Accepted by the Royal Academy.
A Girl's Head. Accepted by the Royal Academy.
Monte Bisbino, Near Como. Oil.
From, S. Nicolao, Mendrisio. Oil.
View in the Leventina Valley (?) Oil sketch.
- c. 1877 *Leatherhead Church.* Watercolour.
Montreal, Canada, from The Mountain. Oil.
- 1877 *Calpiogna, Val Leventina.* Oil.
Three Sketches on one panel in the Val Leventina. Oil.
Calonico. Oil.
Tengia. Oil.
Prato. Oil.
Lago Tom, Piora, Val Leventina. Oil.
- 1878 *Sketch of His Own Head.* Oil. Dated April, 1878. Reproduced as frontispiece in *Memoir* Vol. I.
Calonico. Oil Sketch.
Rossura. Oil Sketch.
Rossura, from inside the Porch looking out. Oil sketch on panel.
- 1879 *Handel When A Boy.* Pencil sketch. Dated Dec. 15, 1879.
Oxford, Kent, from inside the Church looking out through the Porch.
- 1880 *Portrait of Samuel Butler.* Self-portrait. Oil. Now at the Schools, Shrewsbury.
Edgeware. Pencil and ink drawing.
Rimella Val Mastallone, up the Valley from Varallo-Sesia. Oil.
- Gynsford, Kent.* Oil.
On the S. Bernardino Pass. Oil.
Bellinzona, The Castle. Oil.
Mesocco, The Castle. Oil.
Bellinzona, The Castle. Oil.
- 1881 *The Sarco Monte, Varese, from the Seventh or Flagellation Chapel.* Drawing in pencil and ink.
Boulogne-sur-Mer, La Porte Gayole. Drawing in pencil and ink.
- 1882 *Portrait of Henry Festing Jones.* Oil.
Castello Fénis, Val d'Aosta.
- 1883 *Edward James Jones.* Oil.
- 1887 *Chiavenna.* Oil.
- 1896 *Meien near Wassen on the S. Gottardo.* Watercolour.
- c. 1897 *Trapani and The Islands from Mount Eryx.* Pen and ink sketch.
- c. 1898 *Wembley, Middlesex.* Oil.
Copy: of a Landscape behind a small Madonna and Child by Bartolomeo Veneto, signed and dated 1505.
Trapani and The Islands from Mount Eryx. Wash drawing.
- 1900 *Calatafimi, Sund. May 13th 1900* Pencil sketch.
Taormina, The Theatre and Etna. Watercolour.
Siena. Watercolour.
Pisa, inside the top of the Leaning Tower. Watercolour.
- 1901 *Wassen.* Watercolour.
Trapani, S. Linerale and Lo Scoglio di Mal Consiglio. Watercolour.
Rough sketch of the islands, Marettino, Levanzo and Favignana.

In addition to the above-listed works there is in the Samuel Butler Collection at St. John's a portfolio containing miscellaneous drawings, prints, etchings, photographs, etc., some by Butler, others by Gogin and Sadler. The Collection also contains (with the exception of a few which were lost) the original drawings for *Alps and Sanctuaries*. These were listed by Jones for 1881, not because they were done then, but because the book was published then. Some of the drawings are by Gogin, who did the frontispiece as well as introducing the figures into those of Butler's drawings which have them.

The self-portrait which is now in the McDougall Gallery Collection does not seem to have been listed previously, and certainly it was not known that it was signed and dated. It is listed by S. B. Harkness in his book *The Career of Samuel Butler, 1835-1902, A Bibliography* (Bodley Head, 1955) as 'a third portrait of Samuel Butler by himself, now at Christchurch, New Zealand, with the date 1880.' Such a listing must have been by pure conjecture. There is also a watercolour by Butler in the Canterbury Museum of 'The Rectory, Langar' and another, of a canal scene, and probably done on the Continent, in the Hocken Library, University of Otago, Dunedin. Both of these appear to belong to the last phase of Butler's painting.

All of the Butler paintings now in the Turnbull Library, Wellington, came from the late William du Bois Ferguson of Wellington, a nephew of William Sefton Moorhouse to whom Butler gave the paintings.

Unless otherwise stated, the works listed above are in the Samuel Butler Collection, St. John's College, Cambridge.

CATALOGUE OF AN EXHIBITION

SAMUEL BUTLER & HIS CONTEMPORARIES

*shown at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery,
Christchurch, 15-28 May, 1972*

SECTION ONE—PHOTOGRAPHS

1. *Samuel Butler in 1862*. Turnbull Library.
2. *Butler Cottage, Mesopotamia, 1861*. Turnbull Library.
3. *Interior of Butler's Cottage, Mesopotamia, c. 1868*. From a watercolour by William Packe. The original is in the possession of Judith Packe. Turnbull Library.
4. *Mesopotamia Station*. From a painting by R. B. Booth used to illustrate his book 'Five Years in New Zealand'. Turnbull Library.
5. *Old Fetter Lane, London*. Photograph of a watercolour by Butler, in the possession of Mrs W. B. Tidy. Turnbull Library.
6. *Samuel Butler*. A photograph of 'A sketch from his own head, April 1878'. Original in St. John's College, Cambridge. Turnbull Library.
7. *Family Prayers*. Photograph of Butler's painting of 1864.
This, and the following are from Henry Festing Jones's 'Memoir of Samuel Butler,' published in two volumes by Macmillan and Co., 1920 edition, and are included as part of this critical assessment of Butler.
8. *No. 15 Clifford's Inn*. A side of Butler's sitting room, from a photograph by Butler.
9. *Mr Heatherley's Holiday*. The original painting in oils now in the Tate Gallery, London.
10. *Samuel Butler, self-portrait, 1878*. From an oil painting now at St. John's College, Cambridge.

11. *Samuel Butler*. From an oil painting by Charles Gogin in the National Portrait Gallery, London.
12. *Samuel Butler*. From a photograph about 1858.
13. *Samuel Butler*. From a photograph taken while he was at Cambridge.
14. *Samuel Butler*. From a photograph taken at Varallo - Sesia in 1889.
15. *Alfred Emery Cathie*. Photograph of an oil painting by Butler.

SECTION TWO—PAINTINGS OF EARLY CANTERBURY: *People and Setting*

16. *Clent Hills Sheep and Cattle Station 1864, on the Ashburton River above Mt. Somers*, by R. B. Booth. Hocken Library.
Booth was a primitive painter whom Butler would no doubt have admired for his unaffected truthfulness to himself. He was also associated with Butler in Canterbury. (See Bibliography.)
17. *Riccarton, Messrs Deans Station, Canterbury, 1849*. Watercolour by Sir William Fox (1812-1893). Hocken Library. Fox, one-time Premier of New Zealand was earlier on, a surveyor for the New Zealand Company. He too was a 'natural'; an unaffected watercolourist who recorded the very early years of settlement as shown here.
18. *Port Cooper (Lyttelton), Natives*. Watercolour by Sir William Fox, 1849, Hocken Library.
19. *Port Lyttelton, Immigrants' Luggage dis-*

embarking, Jan. 1851. Watercolour by Sir William Fox. Hocken Library.

20. *Lyttelton, c. 1858.* Watercolour by an unknown artist. National Art Gallery, Wellington.

SECTION THREE—COLONIAL PAINTING IN NEW ZEALAND ABOUT 1860

The picturesque and often dramatic landscape was a constant source of subject matter. Most painters were talented amateurs, some showing varying degrees of nineteenth century watercolour convention in painting, derived from masters like de Wint, Cotman, Cox, Turner and others. Some were simply gifted amateurs who painted for the love of painting and who, like Fox, Kinder and Buchanan, have left us some strikingly fine examples of their talent.

21. *Lake Tekapo, 1866.* Watercolour by Nicholas Chevalier (1828-1902). National Art Gallery, Wellington. Chevalier was an itinerant, professional artist who also painted in Australia.
22. *Milford Sound.* Watercolour by John Buchanan (1819-1898). Hocken Library, Dunedin. A draughtsman who was also an amateur topographical painter. His works were not known publicly during his lifetime.
23. *Anakiwa, Queen Charlotte Sound.* Watercolour by John Kinder (1819-1903). City of Auckland Art Gallery. Rev. Kinder was a fine amateur photographer as well as a talented watercolourist. While he lived in Auckland there were few parts of the country he did not reach or traverse by foot.
24. *The Artist's Farm at Tamaki.* Painting in oils by Albin Martin. City of Auckland Art Gallery. Martin was a professional painter-settler in Auckland, whose work was weighted towards romanticism and academicism.
25. *After Rain, Lake Wakatipu, 1896.* Watercolour by William Matthew Hodgkins (1833-1898). City of Auckland Art Gallery. A Dunedin Barrister and Solicitor, also a talented amateur watercolourist. The father of Frances Hodgkins and 'father' of art in Dunedin.
26. *On Collingwood Goldfields, c. 1861.* Watercolour by J.C. Richmond, (1822-1898). National Art Gallery, Wellington.

An engineer turned settler, Richmond produced some fine watercolours of early New Zealand.

27. *A West Coast Road.* Watercolour by John Gully (1819-1888). City of Auckland Art Gallery. A painter of romantic and misty landscapes, he was a friend and associate of Richmond.

SECTION FOUR—PAINTINGS BY SAMUEL BUTLER

28. *Portrait of a Man.* Oil. Canterbury Society of Arts.
29. *Head of a Woman, c. 1865.* Oil on board. Unsigned. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
30. *His Own Head.* Oil. Inscribed 'S.B. Feb. 18, 1865.' Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
31. *Head of a Girl.* (1868). Oil. Signed and dated upper right. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington.
32. *Self-portrait.* Oil on canvas. Signed and dated 'S. Butler, Aug. 1873' centre right. Robert McDougall Art Gallery Collection, Christchurch.
33. *Canal Scene.* Watercolour. Hocken Library, Dunedin.

SECTION FIVE—PAINTINGS BY BRITISH ARTISTS (who were contemporary with Butler).

These have all been drawn from the collection of the McDougall Art Gallery.

34. *Incident in the Life of Benvenuto Cellini.* Watercolour by George Cattermole (1800-1868). This gives some idea of the reliance on earlier so-called civilized periods for suitable subject matter.
35. *An audience.* Watercolour by Charles Cattermole, R.I. The Renaissance once again, seen as a high point in Western culture and handled technically with great delicacy.
36. *Drawing for Harper's Magazine.* Pen and ink drawing by George du Maurier (1834-1896). Butler thought the less pretentious illustrations for popular magazines reflecting everyday Victorian life — even if crudely (as well as melodramatically) — more preferable.

37. *Drawing for Cornhill Magazine*. Pen and ink drawing also by du Maurier.
38. *Drawing for 'Punch', 1896*. Pen and ink drawing by du Maurier.
39. *Teresina*. A portrait in oils on canvas by Frederic, Lord Leighton, PPRA (1830-1896). A very fine example of mid-nineteenth century academic portraiture.
40. *The End of the Chapter*. Oil on canvas, by G. Paul Chalmers, RSA (1836-1878). A further example of good academic painting by a lesser-known painter.
41. *Grand Canal, Interpretation of Turner*. Watercolour by Hercules Brabazon Brabazon (1821-1906), one of the innovators as well as one of the leading figures amongst nineteenth century watercolourists.
42. *Manfalut, Egypt*. Watercolour by Hercules Brabazon Brabazon. In its boldness and freshness of approach it is a clear indication of the revolution that was taking place in painting.
43. *Cornfield*. An oil on panel by Eugene Boudin (1824-1898). Clear, fresh, pure colour . . . an almost brilliance and dazzle of clean light marks the emergence of 'plein air' painting and moves towards im-

pressionism. This was taking place in France when Butler was following the academic tradition.

ADDITIONAL ITEMS

44. Painting. *Old Fetter Lane, London*. Watercolour. (The original of no. 5). Loaned by Mrs W. B. Tidy. (Butler's great-niece.)
45. Manuscript, by Samuel Butler's Grandfather, inscribed, *A Translation of Justine* by Saml. Butler Junr. Novr. ye 9th 1782. Born 30th Jany. 1774. Loaned by Mrs W. B. Tidy.
46. Portfolio. This belonged to Samuel Butler and has an inscription in his hand: 'This was my old school portfolio in use since about 1850—it has been in constant use since then, and I suppose there is not one of my books that has not gone through it page by page some two or three times over. It is the last thing I have of those I had in daily use as a schoolboy, and I cannot find it in me to throw it away after such faithful service. At the same time I really want a new one.' S. Butler Mar. 3. 1891.

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Sunday

2.00 - 4.30 p.m.

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