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SAMUEL BUTLER (1835 - 1902)

“Every man's work, whether it be literature, or music or pictures or architecture or anything else, is always a portrait of himself”.

If that is so, then Samuel Butler's portrait is immense and controversial as he broke many taboos in his ideas on religion, science and morality.

“I have never written on any subject unless I believed that the authorities on it were hopelessly wrong”

He is best known as an author, albeit one not always recognised then or now. His book ‘Erewhon’ (1872); a utopian satire was ‘a work of genius’ according to E.M. Forster. His semi-autobiography ‘The Way of all Flesh’ so impressed George Bernard Shaw he commented that Butler was ‘in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the 19th century’.

His note taking, on many issues, was prodigious, collated after his death into 16 volumes.

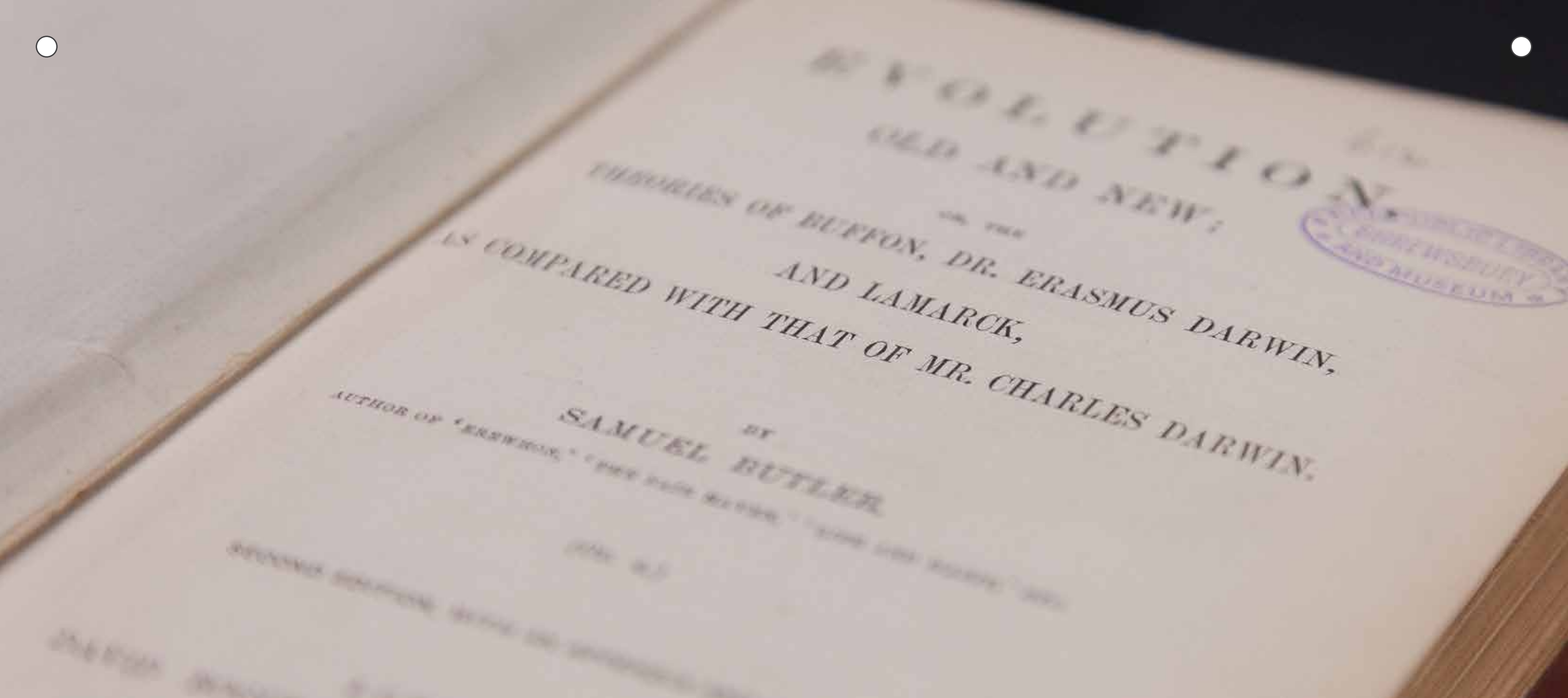
In addition, Butler was a painter and photographer despite his assertion that *“Any fool can paint a picture, but it takes a wise man to be able to sell it”*.

Butler's naïve style of painting was not to the liking of the art establishment. In later life, photography became his preferred medium.

Butler was obsessed by Handel's music. He felt that *“Life is like music, it must be composed by ear, feeling and instinct, not by rule”* but his own compositions, such as ‘Narcissus: A Dramatic Cantata’ were never highly rated.



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BUTLER AND EVOLUTION:

In 'Life and Habit' (1878), Butler stated: *‘To the end of time, if the question be asked, “Who taught people to believe in Evolution? The answer must be that it was Mr. Darwin.”’* However, Butler’s views on evolution ran contrary to Darwinism. Butler rejected the theory of natural selection and championed the idea of ‘acquired characteristics’; when an organism passes on characteristics it has attained during its lifetime to its offspring.

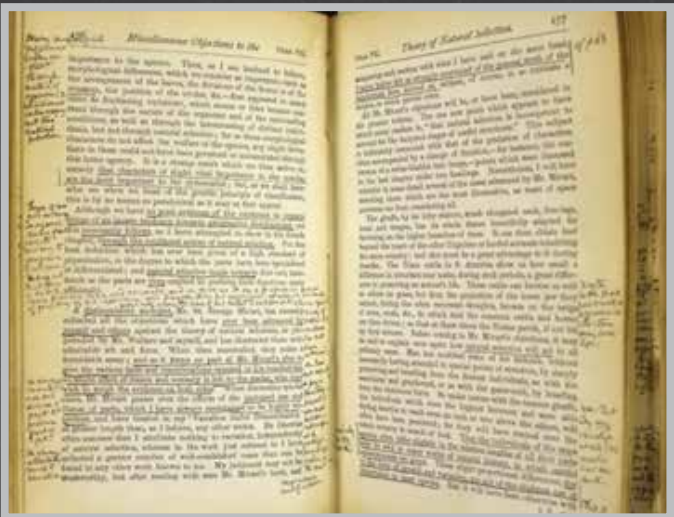
Butler’s correspondence with Darwin began respectfully. He sent an apologetic note to Francis Darwin explaining that 'Life and Habit' had *‘resolved itself into a downright attack upon your father’s view of evolution’*. The preface to 'Evolution, Old and New' (1879) showed however how their relationship had changed within a year: *‘it was with the greatest reluctance, not to say repugnance, but I became one of his opponents... and after all Mr. Darwin may have been right, and I wrong’*.

Darwin’s release of *‘The Life of Erasmus Darwin’* (1879) further challenged their relationship. The biography was based on an early 1879 article by German biologist Ernst Krause. 'Evolution, Old and New' had appeared since Krause’s article, and it was implied that Butler had plagiarised it. Butler’s request for an explanation from Darwin was largely ignored. *‘Luck or Cunning’* (1887) was Butler’s final attempt at refuting Darwinism. However, it focused mainly on his personal animosity towards Darwin and his followers.

After Butler’s death, Henry Festing Jones published the pamphlet *‘Charles Darwin and Samuel Butler: A Step Towards Reconciliation’*. He transcribed the correspondence between them releasing their private exchanges into the public domain thus helping to explain the enmity that had built up between them.



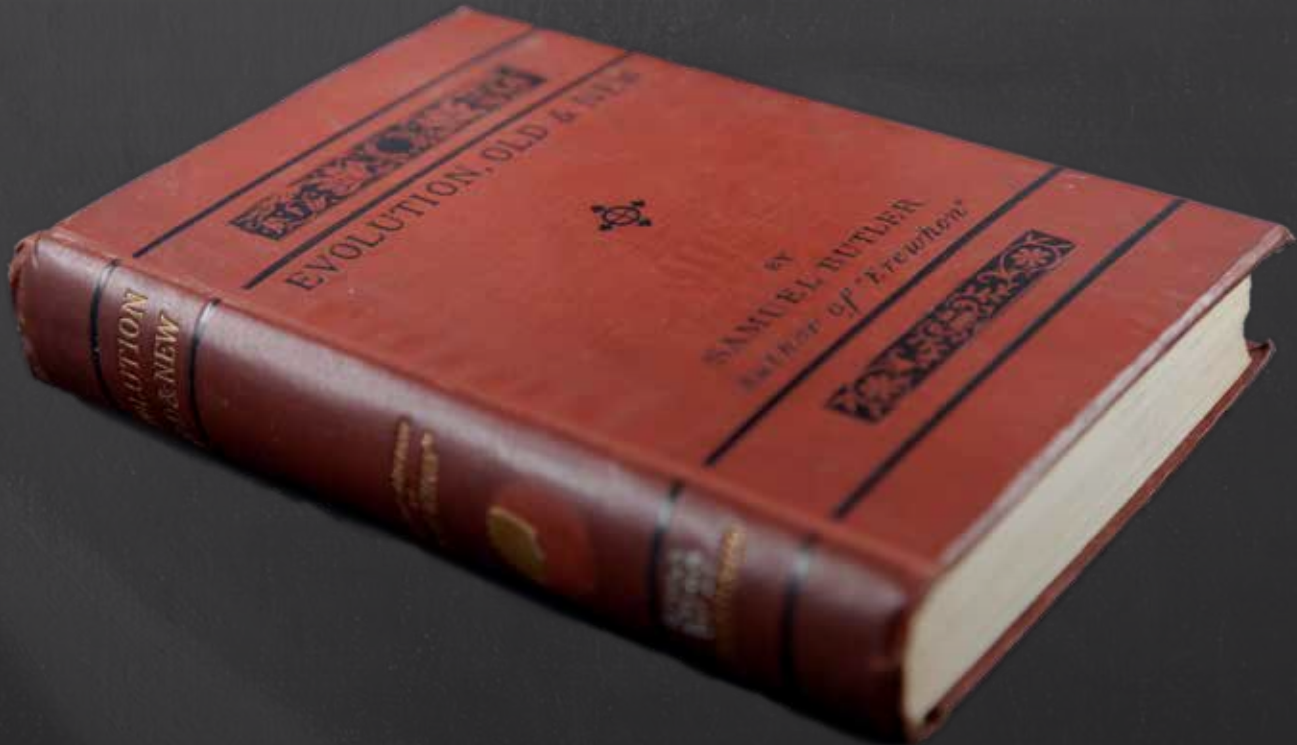
While the first edition of 'Life and Habit' was published in 1878, the second edition soon followed in 1890. This image shows Butler's copy of the second edition, with pressed flowers (BII LIF 1890.4).



Annotated copy of the sixth edition of 'Origin of Species' by Charles Darwin (1872) BV.D2. Butler bought this edition in 1876 to compare it with the first edition. The annotations are in Butler's hand and portray the thinking that formed into his first book on evolution, Life and Habit.

Bibliography:

- Cannan, Gilbert, Samuel Butler: a critical study, (1915: London, M. Secker)
- <https://www.joh.cam.ac.uk/about-samuel-butler>
- Raby, Peter, Samuel Butler: a biography, (1991: Iowa, University of Iowa Press)





THE HIDDEN HISTORY OF SAME SEX DESIRE AND ATTRACTION

Recognizing ourselves in history is important. It creates a sense of belonging, heritage and place in our world.

The history of same sex desire and attraction is obscured and overlooked by historians. We concealed our lives because of legal and societal pressures: the threat of discrimination, harassment and violence.

In the 19th century, while largely clandestine, owing to laws prohibiting 'indecent' in public, private male homosexual acts were not explicitly and severely legislated against until 1885.

Same sex desire finds its place within Victorian literature in textual encodings, recognized by us, invisible to others. They are oblique, hidden and even unconscious.

Within the visual arts a 'blind eye' was turned as long as the image was ambiguous. Today they look blatantly homoerotic, but then they were respectably expressed within the framework of the classical nude.

Lesbian relationships tended to occur within domestic spaces, reflecting the separate lives and positions of women within society.



Oscar Wilde, the acclaimed writer and celebrity, was prosecuted under the Criminal Law Amendment Act, 1885. He faced two trials, being found guilty on the second occasion and sentenced to two years in prison with hard labour, the maximum sentence.

After the trial of Oscar Wilde, wealthier men would often travel abroad, where laws and attitudes were more liberal.

It is worth considering that, if Oscar Wilde had not been prosecuted, whether he would be seen by historians as heterosexual, being married with children.

'It is impossible for me to explain how it was she and I never married. We two knew exceedingly well, and that must suffice the reader'

'The only trouble he was ever in danger of getting into was exchanging words or looks with the more decent looking of his fellow prisoners...'

'In marrying Ellen he had meant to avoid a life of sin'

'The Way of All Flesh', Samuel Butler, 1st pub 1903



'Family Prayers' 1864. S. Butler
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FAMILY

In 'The Way of All Flesh', (1903), Samuel describes prayers with the servants:

"They were nice people, but more absolute vacancy I never saw upon the countenance of human beings"



Two family members dominate accounts of Samuel's life - his paternal grandfather and his father:

Dr Samuel Butler;
Paternal Grandfather (1744 - 1839)

Samuel was a small child at the time of his death. In his will, Dr Butler left his mansion at Whitehall, Shrewsbury to Samuel. This passed to him in 1880 when he was 45.

Dr Butler became headmaster of Shrewsbury School in 1798. He was an ordained priest and later became Bishop of Lichfield. During his headmastership the school's reputation increased greatly. He is buried in St Mary's churchyard, Shrewsbury.



Reverend Thomas Butler;
Father (1806 - 1886)

Thomas, married to Fanny Worsley had four children. Samuel was the second child and elder son.

For much of Samuel's early life he was financially dependent on his father, who expected him to go into the Church. Samuel's autobiographical novel 'The Way of All Flesh' depicts an upbringing dominated by Thomas' strict observance of Old Testament principles, and the harsh punishments that came with transgressing these. Samuel always looked back on his childhood as a period of domestic confinement, oppression and misery.

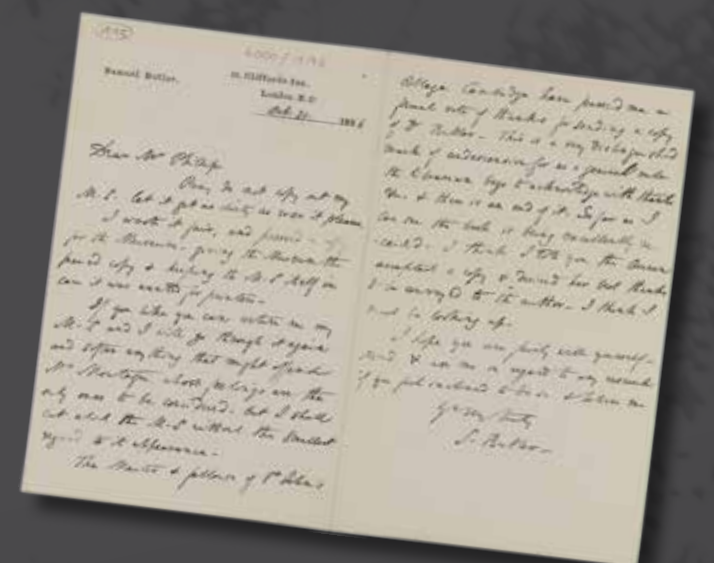
Their antagonism is recorded from early correspondence e.g. when Samuel questioned the efficacy of infant baptism. His father was very much opposed to Samuel's attempts at becoming a painter and claimed that Samuel had killed his mother by writing 'Erewhon'!

Friendships and Family

Samuel was indebted to his grandfather, and financially dependent on his father, for many years. He also had on-going contact with his family, and paid many visits to them in Shrewsbury. However, Samuel's family and his friendships were very separate aspects of his life which very likely suited both parties!

After success raising sheep in New Zealand, and having published 'Erewhon', Samuel became financially independent. He was able to defy his father and train as an artist and follow his own path as a writer.

Left: Shrewsbury School c. 1830. **Shropshire Archives ref: PR/3/528**
Top left: The Revd Samuel Butler, D.D., F.R.S. Archdeacon of Derby and Head Master of Shrewsbury School, c.1830. **Shropshire Archives ref: PR/4/15**



Letter from Samuel Butler, 15, Cliffords Inn, London E.C., to William Phillips of Shrewsbury regarding the manuscript (MS) of his book. He also mentions the formal vote of thanks from St John's College, Cambridge for sending a copy of 'Dr Butler' and thanks from the Queen for her copy. "I think I must be looking up" 31 Oct 1896. **Shropshire Archives ref: 6000/19195**



Whitehall Mansion from East, 30 Jun 1892. Photo by Samuel Butler. **St John's College, Cambridge. Butler Collection. D105. Neg 8**
Shropshire Archives ref: PH/S/13/W/4/13





*'Interior of the Artist's Study at 15 Clifford's Inn, London', 1865, S. Butler
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FRIENDS

Samuel primarily enjoyed the company of men, as did Oscar Wilde and Byron. Male friendship circles offered support and stimulation; a pattern seen well into the 1970s.

Prominent among these were:

John Holland Baker (1841 –1930) - Escape?

Baker sailed for New Zealand aged 16 where he met up with and explored the Southern Alps with Samuel, then in his early twenties. Both ‘found’, what was later called, the Whitcombe Pass; a key source for ‘Erewhon’.

Charles Paine Pauli (1838 - 1897) - Blackmail?

Pauli accompanied Samuel, then aged 29 years, on his abrupt return to England from New Zealand in 1864. *"(I) was suddenly aware that I had become intimate with a personality quite different to that of anyone whom I had ever known."*

Pauli may have been blackmailing Samuel. Pauli was given an allowance for thirty years, even though for the last twenty-five years they kept up only the merest appearance of friendship despite Pauli living close to Samuel's home. Tellingly, Pauli, who amassed a fortune, received allowances from other men too.

Henry Festing Jones (1851 –1928) – Lover/Companion?

Probably Samuel's closest friend, Jones met Samuel at St John's College, Cambridge remaining close friends until Samuel's death in 1902. Jones gave up his job to become Samuel's paid companion, assistant and musical collaborator. They spent much of their time together regularly attending the theatre and concerts, and they travelled together in Europe. Jones kept his own home in Barnard's Inn and later Staples Inn, both not far from Samuel's home in 15 Clifford's Inn. The latter consisted of three rooms and a pantry, on the second floor. From 1893-95, both were in a close relationship with Hans Faesch.

Alfred Emery Cathie (1865 -1947) - Service?

Cathie, in his early twenties became part of Samuel's circle of friends i.e. Pauli, Jones and, later, Faesch and shared fully in Samuel and Jones' lives in Clifford's Inn from 1887.

Samuel described him as ‘...half son, half nurse, always a very dear friend and playmate rather than work fellow - in fact he is or has been for the last ten years my right hand...’. (‘playmate’ could be a euphemism for ‘lover’). As with Jones and Pauli, Cathie was paid a retainer.

He spent at least a decade sorting Samuel's vast archive of approximately thirty years of aphorisms, paradoxes, sayings, travel details etc. which came to form the Note-Books.



*'Henry Festing Jones', 1882, S. Butler
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*'Alfred Emery Cathie', 1898, S. Butler
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"Two heads, S. Butler"
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FRIENDS

Hans Rudolph Faesch (? 1870 - ?) - Infatuation?

In 1893, Jones introduced Faesch, a young Swiss man travelling to England to learn English, to Samuel and he became a popular member of their network. Faesch's departure, in 1895, was a great loss to both Jones and Samuel. He returned to Basel and then went on to Singapore.

Samuel wrote a poem, **'In Memoriam'** to Faesch in 1895, but withdrew it from publication, on Jones' advice, after the first Oscar Wilde trial that year, for fear of "being Oscared".

Numerous affectionate letters passed between them, as well as a lock of Faesch's hair, strands of which were later put into lockets worn by Samuel and Jones.

Lucie Dumas (1852 -1892) - Cover/Beard*?

Samuel used to visit Dumas, a Frenchwoman, at her house in Handel Street, Bloomsbury, usually on Wednesdays. Jones would visit her on Tuesdays. Samuel paid their fees. (£1 each).

When she died, the only mourners at her funeral, apart from her brother, were Samuel, Jones, and Cathie.

Whatever the nature of their relationship, it would have provided some protection from any suggestions that Samuel and Jones had any 'improper association'.

* "Beard" - gay slang for being seen with a woman in order to hide one's homosexuality



Miss E.M.A. Savage. By permission of the Master and Fellows of St John's College, Cambridge

Eliza M.A. Savage (1836 -1885) - Exploitation?

Samuel met Miss Savage at Heatherley's Art School in 1867. Throughout their relationship they always referred to each other as 'Mr Butler' and 'Miss Savage'.

Some three years after first meeting, it seems, a bag of cherries shared in the street enabled her to "find him out," and for the next fourteen years she was his confidential and ever encouraging friend and critic. The first extant letter from Samuel to her refers to his wish she should read his draft of **'Erewhon'**. Her comments on **'The Way of All Flesh'**, in particular, were very important to Samuel.

At first a governess, later the assistant-secretary of a Society of Lady Artists, she lived with sick and aged parents. She had a congenital disability and was referred to as a 'cripple'

The annotations Samuel made to their numerous letters, soon after her death appear brutal; some commentators suggest it was his determination to be truthful; others see a streak of cruelty. His notes describe her as being fat, old-maidish and dowdy in appearance "a shock and a disappointment," her face was redeemed only by a "most attractive expression of friendliness and good humour" And her "sunless life" had been relieved neither by love nor travel.

Miss Savage did not tell Samuel she was ill: she died after an operation to treat cancer. Later, Samuel wrestled with his conscience – had he been a good friend... or not?

TIMELINE:

- 1533:** 'Buggery Act'; buggery became a capital offence.
- 1543:** 'Buggery Act'; extended into Wales.
- 1682:** Marriage between Arabella Hunt and Amy Poulter was annulled. 'Poulter had presented as a man called 'Hunt' but was born a woman.
- 1724-1726:** 'Molly Houses' run by Margaret Clap were coffee houses for the gay community in London.
- 1726:** Three men were hanged at Tyburn for sodomy after a raid on a Molly House.
- 1736:** Love letters from Lord John Hervey to Stephen Fox PC were found proving a 10 year relationship.
- 1785:** Jeremy Bentham, said to be the first person to argue for the decriminalisation of homosexuality in England.
- 1810:** 27 men were arrested by the Bow Street runners at the White Swan molly house in London.
- 1812:** James Barry graduated from University of Edinburgh as a doctor and served as an army surgeon overseas. Barry lived as a man for all of his life and only in death was it discovered he had been born a woman.
- 1828:** Offences against the Person Act; retained the death penalty for buggery.
- 1835:** Last two men to be executed in Britain for buggery: James Pratt and John Smith.
- On December 4th Samuel Butler was born.**
- 1858:** **Butler graduated from St. John's College Cambridge.**
- 1860:** **Butler migrated to New Zealand.**
- 1861:** Death penalty for buggery was abolished.
- 1864:** **Butler returned to England with Charles Paine Pauli.**
- 1866:** Marriage was defined as being between a man and a woman.
- 1871:** Ernest 'Stella' Boulton and Frederick 'Fanny' Park appeared in court for 'conspiring and inciting persons to commit an unnatural offence.'
- 1878:** **Butler became friends with Henry Festing Jones, who became his personal literacy assistant and lifelong partner.**
- 1883:** Oscar Wilde lectured at Shrewsbury's Theatre Royal, (no longer standing.)
- 1884:** Dublin Castle Affair: Government officials found engaging in 'gross indecency' by Irish Nationalists.
- 1885:** Henry Labouchere's amendment to Criminal Law Amendment Act. Gay men could be prosecuted for actions in public **and private**.
- 1895:** Oscar Wilde vs Queensberry, libel trial on April 3rd. Wilde convicted of gross indecency.
- 1902:** **Samuel Butler died, Jones at his bedside, having taken great care of him.**



Chiavenna, Province of Sondrio, region of Lombardy, Italy. S. Butler
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VICTORIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS SEXUALITY

"The arts... may have been the closest that men of convention and moral conscience could get to expressing carnal affection... of any type"

Victorian society was deeply problematic for homosexuals. However, despite draconian laws and punishments, most people seem to have looked away. In 1856, only 28% of men who were prosecuted were convicted, compared to a 77% overall conviction rate. However, rather than indicating any tolerance, trials that involved members of the upper classes, including members of parliament and minor nobility, were often quashed to avoid 'unnecessary publicity'.

Europe offered far more freedom for those who were able to travel. By the time Butler was born, Russia, Prussia, Austria, Tuscany, the French and Ottoman Empires had all decriminalised homosexuality.

*"How beautiful is sunset, when the glow
Of Heaven descends upon a land like
thee, Thou Paradise of exiles, Italy!"*

Percy Shelley, Letters II, 69.

Publically Butler conformed by living as a bachelor. He attributed his bachelorhood to 'a force beyond his control.' To a Muslim man in Greece, he said it was 'the will of Allah that he should not be married.' His scheduled weekly visits to Lucie Dumas with Henry Festing Jones were probably intended to secure his and Jones' reputation.

Within his work, he allowed himself to have a greater degree of freedom. *'In Memoriam'* is a clear display of same sex desire and grief for Hans Rudolf Faesch, the Swiss student who roomed with Jones and Butler. Jones nicknamed the poem a 'Whitman' or a 'Calamus', connecting Butler to Walt Whitman who's *'Calamus'* poem was renowned for depicting same sex desire. It was referenced by other homosexual writers of the time. Nevertheless, the trial of Oscar Wilde in 1895 can be perceived as a watershed moment for popular attitudes. Butler stopped the publication of *In Memoriam* in 1895 for fear of scandal.



Varallo, commonly known as Varallo Sesia, a comune and town in the province of Vercelli in the Piedmont region of Italy. S. Butler, 1885
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