



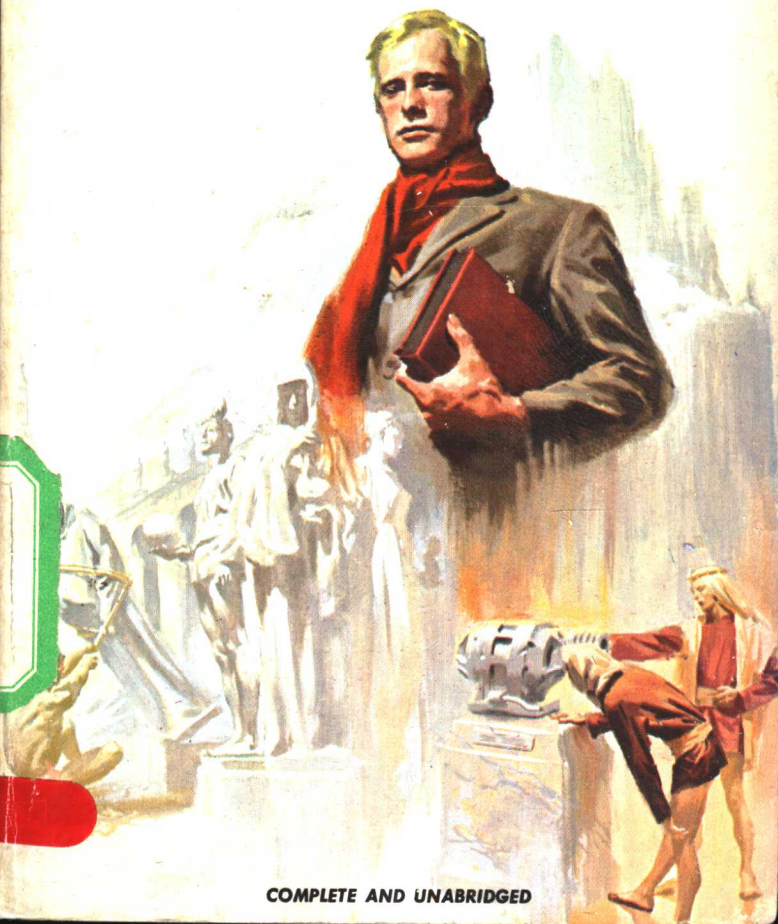
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CLASSICS SERIES CL130

SAMUEL BUTLER

Erewhon

Introduction by Mary M. Threapleton



COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

EREWON



SAMUEL BUTLER



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EREWHON

SAMUEL
BUTLER



Introduction

SAMUEL BUTLER

Samuel Butler, that free-thinking, free-wheeling anti-Victorian, was the peculiar product of a conventional Victorian establishment. His father was a Canon, and his grandfather had been Headmaster of Shrewsbury School and Bishop of Lichfield. Young Butler was destined for the Church, but after taking Classical Tripos at Cambridge, and serving briefly as a lay assistant among the London poor, he decided that his doubts on the subject of baptism precluded his taking orders. He wanted to study art, but as a compromise with the views of his horrified family, he went out to New Zealand, where he bought and managed a sheep ranch. He doubled his investment in four years, and returned to London to study art. On one of his several trips to the Continent, he met an elderly Russian lady, who remarked to him, "*Et maintenant, monsieur, vous allez créer.*" Of that incident, Butler wrote: "I had not yet, for all my education, got to know that doing is the sole parent of doing, and creating a little the only way of learning how to create more; still I went home resolved to do something at any rate, something in literature if not in painting. So I began tinkering up the old magazine articles I had written in

New Zealand and they strung themselves together into *Erewhon*." It was published anonymously in 1872, and was fairly well received, partly perhaps because it was rumored to be the work of the popular Lord Lytton. *Erewhon* ran to nine editions in Butler's lifetime, and was the only one of his many books to show him a profit.

After a period of disappointment in his career as a painter, and financial difficulties with his capital, which he had invested unwisely, Butler gave up his attempts to become a professional artist and settled to writing, with the constant encouragement and enthusiasm of Miss Eliza Mary Ann Savage, whom he had met at Heatherington's Art School. Unfortunately, the public was not so encouraging or enthusiastic, for Butler took it upon himself to attack England's most cherished intellectual institution, Charles Darwin. At first a convert to Darwin's theory of evolution, Butler gradually became profoundly disturbed by its implications, for it seemed to reduce man to a purely mechanistic creature, to take no account of man's will, and to deny all purposiveness in the universe. Butler tried to find, and establish in his writings, a meaningful pattern in the universe beyond the fortuitous natural selection of Darwin's theory. Influenced strongly by Lamarck, and by Erasmus Darwin, the grandfather of Charles, Butler presented a theory of evolution that stressed the idea of an unconscious inherited memory, and the purposeful will of the organism itself to survive and improve. He accused Darwin of inconsistency and outright dishonesty in his arguments. This was rank iconoclasm in the eyes of the thinkers of the period, and Butler's several books and articles were either condemned or ignored by most of the critics. Besides these scientific works, Butler published a description of his travels in the Italian Alps, and was also working on his great and bitter novel, *The Way of All Flesh*, which was not published until after his death.

In his later years, Butler was financially secure through an inheritance, but he was lonely and eccentric. He championed strange causes. Working on translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, he decided that these epics must have been written by a woman, and published his

carefully documented thesis to this effect. Later, he devoted himself to a study of Shakespeare's sonnets, dating and rearranging them, and concocting a new theory as to their meaning. Although few accept their main theories, *The Authoress of the Odyssey* and *Shakespeare's Sonnets Reconsidered* are still fascinating to scholars, for Butler brought to his literary detective work the same care and devastating keenness of mind which he had used against the idols of Victorian society in his satires and scientific works. His translations of Homer are interesting, too, for he rejected the conventional archaisms of other translators and rendered the epics in almost colloquial language.

Butler had long been planning a sequel and additions to *Erewhon*, and began work on *Erewhon Revisited* in 1900. In 1901, it was rejected by Longmans as offensive to the High Church Party, but Bernard Shaw, an enthusiastic supporter of Butler, persuaded Grant Richards to undertake its publication, along with a revised *Erewhon*, with several sections added. Richards thus became the first publisher to bring out a work of Butler's not at the author's risk.

Butler had predicted posthumous fame for himself, and he was right. He died in 1902. *The Way of All Flesh* slowly gained recognition after its publication in 1903, and has influenced writers such as Shaw, H. G. Wells, and Somerset Maugham. Selections from his voluminous notebooks were enthusiastically received in 1912, and by 1926 the Shrewsbury edition of his works had appeared in twenty volumes. Although the first flush of enthusiasm for Butler waned when it was no longer fashionable to deflate Victorianism, he has a steady following, and is considered one of the most "modern" of the writers of his period.

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Erewhon is the second great satire of the nineteenth century, but Butler's target is not so broad as that of Swift, who strikes out savagely at all mankind in *Gulliver's Travels*. Butler attacks the Victorian Age, with its mixture of hard-core materialism and pseudo-

idealism. The satire is carried alternately by Higgs and the Erewhonians—when Higgs is being Victorian, the Erewhonians are sensible, and vice versa. Higgs can see the ridiculousness of the Colleges of Unreason and the hypocrisy of the Musical Banks, and can protest against the materialism of Erewhon, and yet is himself guilty of the same sins when he plans to sell the Erewhonians into slavery in order to convert them to Christianity.

Butler uses several satiric techniques, and the reader must be agile enough to follow his shifting methods and shifting point of view. His most obvious method is logical perversion or reversal—we are given clear indication of this in names like “Senoj Nosnibor” and “Erewhon” itself. The Erewhonians consider crime a disease, and disease a crime. Instead of disguising a hang-over as a migraine, Mahaina pretends to be a dipsomaniac in order to conceal her chronic indigestion from her friends. But not all the satire is carried by reversal, any more than all the names are reversed. Sometimes Butler uses analogy, as in the account of the prohibition on meat-eating, which stands for all moral taboos, probably specifically sexual taboos in the account of the young man who sneaked out and ate a steak, and “felt so much better next morning.”

Butler uses the technique of resemblance rather than reversal when he satirizes the English Church as the Musical Banks. The buildings are beautiful, but they are frequented only by women and elderly people, not by the busy men who actually run the community, and the currency that they issue has no value other than the respectability it lends its possessors. In other words, Christian virtues are not legal tender in a materialistic society. The Colleges of Unreason in *Erewhon* represent the English universities. Once again, the buildings are beautiful, but what is learned there has no application in the community. The students are taught a hypothetical language, which is of no use to them or anyone else. So much for a classical education!

Some of the most bitter satire in *Erewhon* is directed against Victorian family life, where in so many cases, as

in Butler's own, the rights and individuality of the child were ignored. The Erewhonians have constructed an elaborate Mythology of the Unborn, which explains that married couples are haunted and pestered by the spirits of the unborn who wish to enter into this world, and who choose to do so in full knowledge of the disadvantages of mortality. Thus children have made their mortal beds, and must lie in them. Under such circumstances, affection between parent and child would be the exception rather than the rule, and the Erewhonian feels justified in dominating his children. But what excuse had the Victorian parent? This was a theme close to Butler's heart. In *The Way of All Flesh*, he presents a devastating portrait of oppressive Victorian family life.

In "The Book of the Machines," Butler satirizes the mechanistic Darwinian theory of evolution, and, by false analogy, reduces it to absurdity. Since man is machine-like, without free will, obviously there is danger that machines themselves will develop sufficiently to present a real menace to man. Therefore the Erewhonians decided to destroy these Frankenstein monsters while there was still time. In an age of electronic brains, and a degree of automation that affects the employment situation as ours is affected, perhaps Butler's joke is a little too near the bone.

Many other facets of Butler's England come under his distorting glass. The English criminal code is reflected in the severity of the Erewhonian courts, where tuberculosis is punishable by death. Unmusical England becomes non-diatonic Erewhon, where Higgs becomes a sensation for singing "The Ratcatcher's Daughter." The English love of ruins is mocked in the description of Mr. Nossibor's estate, which contains the ruins of a railway station. English regard for propriety and the "what-will-the-neighbors-think" kind of morality is portrayed in the tenets of the Ydgrunites, who worship Mrs. Grundy, that archetype of all neighbors. But the satire shifts here somewhat, for Higgs finds the Ydgrunites so admirable that he does not presume to inflict Christianity on them. One might have expected *Erewhon* to contain some refer-

ence to English labor and economic problems, or to the growing concern for women's rights, but these matters did not touch Butler personally, and he ignores them.

The various targets and methods of satire are the chief sources of interest in *Erewhon*. The characterization is thin. As one critic puts it, "Ideas are the heroes of *Erewhon*." But the opening section is of particular interest as an adventure story, with magnificent New Zealand settings. It carries the reader effortlessly into the somewhat academic core of the book, where he becomes caught up in the intellectual delight of the ideas, and the devastating digs at so much of Victorian England that is still with us today.

MARY M. THREAPLETON

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Preface to the First Edition

The Author wishes it to be understood that Erewhon is pronounced as a word of three syllables, all short—thus, E-re-whon.

Preface to the Revised Edition

My publisher wishes me to say a few words about the genesis of the work, a revised and enlarged edition of which he is herewith laying before the public. I therefore place on record as much as I can remember on this head after a lapse of more than thirty years.

The first part of *Erewhon* written was an article headed "Darwin among the Machines," and signed Cellarius. It was written in the Upper Rangitata district of the Canterbury Province (as it then was) of New Zealand, and appeared at Christchurch in *The Press* newspaper, 13th June, 1863. A copy of this article is indexed under my books in the British Museum catalogue. In passing, I may say that the opening chapters of *Erewhon* were also drawn from the Upper Rangitata district, with such modifications as I found convenient.

A second article on the same subject as the one just referred to appeared in *The Press* shortly after the first, but I have no copy. It treated Machines from a different point of view, and was the basis of pp. 270-274 * of the present edition of *Erewhon*. This view ultimately led me to the theory I put forward in *Life and Habit*, published in November 1877. I have put a bare outline of this theory (which I believe to be quite sound) into the mouth of an Erewhonian philosopher in chapter 27 of this book.

In 1865 I rewrote and enlarged "Darwin among the Machines" for *The Reasoner*, a paper published in London by Mr. G. J. Holyoake. It appeared 1st July, 1865 under the heading "The Mechanical Creation," and can be seen in the British Museum. I again rewrote and enlarged it, till it assumed the form in which it appeared in the first edition of *Erewhon*.

The next part of *Erewhon* that I wrote was "The World of the Unborn," a preliminary form of which was sent to Mr. Holyoake's paper, but as I cannot find it among those copies of *The Reasoner* that are in the British Museum, I conclude that it was not accepted. I have, however, rather a strong fancy that it appeared in some London paper of the same character as *The Reasoner*, not very long after 1st July, 1865, but I have no copy.

I also wrote about this time the substance of what ultimately became "The Musical Banks," and the trial of a man for being in a consumption. These four detached papers were, I believe, all that was written of *Erewhon* before 1870. Between 1865 and

* Signet Classic edition, pp. 172-198.

1870 I wrote hardly anything, being hopeful of attaining that success as a painter which it has not been vouchsafed me to attain, but in the autumn of 1870, just as I was beginning to get occasionally hung at Royal Academy exhibitions, my friend, the late Sir F. N. (then Mr.) Broome, suggested to me that I should add somewhat to the articles I had already written, and string them together into a book. I was rather fired by the idea, but as I only worked at the MS. on Sundays it was some months before I had completed it.

I see from my second Preface that I took the book to Messrs. Chapman and Hall 1st May, 1871, and on their rejection of it, under the advice of one who has attained the highest rank among living writers, I let it sleep, till I took it to Mr. Trübner early in 1872. As regards its rejection by Messrs. Chapman and Hall, I believe their reader advised them quite wisely. They told me he reported that it was a philosophical work, little likely to be popular with a large circle of readers. I hope that if I had been their reader, and the book had been submitted to myself, I should have advised them to the same effect.

Erewhon appeared with the last day or two of March 1872. I attribute its unlooked-for success mainly to two early favourable reviews—the first in *The Pall Mall Gazette* of 12th April, and the second in *The Spectator* of 20th April. There was also another cause. I was complaining once to a friend that though *Erewhon* had met with such a warm reception, my subsequent books had been all of them practically still-born. He said, "You forget one charm that *Erewhon* had, but which none of your other books can have." I asked what? and was answered, "The sound of a new voice, and of an unknown voice."

The first edition of *Erewhon* sold in about three weeks; I had not taken moulds, and as the demand was strong, it was set up again immediately. I made a few unimportant alterations and additions, and added a Preface, of which I cannot say that I am particularly proud, but an inexperienced writer with a head somewhat turned by unexpected success is not to be trusted with a preface. I made a few further very trifling alterations before moulds were taken, but since the summer of 1872, as new editions were from time to time wanted, they have been printed from stereotypes then made.

Having now, I fear, at too great length done what I was asked to do, I should like to add a few words on my own account. I am still fairly well satisfied with those parts of *Erewhon* that were repeatedly rewritten, but from those that had only a single writing I would gladly cut out some forty or fifty pages if I could.

This, however, may not be, for the copyright will probably

expire in a little over twelve years. It was necessary, therefore, to revise the book throughout for literary inelegancies—of which I found many more than I had expected—and also to make such substantial additions as should secure a new lease of life—at any rate for the copyright. If, then, instead of cutting out, say fifty pages, I have been compelled to add about sixty *invita Minerva*—the blame rests neither with my publisher nor with me, but with the copyright laws. Nevertheless, I can assure the reader that, though I have found it an irksome task to take up work which I thought I had got rid of thirty years ago, and much of which I am ashamed of, I have done my best to make the new matter savour so much of the better portions of the old that none but the best critics shall perceive at what places the gaps of between thirty and forty years occur.

Lastly, if my readers note a considerable difference between the literary technique of *Erewhon* and that of *Erewhon Revisited* I would remind them that, as I have just shown, *Erewhon* took something like ten years in writing, and even so was written with great difficulty, while *Erewhon Revisited* was written easily between November 1900 and the end of April 1901. There is no central idea underlying *Erewhon*, whereas the attempt to realize the effect of a single supposed great miracle dominates the whole of its successor. In *Erewhon* there was hardly any story, and little attempt to give life and individuality to the characters; I hope that in *Erewhon Revisited* both these defects have been in great measure avoided. *Erewhon* was not an organic whole, *Erewhon Revisited* may fairly claim to be one. Nevertheless, though in literary workmanship I do not doubt that this last-named book is an improvement on the first, I shall be agreeably surprised if I am not told that *Erewhon*, with all its faults, is the better reading of the two.

Samuel Butler.

7th August, 1901.

Preface to the Second Edition

Having been enabled by the kindness of the public to get through an unusually large edition of *Erewhon* in a very short time, I have taken the opportunity of a second edition to make some necessary corrections, and to add a few passages where it struck me that they would be appropriately introduced; the passages are few, and it is my fixed intention never to touch the work again.

I may perhaps be allowed to say a word or two here in reference to *The Coming Race*, to the success of which book *Erewhon* has been very generally set down as due. This is a mistake, though a perfectly natural one. The fact is that *Erewhon* was finished, with the exception of the last twenty pages and a sentence or two inserted from time to time here and there throughout the book, before the first advertisement of *The Coming Race* appeared. A friend having called my attention to one of the first of these advertisements, and suggesting that it probably referred to a work of similar character to my own, I took *Erewhon* to a well-known firm of publishers on the 1st May 1871, and left it in their hands for consideration. I then went abroad, and on learning that the publishers alluded to declined the MS., I let it alone for six or seven months, and, being in an out-of-the-way part of Italy, never saw a single review of *The Coming Race*, nor a copy of the work. On my return, I purposely avoided looking into it until I had sent back my last revises to the printer. Then I had much pleasure in reading it, but was indeed surprised at the many little points of similarity between the two books, in spite of their entire independence of one another.

I regret that reviewers have in some cases been inclined to treat the chapters on Machines as an attempt to reduce Mr. Darwin's theory to an absurdity. Nothing could be further from my intention, and few things would be more distasteful to me than any attempt to laugh at Mr. Darwin; but I must own that I have myself to thank for the misconception, for I felt sure that my intention would be missed, but preferred not to weaken the chapters by explanation, and knew very well that Mr. Darwin's theory would take no harm. The only question in my mind was how far I could afford to be misrepresented as laughing at that for which I have the most profound admiration. I am surprised, however, that the book at which such an example of the specious misuse of analogy would seem most naturally

levelled should have occurred to no reviewer; neither shall I mention the name of the book here, though I should fancy that the hint given will suffice.

I have been held by some whose opinions I respect to have denied men's responsibility for their actions. He who does this is an enemy who deserves no quarter. I should have imagined that I had been sufficiently explicit, but have made a few additions to the chapter on Malcontents, which will, I think, serve to render further mistake impossible.

An anonymous correspondent (by the handwriting presumably a clergyman) tells me that in quoting from the Latin grammar I should at any rate have done so correctly, and that I should have written "*agricolas*" instead of "*agricolae*." He added something about any boy in the fourth form, etc., etc., which I shall not quote, but which made me very uncomfortable. It may be said that I must have misquoted from design, from ignorance, or by a slip of the pen; but surely in these days it will be recognized as harsh to assign limits to the all-embracing boundlessness of truth, and it will be more reasonably assumed that *each* of the three possible causes of misquotation must have had its share in the apparent blunder. The art of writing things that shall sound right and yet be wrong has made so many reputations, and affords comfort to such a large number of readers, that I could not venture to neglect it; the Latin grammar, however, is a subject on which some of the younger members of the community feel strongly, so I have now written "*agricolas*." I have also parted with the word "*infortuniam*" (though not without regret), but have not dared to meddle with other similar inaccuracies.

For the inconsistencies in the book, and I am aware that there are not a few, I must ask the indulgence of the reader. The blame, however, lies chiefly with the Erewhonians themselves, for they were really a very difficult people to understand. The most glaring anomalies seemed to afford them no intellectual inconvenience; neither, provided they did not actually see the money dropping out of their pockets, nor suffer immediate physical pain, would they listen to any arguments as to the waste of money and happiness which their folly caused them. But this had an effect of which I have little reason to complain, for I was allowed almost to call them lifelong self-deceivers to their faces, and they said it was quite true, but that it did not matter.

I must not conclude without expressing my most sincere thanks to my critics and to the public for the leniency and consideration with which they have treated my adventures.

9th June, 1872.