

SAMUEL BUTLER, 1835 – 1902

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In terms of the internationally recognised canon of literature in English, Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* (1872) is the most important work to emerge from New Zealand. It has been continuously in print since 1872, is included in almost all series of literary classics, is widely taught in universities, and receives international scholarly attention. It is accepted as a major work of Victorian prose, a key indicator of changing values, and as standing with More's *Utopia* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as the three outstanding examples of the genre of imagined world irony.

Although Butler spent less than five years in New Zealand, wrote *Erewhon* after he left, and aimed its satire at Victorian England, the book is drawn in fundamental ways from his New Zealand experience, and must be described as a classic of New Zealand as well as English literature. The same is true of the retrospective *Erewhon Revisited* (1901). Significant reference to New Zealand, or material relating to his life there, can also be found (though largely unnoticed) in other works by Butler, including his immensely influential *Notebooks* (1912, 1934), and indirectly even his novel *The Way of All Flesh* (1903). His first book, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement* (1863), is a wholly New Zealand text in its place of composition and subject matter, and is an important narrative of mid-Victorian colonial settlement. Apart from the obvious biographical significance of his New Zealand years, it has been argued that Butler's encounter with the settler society of Canterbury Province, and the challenging terrain of the Southern Alps, was crucial in shaping his literary methods as a major ironist.

Samuel Butler was born on 4 December 1835 at the Rectory of Langar, Nottinghamshire, in the English Midlands, second child (of four) and elder son of the Reverend Thomas Butler and Fanny Worsley. His grandfather Samuel Butler had been a classical scholar, distinguished headmaster of Shrewsbury School, and Bishop of Lichfield, and his father Thomas also excelled in classics at Shrewsbury and Cambridge before entering the Church of England. A progress through Shrewsbury and Cambridge to ordination as a clergyman was therefore obligatory, and Samuel Butler unenthusiastically followed it, suffering intense unhappiness under his father's strictly moralistic regime. At school he regarded himself (according to *The Way of All Flesh*) as ranking 'among the upper part of the less reputable class' and distinguished

only by semi-illicit enthusiasms for Handel's music and cross-country running. He eventually did well academically and proceeded to St John's College, Cambridge, where he enjoyed some freedom and independence for the first time.

After taking first class honours in Classics, he entered pre-ordination parish work in London, but was quickly disillusioned by the discrepancy between the complacent tenets of Victorian Christianity as inculcated into sheltered young ordainees and the squalid realities of life for the urban poor. He also responded to the radical climate of the 1850s, and his astutely critical mind began to identify discrepancies in the narratives of the New Testament. After six months, he sought refuge at Cambridge, and outraged his father by asking to train as an artist. After long negotiation by letter, the Reverend Thomas Butler agreed to finance his emigration to the respectable Church of England colony of Canterbury, New Zealand, to raise sheep.

He embarked on the *Roman Emperor* on 30 September 1859, at the age of 23, and on that night for the first time famously omitted saying his prayers (the ship he had previously booked on a few weeks earlier disappeared without trace on the crossing.) Finding on arrival in Christchurch that all the easily accessible sheep country in the province had been taken up, he showed unexpectedly resourceful energy in exploring high in the Southern Alps to the dangerous headwaters of four major Canterbury rivers. At times his only companion was a horse called Doctor who patiently tolerated his inexperienced handling, and would stay stock still when Butler fell off. They were rewarded by finding land on the Rangitata River in South Canterbury, on a high tributary called Forest Creek. These first adventures in the raw new settlement, as well as many details of the long voyage from England, are recorded in two articles published (in heavily edited form) in the journal of St John's College, Cambridge, the *Eagle*, under the pseudonym 'Our Emigrant', and further edited, this time by his father, in *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*. One section, in manuscript as Butler actually wrote it, in what he describes as very difficult conditions, was finally published as 'the Forest Creek Manuscript'. In *Samuel Butler at Mesopotamia*, edited by Peter Bromley Maling, in 1960.

The extreme discomforts of the 1860 winter persuaded Butler to move a few miles to a less exposed foothills situation at the confluence of Forest Creek with the Rangitata, and there he established the 'run', or sheep station, that he named Mesopotamia, meaning 'between two rivers'. A rival squatter, J.H. Caton, also claimed this land, and he and Butler raced the hundred miles

to Christchurch to register the claim. By good fortune the outcome was in Butler's favour. With a small staff and materials that had to be brought a hundred miles by bullock dray from Christchurch, he built his own huts, fences, sheepfolds and garden. The dray also brought his books, including Charles Darwin's just-published *Origin of Species* (1859), and his piano, on which he played Bach and Handel in the evenings in what one visitor called 'the most civilized experience I had had of up-country life'.

By resourcefulness and hard work Butler succeeded as a sheep farmer despite his inexperience and the remote location of his land, and by 1864 he had 55,000 acres and employed seven men. He retained his adventurous impulse, however, as well as an enjoyment of vigorous hiking that derived from his days as a leading 'hare and hounds' runner at Shrewsbury, the school where cross-country running first began as an organized sport. After his first Christmas at Mesopotamia, in the high summer month of January, while his sheep were safely grazing, he set out with a friend, John Holland Baker, to explore the headwaters of the three precipitous upper branches of the Rangitata River. Nominally they were looking for gold or sheep country, but in fact they found a new pass across the main mountain divide, and a distinguished place in the history of settler exploration. Their discovery was eventually named the Whitcombe Pass, after the surveyor who died while examining its potential as a route to the West Coast, but Butler is commemorated in high Alpine names such as Mount Butler, the Butler Range, and Butler's Saddle, an unusual distinction among writers. His shepherd's life and momentous exploration also gave him the narrative material for the opening chapters of *Erewhon* eleven years later.

Butler's four years in Canterbury were also a time of intellectual growth and literary development. Reading in his cramped homemade cob hut, or conversing with the province's many well-educated farmers in the Christchurch Club, he grappled with the two great intellectual crises of the 1860s – the fallibility of the Bible under close critical reading, and the significance of Charles Darwin. But although he said that at first 'I became one of Mr. Darwin's many enthusiastic admirers', he never had the temperament to be a mere disciple. By December 1862 he was ready to question as well as advocate Darwin's ideas, and did both in a 'philosophical dialogue' published anonymously in the Christchurch *Press*. It is the first example of the elusive, dialectic technique that he later called 'counterpoint', and that characterizes much of his work.

Several other contributions to the *Press* followed in 1863-1864, mostly continuing the debate about Darwin, though it has not been easy for scholars to track his mischievously evasive footsteps through that largely pseudonymous newspaper controversy. He is, for instance, almost certainly 'Lunaticus', who on 15 September 1863 submitted 'From Our Mad Correspondent' a hilariously solemn account of human communications (including the shepherd's call 'Coooo-ey') in evolutionary terms. This seems to be an absurdist first version of the most important of all his *Press* articles, 'Darwin Among the Machines' (13 June 1863), which he later incorporated as 'The Book of the Machines'. In *Erewhon*, and expanded by a further two chapters in the 1901 revised edition. *Erewhon* also includes the argument that machines are evolving as a phase of human evolution as supplementary human limbs, which first appeared in the *Press* (29 July 1865) in the article 'Lucubratio Ebria' ('Drunken Night Thoughts'), sent to the Christchurch newspaper after he returned to England.

In his last year in New Zealand Butler also wrote up the results of his long critical study of the New Testament in the Greek, work which became in his mind an apologia for turning away from the faith of his family and his culture. It was privately published in London as an anonymous pamphlet, *Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ as given by the Four Evangelists critically examined* in 1865, after his return to England.

His first book, *A First Year in Canterbury Settlement*, was published in January 1863. Its vigorous narrative of his voyage to New Zealand, and his early activities and impressions there, was compiled by his father from his letters home, apparently with his agreement, since the manuscript was sent to him for proof-reading. It suffered water damage when the ship carrying it back to England was wrecked in the Indian Ocean, and the text had to be restored by his mother. The involvement of his parents made him ambivalent about the book. An ironically dismissive review in the *Press* (28 October 1863) was almost certainly written by Butler himself at his most mischievous. He enjoyed these games of elusive masked identity at this time. Close examination shows that the review's censures are aimed almost entirely at the patronizing Preface, which his father wrote, and the whole notion of such a compilation of personal letters. Butler never acknowledged the book, claiming privately that he found it 'priggish'. This has not prevented it from gaining high standing in New Zealand as an original, vivid and sharply observed account of settler experience, a fascinating compilation of pragmatic advice on frontier farming, and a narrative notable for the vigour, wit and flexibility of its voice.

Butler gained some status in the small colonial society. He made good friends, including Edward Fitzgerald, editor of the *Press*, William Moorhouse, the Province's second Superintendent, the geologist and artist Dr (later Sir) Julius Haast, Alexander Lean, an architect and music writer, and runholding neighbours like Frederick Napier Broome, later governor of Western Australia. He became a regular at the Christchurch Club once his farm was able to thrive without him. He was a guest speaker at the opening of the country's first railway, joined a steering group to establish a school of art, was an examiner for the new Christchurch Boys' High School, and played Bach at a charity concert. But in some quarters he was suspect as an avowed atheist. This may have cost him marriage to the sought-after Mary Brittan, who even lured him into the congregation of Avonside Church, where she sang in the choir. It is uncertain how badly he took her rejection of him in favour of the rising politician William Rolleston, but soon afterwards he decided to return to England, with a suddenness that he later regretted. An unpublished note made many years later refers to ten years 'of very great pain' that began about 1862. He may have intended some revenge on Mary in his teasing account of the *Erewhon* narrator's roguish and less than committed love affair with Yram the gaoler's daughter.

Butler left Canterbury on 15 June 1864 in company with a newer and less reputable friend, the *Press*'s lawyer Charles Paine Pauli, who after his death many years later was discovered to have been a parasitical confidence man taking money from Butler and several others. A homosexual relationship has been suggested, but Butler's frank memoir of Pauli (in *Butleriana*, 1932), and his well regulated and well documented heterosexual activity through the rest of his life, make that less than likely. He was, however, always inclined to admire men like Pauli, with the tall good looks and suave urbanity of manner that he felt he himself lacked. The 'High Ygrundites' of *Erewhon* and the ambiguous figure of Towneley in *The Way of All Flesh* show his ambivalence, as does the private memoir.

Butler and Pauli arrived in England on 29 August 1864, and took neighbouring apartments in Clifford's Inn, just off Fleet Street, London. Pauli moved out to better quarters after a year, but Butler settled into bachelor routines and stayed there for the rest of his life. Financially independent though far from wealthy, he was now able to defy his father and train as an artist. He had been a talented sketcher and water colourist at Shrewsbury School (which still has a small collection of this work), and had painted portraits and self-portraits in New Zealand, some of which survive there. His best known and arguably best painting, the apparently primitivist yet poignant,

painful and satirical 'Family Prayers', was done as soon as he returned to England. Later he felt that he should have 'gone on doing things out of my own head', but in fact he studied and practised intensively, and became competent enough to have six paintings exhibited at the Royal Academy between 1871 and 1876. The best of his later paintings are oils and water-colours done during his regular walking holidays in the Swiss-Italian Alps. He also became a competent and sometimes striking photographer.

At Heatherley's School of Art he met Eliza Savage, an astute and witty woman of about his age who became a major influence on his literary career. He had never stopped writing. New Zealand had established the habit. In the first months back in England, he revised and published *Evidence for the Resurrection*, and enlarged his 'Darwin Among the Machines' piece as 'The Mechanical Creation', an article published in *The Reasoner* in July 1865. At this time, Frederick Napier Broome, his friend from New Zealand, visited and suggested that he make some of his *Press* writings into a book. 'Broome gave me the final shove into *Erewhon*', he wrote. Despite claiming to resent the time taken from his painting, he revised the 'Machines' article again, reworked another *Reasoner* article, 'The World of the Unborn', and then added drafts of 'The Musical Banks' and 'An Erewhonian Trial'. When he had a draft manuscript, he sent it to Miss Savage, who was tactful and perceptive in her comments. *Erewhon* was taking shape, with his New Zealand writings at its core.

The book never names New Zealand, but the mountainous sheep-farming location of its opening chapters was recognisable to anyone with the least knowledge of the country, and there was more speculation about the anonymous author than about the setting. Festing Jones's edition of Butler's *Notebooks* (1912), and his *Memoir* (1919), included Butler's note headed 'The Geography of Erewhon', which recounts how he and Baker discovered the Pass and how he modified the events for the fictional narrative. Most modern editions deal with the origins of the location in Butler's own life and exploits in Canterbury. Few give enough credit to the emotional commitment that heightens the descriptions of his life on the Rangitata ('I am there now as I write...'), nor to the intense power of the writing in parts of the exploration narrative. In passages like his account of the effect of solitude in the mountains, that 'dreadful feeling of being cut off from all one's kind...[when] One begins doubting one's own identity', he is drawing on personal experience to create an effect of disorientation and identity loss that in psychological and literary terms was ahead of its time in the 1870s.

Even after the action narrative of crossing the range is over and the book moves into its fantasy land of satirically distorting reflections of English values and conduct, *Erewhon* still shows the effect of New Zealand on Butler's literary imagination. For Swift in *Gulliver's Travels* the basic ironic metaphor is discrepancy of size; for Butler in *Erewhon* it is inversion and reversal. This image of a back-to-front world is an antipodean one, and has been associated with imaginary representations of the antipodes at least since Richard Brome's play of that name was performed in 1638 (*The Antipodes; The World Upside Down*, published 1640). It is not hard to find a connection between an actual new country where the south is cold, Christmas comes at midsummer, and highly educated scholars are judged by their competence as butchers, and an imagined world where illness is a crime, churches are banks, and universities teach unreason.

In the main satiric part of *Erewhon* the energy is all in the irony. Narrative interest does not rise above the level of the perfunctory love affair with Arowhena Nosnibor – probably the most unprepossessing name for a romantic heroine in literature. There is virtually no action until the time comes to escape. Yet there is considerable imaginative strength in aspects of the fiction drawn from Butler's transformation of his recollections of life in Canterbury. The book is suffused with a pervasive and at times poignant sense of isolation and constraint. The narrator is at first actually and then effectively imprisoned. Erewhon, though he moves in it with some limited freedom, is a small, cut-off, inward-looking land of confinements, severe rules, social factions, personal gossip and moralistic censoriousness. Butler's feelings of remoteness at Mesopotamia and social hostility in Christchurch are not far beneath this fictional surface.

The escape by balloon returns Butler to his memories of the mountains, and he writes another remarkable account of the isolation and psychological disorientation he had experienced there, with no sense of time or identity, but as if 'gone adrift into the timelessness of eternity'.

Another narrative strength in *Erewhon* drawn directly from New Zealand experience is the character of Chowbok. When Butler writes elsewhere (in the Forest Creek manuscript, for instance) about the Māori people he met, he does so with sympathy and frankness but no false sentiment. Several unpublished notes show his admiration for their resilience and sense of humour. The *Press* editorially opposed the North Island war against Māori that was in progress in the 1860s, and informed Christchurch opinion was strongly sympathetic with the Māori cause. Butler, who was friendly with the *Press*

editorial staff. and who was so dark skinned that he was sometimes taken as Māori) is unlikely to have been less liberal. His treatment of the figure of Chowbok therefore reveals a better-informed and more complex view of indigenous people than can be found in most Victorian literature. He takes the trouble to identify Chowbok as a chief and give his real name – Kahabuka – yet that also smuggles in a satiric joke, since in Māori (in which there is no ‘b’) Kahapuka means ‘cabbage head’. Chowbok is a drunk and a liar, apparently a typical native ‘unregenerate’, yet he strictly preserves his people’s ‘tapu’ on the pass, holds true to their spiritual beliefs, pretends to being converted only for his own purposes, outwits the comically naïve narrator at every turn, and in the scene of his trance in the woolshed leaves the intruder utterly at a loss to interpret his ‘grotesque fierceness’, the mix of ‘the ridiculous and the sublime’. In that remarkable scene Butler describes a cultural encounter in which the patronizing European is in reality far from more knowing or in control.

At the end of *Erewhon*, Chowbok has become a hypocritical celebrity bishop in London, still shrewdly exploiting the equally hypocritical vanities of the colonizing power for his own advantage. With his typical complexity of mind, Butler places that ambivalent revelation immediately after a passage, referring to an actual paragraph from the *Times*, that ironically exposes the cruelty and avarice behind much colonizing enterprise. In this case the narrator becomes an enthusiastic advocate of ruthless colonization, endorsing and planning to imitate an abhorrent scheme for effectively enslaving the peoples of the Polynesian islands by shipping them as ‘indentured labourers’ to the Queensland sugar plantations. *Erewhon* is for the most part a challenging, comical, mobile and multi-faceted satire, but in dealing with this exercise in exploitation, Butler chooses to end his book on an unambiguous note of savage indignation.

Erewhon became a success when the first anonymous edition of 750 copies sold out in two months, March to May 1872. It benefited by being taken as the work of Lord Lytton (best-selling novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton), whose successful utopian fantasy novel *The Coming Race* had been published in 1871, also anonymously. Once Butler’s authorship was revealed in the 1873 edition, the sales dropped. Nevertheless it established his name, though not enough to enable him to publish his later works without personal expense.

He spent his thirty remaining years as a London man of letters of very diverse interests. The independence of mind honed in New Zealand, and the process he had developed there of working assiduously and originally from

the text itself in forming his opinion, became habitual. He continued to explore dangerous territory. There was originality and courage as well as some perverseness in his choice of subjects and targets. He offered theories about the Bible, evolution, folk art, Homer and Shakespeare, without having any qualifications as a theologian, scientist, art critic, classicist or literary scholar. There is now some recognition of the centrality of many of his concerns: his critique of the inconsistencies in the gospels; his idea of evolutionary 'unconscious memory'; his advocacy of popular culture as being capable of high artistic value; his theory that *The Odyssey* was written by a woman; his understanding that there was a need for vigorous and accessible prose translations of Homer's epics; his reading of the personal and sexual tensions within Shakespeare's sonnets; and his guiding procedure in what would later be called practical or new criticism. But at the time he seemed eccentric, unqualified, provocative and marginal, and remained almost entirely unread.

Through these London years New Zealand continued to be active in his memory and literary imagination. His awareness of its importance in his life story is made most evident in a book where it is not mentioned. His only novel, *Ernest Pontifex; or, The Way of All Flesh* was begun with the strenuous persuasion of his literary confidante Eliza Savage in 1873. His mother died shortly after he began, and his father's accusation that he had killed her by writing *Erewhon* plunged him back into a still immature confusion of dependence and rejection. Writing the autobiographical story therefore became as much a therapeutic exercise as an artistic one, and the book evolved into a pungent masterpiece of iconoclasm. He rendered into semi-fictional narrative his own childhood and school and university days, up to the beginning of his disenchantment with clerical life. At that point, the decline and fall of Ernest becomes a nightmare version of what might have happened to Butler, if he had been less pragmatic and more naïve. Ernest is duped by a group of religious charlatans, goes through shattering disillusionment, commits in his confusion an act of sexual harassment, is imprisoned, and suffers delirious breakdown.

It is at the moment of Ernest's release from prison that Butler was most consciously thinking of his own career. Ernest's parents, who are closely modelled on Butler's, come to repossess him as he leaves prison, and in a heightened and sometimes melodramatic scene he rejects them: 'he knew that if he wavered he was lost. He had crossed his Rubicon'. The date of that scene is unobtrusively but carefully fixed in the text as 30 September 1859 – the day when Butler crossed his own Rubicon and embarked for New Zealand. Clearly, writing now from the retrospect of his late thirties or early

forties, he saw that decision at twenty-three as the crucial moment of transition from his stifling upbringing. New Zealand brought him emancipation and the freedom to grow and turn into a writer. Ernest Pontifex goes a more painful route to the same goal. Absorption into the working poor, and marriage to a bigamous alcoholic, enable Ernest to reach that state of resilient maturity that Butler believed he had attained in New Zealand. For both, it is contact with the real business of life, with a range of people other than the clerical upper middle class, it is the mixture of physical hardship and practical work, that serves what Butler in his evolutionary terminology calls a 'crossing' – a change in life and habit that makes possible a new vitality and fulfillment of potential.

His thoughts continued to revert to New Zealand quite often, quite comfortably, and with none of the rancour or resentment that dominated his reflections on his childhood, family or schooling. In a letter to Miss Savage in 1874 from Montreal, where he was trying to sort out a disastrous financial investment, he wrote, 'I am much better than I was three months ago, and am sure to get better and better, as I did in New Zealand'. In his evolutionary book *Life and Habit* (1878) he uses an affectionate anecdote about seeing a bullock in Canterbury 'take an eye lash out of its eye with its hind foot'. In *Alps and Sanctuaries* (1882) he writes of how much better it is to enter a mountain region on foot than by diligence or train, as in Switzerland. The same book uses a droll anecdote about how in New Zealand he learned to seek for strayed bullocks not by frantic searching or guesswork, but by going to the nearest pub and buying drinks until someone came in who had seen them.

The various published selections from his notebooks edited by H. Festing Jones (1912), A.T. Bartholomew (1934), Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill (1951), and Hans-Peter Breuer (1984) contain about thirty notes relating in some way to Butler's New Zealand experiences. The unpublished notes (in the ms Notebooks in the Chapin Library, Williams College) contain over fifty more. Together, while it would be excessive to say that they reveal any deep fondness or nostalgia for the Canterbury years, they show a lively, well-balanced, good humoured and ready recollection of quite trivial incidents up to almost forty year afterwards. They deal with the flora and fauna, notable characters, or amusing incidents. Often they recall New Zealand's characteristic discourse – no-nonsense, laconic, droll and self-deprecatory. Some are satiric, like the comment that 'missionaries are more useful as underminers of old faiths than as propagators of new ones' (unpublished) or that transposed European weeds, like European men, 'oust the native growths' (unpublished). Some tell of Māori resilience, like the story of the chief

during the wars who told a surveyor that he was going to give up shooting soldiers, since the Queen could get another for a shilling, and instead, 'since it takes a great deal of money to make a surveyor...you are the kind of people whom I intend to shoot in future'. Typical is the moment in Italy in the 1890s, when the sound of rocks in a river reminds him quite naturally of New Zealand thirty years earlier – 'The boulders booming under the Dora as under the Rangitata' (unpublished).

One lifelong habit that began for Butler in New Zealand was hard walking in rugged terrain. In Canterbury, as *Erewhon* shows, that challenging exercise was a pleasure as well as a necessity. Back in England, he immediately adopted a routine of long 'explorations' (as he called them) in the countryside around London, twice a week as a break from his daily stint of study in the Reading Room of the British Museum. On his annual hiking-and-painting holidays in Europe he covered prodigious distances in mountainous terrain. He could walk twenty miles before breakfast through the Swiss Alp foothills in his forties and fifties. The places he loved best, and wrote about best, all have steep climbing in common: South Canterbury (*A First Year, Erewhon, Erewhon Revisited*), the Canton Ticino (*Alps and Sanctuaries*), the hilltop sanctuaries of Varallo and Varese in Northern Italy (*Ex Voto*), and the coast of Sicily, including the precipitous hill-town of Erice, above Trapani (*The Authoress of the 'Odyssey'*). To follow Butler's footsteps demands a much higher level of fitness than most literary biographical work.

His most emotional reminiscence of New Zealand rose in his mind at the end of his life, in *Erewhon Revisited* (1901). Written in illness and the knowledge that it would be his last, the book took him back in imagination to New Zealand, and all the ironic jumble of reversals and inversions that had fed into his great satire. His invention was waning now, and the satiric chapters have little of the challenging perplexity of *Erewhon*. But a sense of passionate commitment and reawakening heightens the narrative chapters at the beginning and end. They read like the achievement of a long-held wish, and not only because Butler provides himself in the story with the son he lacked and increasingly missed. A late chapter censored from most editions of *The Way of All Flesh* gives Ernest an illegitimate son; in *Erewhon Revisited* his narrator, now called Higgs, returns to the nameless colony to find that he has fathered a son by Yram.

And at the end of the book, written when he was close to death himself, Butler describes the death of Higgs. In his last delirious moments, Higgs returns in imagination to the Erewhon/Canterbury mountains, and the dangers

and leaps described in the exploration narrative of *Erewhon*. The dying man's last words are 'Look out! John! Leap! Leap!' It is like an imaginative death, one that Butler chose to locate in the New Zealand mountains and at the high point of his youthful adventures there.

Samuel Butler died on 18 June 1902, at his chambers at Clifford's Inn, probably of some form of cancer (he was a heavy smoker). Soon after his death he became a cult figure. *Erewhon*, *The Way of All Flesh* and the *Notebooks* appealed strongly to the new century's reaction against Victorian values, and writers like Bernard Shaw, Lytton Strachey, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and E. M. Forster all admired Butler's irreverent and courageous rejection of the previous generation's sacred cows. The emphasis of the cult was on his iconoclasm and scepticism, his reputation as a provocative 'enfant terrible', his radical attacks on church and family and the academic dominance of the classics. In readings of his life and work, at first almost all from London-based commentators, New Zealand faded into a small interlude between the years of his misery under Victorian rules and his years of writing about it. Now we can see more clearly New Zealand's lasting importance, and the way his experience there enabled him to develop as a writer, and helped to shape his techniques as an ironist.

LINKS

[Te Ara – 1966 Encyclopaedia of New Zealand](#)

[Out of Erewhon](#)

[New Zealand Electronic Text Centre](#)

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PAPERS

Samuel Butler's manuscripts, papers, correspondence and other materials such as paintings and sketches are held mainly in the British Library, the St John's College Library, Cambridge, and the Chapin Library, Williams College, Mass. Some items relevant to his New Zealand experience and writings are in the Canterbury Museum and Canterbury Public Library, both in Christchurch, New Zealand, and the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. Butler's known contributions to the Christchurch Press in 1863-1864 are collected in Volume 1 of Joseph Jones, *The Cradle of 'Erewhon'*. See 'Biographies'.