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## THE BUTLERIAN INHERITANCE OF G. B. SHAW

SAMUEL BUTLER IS ADMITTEDLY A MINOR FIGURE beside other Shavian favourites of the Victorian period — beside, for instance, William Morris and Charles Dickens. But, although Butler did not have the clear, easily identifiable impact on Shaw that a writer like Morris had, he exerted a pervasive and continuous influence. Moreover, we have here something more complex than influence; we have, to a high degree, a temperamental affinity and a basic similarity in attitudes. The contrasts are, of course, strong and striking. We are not dealing with equals. Butler is as unmistakably a minor writer as Shaw is a major one. Butler's stock-in-trade was ironic prose, and his dramatic and fictional gifts were sternly limited; from a similar ironic attitude Shaw fashioned the subtle dialectic of his dramatic dialogue. But we must grant Butler one posthumous advantage. There is little likelihood that either *Erewhon* or *The Way of All Flesh* will suffer the typical literary debasement of our times—adaptation for musical comedy.

When George Bernard Shaw arrived in England in 1876, he was a young intellectual and Bohemian of large hopes and uncertain talents; Samuel Butler was a middle-aged eccentric who had achieved a small temporary fame with the publication of *Erewhon* in 1872. In the intellectual circles that the young Shaw frequented, there was little chance that he would hear much about Samuel Butler. The tone of that society, so he wrote, "was strongly individualistic, atheistic, Malthusian, evolutionary, Ingersollian, Darwinian, and Herbert Spencerian".<sup>1</sup> It was a society that would have looked upon Butler as a quaint conservative who could occasionally turn an amusing phrase. Shaw, however, was not to be confined within the limits of an aggressive and humourless rationalism, and he found himself eventually among a small group of ardent Butlerians. His interest in the older man was clearly aroused during the eighties and nineties with the publication of the four Butler books on evolution. He also made himself thoroughly acquainted with *Erewhon*, a book that he knew well and was to refer to steadily throughout his writing career. Shaw had little inter-

est in the Butler who abandoned evolutionary speculation to explore the works of mediaeval Italian artists and to advance perverse and curious ideas about Shakespeare's sonnets and the *Odyssey*. In a review of the Festing Jones biography of Butler, Shaw refers to the Butler of this period as "a dryasdust dilettante".<sup>2</sup> This did not prevent him, however, from doing all that he could to help the older man. It was Shaw, for instance, who arranged for the publication of *Erewhon Revisited* by his own publisher, Grant Richards, when other publishers refused the book on grounds of impiety.

Butler, on his side, found Shaw a puzzling phenomenon and was embarrassed by the younger man's declared devotion. In a long entry in the *Notebooks* he recorded his impressions: a reluctant admiration breaks through the hard surface of fusty egotism, and a perceptive recognition of the Shavian talents momentarily holds in check the pious prejudices. It is a passage that the Erewhonians would have relished:

I have long been repelled by this man though at the same time attracted by his coruscating power. Emery Walker once brought him up to see me, on the score that he was a great lover of Handel. He did nothing but cry down Handel and cry up Wagner. I did not like him and am sure that neither did he like me.

Still at the Fabian Society when I had delivered my lecture—"Was the *Odyssey* written by a woman?"—(not, heaven forbid, that I belong to or have any sympathy with the Fabian Society) he got up at once and said that when he had heard of my title first he supposed it was some mere fad or fancy of mine, but that on turning to the *Odyssey* to see what had induced me to take it up, he had not read a hundred lines before he found himself saying, 'Why, of course it is a woman.' He spoke so strongly that people who had only laughed with me all through my lecture began to think there might be something in it after all. Still, there is something uncomfortable about the man which makes him uncongenial to me.

The dislike—no this is too strong a word—the dissatisfaction with which he impressed me has been increased by his articles in the *Saturday Review* since it has been under Frank Harris's management—brilliant, amusing, and often sound though many of them have been. His cult of Ibsen disgusts me, and my displeasure has been roused to such a pitch as to have led me to this note, by his article 'Better than Shakespeare' in this morning's *Saturday Review*. Of course Bunyan is better than Shakespeare in some respects, so is Bernard Shaw himself, so am I, so is everybody. Of course also Bunyan is one of our very foremost classics—but I cannot forgive Bernard Shaw for sneering at Shakespeare as he has done this morning. If he means it, there is no trusting his judgment—if he does not mean it I have no time to waste on such trifling. If Shaw embeds his plums in such a cake as this, they must stay there. I cannot trouble to pick them out.<sup>3</sup>

In the growth of the Butler cult, which began only with the posthumous publication of *The Way of All Flesh*, Shaw was to play the leading role. The key passage here is the reference in the preface to *Major Barbara* (1905) where Samuel Butler is described as "in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century".<sup>4</sup> Devout Shavians would have been aware of earlier and more detailed tributes to Butler. In *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (1891), Shaw hailed Butler as the English writer most like Ibsen, having "the same grim hoaxing humour, the same grip of spiritual realities behind material facts, the same toughness of character holding him unshaken against the world".<sup>5</sup> Shaw's references to Butler were not consistently eulogistic; and later on he was to abandon the role of disciple and take on the more typical role of schoolmaster. The Festing Jones biography in 1919 was a turning-point, for in that book Butler appears less as the heroic protagonist of the new scientific religion, and more as the tiresome eccentric, incapable of distinguishing between an idea and a prejudice. Shaw wrote a savage review of the book, in which he held Butler's career up as an example of the permanent harm that can be inflicted upon a delicate and sensitive person by an education received in the rectory, an English public school, and Cambridge.

It is doubtful that even during the heyday of Shaw's enthusiasm for Butler he would have placed him among the illustrious great. In the preface to *Man and Superman* (1903), Shaw tells us about his literary antecedents: "Bunyan, Blake, Hogarth and Turner (these four apart, and above all the English classics), Goethe, Shelley, Schopenhauer, Wagner, Ibsen, Morris, Tolstoi and Nietzsche are among the writers whose peculiar sense of the world I recognize as more or less akin to my own."<sup>6</sup> Butler, who was often, as Shaw observed, "a vulgar nil-admirarist", would have dismissed all of these writers except one—John Bunyan. On the surface, both might have been expected to react violently against Bunyan's simple fundamentalism. And Butler could write tartly that Bunyan's "notion of heaven is hardly higher than a transformation scene at Drury Lane".<sup>7</sup> But both Butler and Shaw saw beneath the fundamentalist trappings to the essential Bunyan — simple, direct, free "from all taint of the schools", with "a genuine internal zeal" that triumphed over his literary machinery. *The Way of All Flesh* is a modern *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Shaw's books were conceived of as stations on the way to the celestial city.

The admiration that Butler and Shaw had for Bunyan gives us one of the most revealing leads to the nature of their relationship. It is often not immediately recognizable, but it is pervasive. Edmund Wilson has suggested that there are at least three points of view in Shaw, which operate on various levels and which pro-

vide the dialectic from which the dialogue springs. "At the bottom of Shaw," writes Wilson, "is a commonsense sphere of everyday practical consideration of society in the interests of ideal values; and above this, a poet-philosopher's ether, from which he commands a longer view of life *sub specie aeternitatis*, and where the poet allows himself many doubts which neither the socialist nor the bourgeois citizen can admit."<sup>8</sup> This is, I think, a just and perceptive analysis, and we can take it as a basis for a discussion of the Butler-Shaw relationship.

The strength of Butler's influence lies in the fact that it was exerted on all three levels. On the first level — what Edmund Wilson describes as "the commonsense sphere of everyday practical considerations", Shaw and Butler achieve their closest identity. It is here not so much a matter of the transference of particular ideas as the similarity of a point of view and an attitude. The emphasis, as Wilson suggests, is on the element of common sense and the practical; it involves a matter-of-fact, realistic attitude towards experience. Basically it is a strongly conservative point of view, although it is a conservatism with a difference, with high explosive potentialities. Both Butler and Shaw begin at this point in their analysis of human experience. Let us, they say, be sure of the facts of what we are about to discuss. Let us strip the facts of emotional colouring, and of strong presuppositions. If the unadorned facts give the impression of the ludicrous or the irrational, let us be hesitant about saying that they point toward a fundamental flaw in human conduct. We can see this attitude at work in Butler's treatment of the musical banks in *Erewhon*. This is not to be interpreted as a basic attack on the Church of England. Butler is saying through his parable that the Church, by its ritual, performs a useful and benevolent role in society. He is not attacking the foundations of the establishment; he is simply suggesting that one should not attribute to the Church a power of spiritual illumination that it does not possess. The same attitude governs a good many of Shaw's observations, and accounts for the rather bewildering mixture of apparent acceptance of the *status quo* and savage protest against it. Shaw, for instance, was not a pacifist, either during the Boer War or during the first World War; indeed he deeply shocked his socialist friends by taking the imperialist side in the first of those wars. What he did protest against was the sentimentalization of war, and the turning of slaughter, even if necessary, into a holy crusade. Here, in one brief quotation from the preface to *Misalliance* (1910), where he is discussing the relation between parents and children, is this Shavian attitude in clear operation:

If we compel an adult and a child to live in one another's company, either the adult or the child will be miserable. There is nothing whatever unnatural or wrong or shock-

ing in this fact; and there is no harm in it, if only it be sensibly faced and provided for. The mischief that it does at present is produced by our efforts to ignore it, and to smother it under a heap of sentimental lies and false pretences.<sup>9</sup>

Shaw, then, was being precise when he described himself as "a reasonable, patient, consistent, apologetic, laborious person with the temperament of a school-master and the pursuits of a vestryman".<sup>10</sup> He is not disingenuous when he maintains that he became a radical because he valued peace and security:

Here am I, for instance, by class a respectable man, by common sense a hater of waste and disorder, by intellectual constitution legally-minded to the verge of pedantry, by temperament apprehensive and economically disposed to the limits of old-maidishness; yet I am, and have always been, and shall always be, a revolutionary writer, because our laws make law impossible, our liberties destroy all freedom, our property is organized robbery, our morality is an impudent hypocrisy, our wisdom is administered by inexperienced or malexperienced dupes, our power wielded by cowards and weaklings, and our honour false in all its points.<sup>11</sup>

Butler, of course, was incapable of such an emotional outburst; his conservatism was of a far more ingrained and traditional nature than Shaw's; his attitude was often like that of Mandeville, "who merely states unpleasant facts without denying the validity of current ideals, and who indeed depends on these ideals to make his statement piquant". But he could, by following out to its logical conclusion a simple realistic analysis of human conduct, reach a position that challenged contemporary standards. This is what happens in the famous crime-disease analogy in *Erewhon*. The young prisoner is accused of the crime of labouring under pulmonary consumption. There follows a long, amusingly ironical indictment which is based, Butler tells us, upon an actual summing up in a law court, with only slight verbal adjustments to fit in to the new situation. The popular interpretation of this passage has been humanitarian; Butler is trying to show how ridiculous and vicious we are in our treatment of criminals, by casting an oblique but searching light on our practice. Actually, Butler was quite prepared to accept the conclusion of a logic that, he would have argued, carried basic assumptions to their inevitable conclusion. Crime is, indeed, a disease, and the reverse is also true: disease is a crime. The ultimate rationale in the treatment of both is society's self-protection. Shaw was a devout Erewhonian in his attitude toward crime and disease. "We should," he wrote, "diligently read Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* and accustom ourselves to regard crime as pathological and the criminal as an invalid, curable or incurable."<sup>12</sup> "The attempt," he continued, "to reform an incurably dangerous criminal may come to be classed with the attempt to propitiate a sacred rattlesnake. The higher civiliza-

tion does not make still greater sacrifices to the snake; it kills it." And he adds, "Why a man who is punished for having an inefficient conscience should be privileged to have an inefficient lung is a debatable question." This, you may say, is not merely the conservative side of Shaw; it is Shaw the inhuman cynic, who helped Butler to establish what Malcolm Muggeridge describes as the crude biological morality where "angels glow with health, not holiness", and where "virtue is assessed in public health statistics".<sup>13</sup>

Butler's close clinging to what actually happens in human life gives rise to a typical satiric trick that Shaw praised and adapted for his own use. Often, Butler suggests, our solemn assertions are self-deceptions, and our unconscious wisdom is directly opposed to our conscious reason. If you reverse a general proposition, then, you may not only shock and surprise, but you may stumble on a neglected truth. Everything, Butler observes, "is like a purse. There may be money in it, and we can generally say by the feel of it whether there is or is not. Sometimes, however, you must turn it inside out before you can be quite sure whether there is anything in it or no. When I have turned a proposition inside out, put it to stand on its head and shaken it, I have often been surprised to find how much came out of it."<sup>14</sup> The crime-disease analogy is this process expanded in parable form. Other verbal reversals abound in Butler's work. One thinks of "there lives more doubt in honest faith than in half the philosophical systems",<sup>15</sup> or "an honest God is the noblest work of man,"<sup>16</sup> or, on a more amusing plane, "better to have loved and lost than never to have lost at all".<sup>17</sup> In his review of Gilbert Cannan's early book on Butler (1915), Shaw praised this technique of reversal, and sharply attacked Cannan for suggesting that it was, in effect, a technique very similar to that used by W. S. Gilbert. "Gilbert," said Shaw indignantly, "never saw anything in the operation but a funny trick; he deliberately separated its exercise from his serious work, and took it off as a man takes off his hat in church when he attempted serious drama. Whenever Butler performed it, he presently realized that the seeming trick was inspired revelation."<sup>18</sup> Shaw then went on in somewhat extravagant terms to suggest that Butler used this device as a weapon "which smashed the nineteenth century", whereas Gilbert only made it laugh.

The attitude I have been describing was based on the assumption that a direct, unsentimental approach could illuminate any part of life. It is the amateur's approach, as opposed to the professional's. The professional has a keen sense of vested interests; he is contemptuous of those who lack proper credentials, and he exults in his bureaucratic status. Butler and Shaw were not opposed to the expert. In-

deed they were considerable experts themselves: Butler in the history of evolutionary thought, the sonnets of Shakespeare, the music of Handel, the art of Gaudenzio di Ferrara; Shaw in an even more impressive range of subjects and with usually a greater depth of knowledge and understanding. What they objected to in the professional was his assumption that no proper expert ventured beyond his own field. Both Butler and Shaw find that the spirit of professionalism deeply permeates the schools and universities. Butler, a product of Shrewsbury and Cambridge, spoke from the inside; Shaw, with even more conviction, spoke from outside. They distrusted the academic mind because of its refusal to venture outside of the walled castle of its particular discipline and its tendency to assume a pose of self-righteous arrogance. "No man can be a pure specialist," observed John Tanner in *The Revolutionist's Handbook*, "without being in the strict sense an idiot."

Finally, the attitude I have been trying to describe involves a particular theory of style. Words must never be used as entities in themselves, and must always remain subservient to a purpose, to the achievement of a goal. Both Butler and Shaw thought of themselves as journalists, in the sense that they were using words to destroy a wrong idea or to defend a right one.

"For art's sake" alone [wrote Shaw] I would not face the peril of writing a single sentence. I know that there are men who, having nothing to say and nothing to write, are nevertheless so in love with oratory and with literature that they delight in repeating as much as they can understand of what others have said or written aforetime . . . Effectiveness of assertion is the Alpha and the Omega of style. He who has nothing to assert has no style and can have none: he who has something to assert will go as far in power of style as its momentousness and his conviction will carry him.<sup>19</sup>

Butler is no less uncompromising. "Who is art," he exclaimed, "that it should have a sake?"<sup>20</sup> The contemporaries whom he found most distasteful were those who laboured most zealously in the pursuit of special effects. "Mr. Walter Pater's style," said Butler, "is like the face of some old woman who has been to Madame Rachel's and had herself enamelled. The bloom is nothing but powder and paint, and the odour is cherry blossom."<sup>21</sup> He, too, protested his devotion to the practical side of literature, and each book was, for him, an act in a prolonged intellectual battle. Both Butler and Shaw developed what Chesterton described as a "plain, pugnacious style". "Shaw," declared Chesterton, "has slain the polysyllable, that huge and slimy centipede . . ." <sup>22</sup>

The second plane on which Shaw operates, according to Edmund Wilson, is that of socialism, the vision of the good society. Here it would seem that the Butlerian influence would be negligible, for Butler remained aloof from the social

changes of his day. He knew little about socialism, and what little he did know he disliked. About the only political conviction he expressed is a pronounced preference for Disraeli over Gladstone, on the grounds that Gladstone was a type of the earnest, self-conscious Victorian addicted to high moral exhortation, whereas Disraeli did not take himself too seriously. The one, in Butlerian terms, lived under the law, the other under grace. Although Butler avoided political and economic controversy, and drew back in horror at the prospect of revolutionary social change, he had a lively sense of the relationship between human happiness and economic security; and this made him, almost in spite of himself, a social prophet. Throughout his life he was constantly and almost pathologically concerned with money, and in his major works of fiction the theme of money and its importance is always close to the surface. *The Way of All Flesh* is a study of the redemptive powers of the unconscious. But it might also be described as a study of the redemptive power of money. Ernest's salvation is accomplished by consolidating the moral resources that he had inherited from his sound and healthy ancestors and using this inheritance to break through the crust of conventional morality; but this moral escape could not have been accomplished if young Ernest had not received a generous benefaction from his aunt. The news of that benefaction is indeed the great apocalyptic moment in the novel, when the burden finally falls from the shoulders of the hero. But it has been preceded by a moment of revelation that prepares young Ernest emotionally for his good fortune. After graduation from university, young Ernest enters the church and serves in a poor parish in London. He completely accepts the popular evangelical attitude of the day that poverty is a virtuous state and that work among the poor is a benediction. This, comments the narrator, was one of those "bad threepenny pieces" which had been passed off upon him by his clerical associates. When Ernest, in a moment of combative self-justification, asks his wealthy college friend Towneley if he, too, is not fond of poor people, Towneley replies emphatically in the negative. "It was all over with Ernest from that moment. As though scales had fallen suddenly from his eyes, he saw that no one was nicer for being poor, and that between the upper and lower classes there was a gulf, which amounted practically to an unpassable barrier." The Towneley attitude toward poverty is, as you recall, a typical Erewhonian attitude. Poverty, like crime, is a disease, and a particularly repulsive one, at that.

This Butlerian attitude toward poverty is one that Shaw eagerly adopted. Indeed, most of the early references to Butler were not to his championship of evolutionary ideas but to his attitude toward poverty and his sense of the importance of



money. The complete sentence in the preface to *Major Barbara* to which I have already referred runs as follows: "The late Samuel Butler, in his own department the greatest English writer of the latter half of the nineteenth century, steadily inculcated the necessity and morality of a conscientious Laodiceanism in religion, and of an earnest and constant sense of the importance of money." It is significant that Shaw has linked together here, as he does elsewhere, Butler's Laodiceanism and his emphasis upon money. The two are related to that stringent realism I have already described, that is suspicious of emotion and of abstraction, that insists upon a cool and controlled appraisal of situations and ideas. Shaw was to go beyond any of the Butlerian ideas on economics and to embrace a complete and elaborately constructed form of socialism. But it is well to remember that Shaw's socialism has this sturdy, matter-of-fact basis, and that it did not grow out of passionate indignation, or a humanitarian dream. *Major Barbara* is Shaw's most famous dramatic exposition of the redemptive power of money. An introduction that he wrote in 1905 to his early novel, *The Irrational Knot*, stated the case in more precise Butlerian terms. "Money," he wrote, "is indeed the most important thing in the world; and all sound and successful personal and national morality should have this fact for its basis. Every teacher or twaddler who denies it or suppresses it, is an enemy of life. Money controls morality." And later, in similar vein: "A sufficient income is indispensable for the practice of virtue; and the man who will let any unselfish consideration stand between him and its attainment is a weakling, a dupe, and a predestined slave." It was this tough conservative basis that enabled Shaw to read such prophetic social writers as Marx, Morris, and George without embracing their theoretical pattern or being swept off his feet by their emotional indignation. In a sense, Shaw found himself forced into the socialistic position by his sense of personal disquietude. The socialist simply carries individualism to its full logical development. He cannot achieve peace, security, and contentment in isolation, for he will be constantly harassed by the spectacle of human suffering and degradation. Concern for others is the final form of concern for himself. This is the attitude that dominates all the Fabian essays: poverty is a loathsome disease, abhorrent to the sensitive person, and destructive of all aesthetic values. Shaw's description of the proletariat sounds very much like the attitude of the eighteenth-century French aristocrats to the poor.

The poor breed like rabbits; and their poverty breeds filth, ugliness, dishonesty, disease, obscenity, drunkenness and murder. In the midst of the riches which their labours pile up for you, their misery rises up too and stifles you. You withdraw in disgust to the other end of town from them; you appoint special carriages on your railways;

and special seats in your churches and theatres for them; you set your life apart from theirs with every class barrier you can devise; and yet they swarm about you still: your face gets stamped with your habitual loathing and suspicion of them: your ears get so filled with the language of the vilest of them that you break into it when you lose your self-control: they poison your life as remorselessly as if you had sacrificed theirs heartlessly. You begin to believe intensely in the devil.<sup>23</sup>

Moreover, to these brutish vices the poor add all the social snobbery of their superiors:

The moment you rise to the higher atmosphere of a pound a week, you find that envy, ostentation, tedious and insincere ceremony, love of petty titles, precedences and dignities and all the detestable fruits of inequality of condition, flourish as rankly among those who lose as among those who gain by it. In fact, the notion that poverty favours virtue was clearly advanced to persuade the poor that what they lost in this world they would gain in the next.<sup>24</sup>

The Shavian attitude toward the poor had personal as well as theoretical and Butlerian antecedents. Shaw was a member of a family with strong class traditions, and with a highly developed sense of gentility; he never forgot that he had been deprived of his rightful birthright. When he came to London in the seventies he diligently sought out the society of the wealthy and the refined. He gradually became aware of an economic problem, not because his poverty made him a social outcast and cut him off completely from social and emotional and intellectual pleasure, but because his income was inadequate to gain him admission to polite society. And he felt his plight all the more keenly when he reflected that he came from a genuinely superior family, that his father had aristocratic connections, and had unequivocal claims to the title of a gentleman. "If you would know what real poverty is," wrote Shaw in his most revealing autobiographical statement, "ask the younger son of the younger son of the younger son. To understand his plight you must start at the top without the income of the top, and curse your stars that you were not lucky enough to start at the bottom."<sup>25</sup> It is easy to understand, then, why when Shaw was converted to socialism in the early eighties he did not turn to humanitarian work in the poor districts of London, but confined himself to speeches on the public platform and lectures to groups of intellectuals. His was a fastidious socialism, with aristocratic and conservative roots.

Another aspect of this conservatism is the Shavian admiration for the captains of industry—again strongly demonstrated in *Major Barbara*. He despised the aristocrat or the upper class millionaire who lived on unearned income, but he had a strong admiration for the industrial manager, who was able by a combination of

wit, organizing power, and personal magnetism to outwit his competitors and to make money. Shaw always preferred wolves to sheep. Again his attitude has Butlerian parallels, if not roots. Butler was theoretically naive in matters of economics; he made no distinctions between kinds of wealth. A wealthy man, in Erewhonian parlance, was simply a superior person who by some ingenuity and forethought, and by a great deal of good fortune (the greatest of the virtues) had added to his body a number of external organs that enabled him to live more abundantly.

There is one final respect in which Butler exerted influence on Shaw's socialistic point of view. This, now, is by transference of ideas, rather than by any direct indebtedness. Although Shaw was profoundly impressed by Marx, he was revolted by the Marxian fatalism, which to him was a political expression of "natural selection". In Butler's books on evolution he found a metaphysic that gave him an answer to the Marxian doctrine of class warfare and inevitability. The socialism that he and his associates embraced has been called Fabian; it might more accurately be described as Lamarckian; for like that doctrine, as re-interpreted by Butler, it involved gradualism and a sense of design. In his preface to the 1908 reprint of Fabian essays, Shaw compares Fabian socialism with the revolutionary doctrines of the day, and goes on to say: "Socialism involves the introduction of design, contrivance and co-ordination, by a nation consciously seeking its own collective welfare, into the present industrial scramble for private gain."<sup>26</sup>

But if a cautious Lamarckianism satisfied Shaw on the social plane, it was less than satisfactory on the philosophical plane. The ghastly blunder of the first World War, the inept fumbings of the first Labour ministries, drove Shaw to another plane of speculation. A year after the outbreak of the first World War, he wrote to Mrs. Patrick Campbell: "The theatre is passing away from me as a sort of wild oats; I go back to politics, religion, and philosophy. They give me frightful headaches, but satisfy my soul."<sup>27</sup> The theatre, of course, did not pass away; the speculations produced the three greatest Shaw plays: *Heartbreak House*, *Back to Methuselah*, and *Saint Joan*. And in the writing of these plays, Shaw returned again to Butler—not the shrewd, cynical Butler of *Erewhon* and the *Notebooks*, but Butler the apostle of a new scientific religion. For Butler had always remained profoundly religious, and never lost the desire to bring his new ideas into some sort of association with the moral convictions he inherited from his religious upbringing. Like Tennyson, he was terrified at the prospect of living in a world of darkness, of being a child crying in the night, and with no language but a cry. He still

longed for the intimate, sympathetic, encompassing world of his childhood. And this manifests itself particularly in his passion to achieve a satisfying concept of an immediate, living, personal God. Having with the help of Darwin banished the old omnipotent Deity, Butler sought to redefine God in terms of his own biological theories. He still retained the Victorian desire for an intimate God, and he scornfully derides the pantheism that would rob God of His personality. His God becomes the whole evolutionary process itself, moving creatively towards new goals. For this new God he devises a new and joyful liturgy, a liturgy, moreover, which can harmonize easily with the theology he had known as a child. Butler, in effect, turns his evolutionary process into a biological commentary on Saint Paul. All the familiar theological concepts are retained in their new setting—concepts such as grace, immortality, the omnipresence of the spirit, individual participation in the Godhead. Here we have an ingenious, and on the whole, I think, ingenuous effort to make the orthodox feel at home in the new dispensation:

I will then indicate the Living and Personal God about whose existence and about many of whose attributes there is no room for question; I will show that man has been so far made in the likeness of this Person or God, that he possesses all its essential characteristics, and that it is this God who has called man and all other living forms, whether animals or plants, into existence, so that our bodies are the temples of His spirit; that it is this which sustains them in their life and growth, who is one with them, living, moving, and having His being in them; in whom, also, they live and move, they in Him and He in them; He being not a Trinity in Unity only, but an Infinity in Unity, and a Unity in an Infinity; eternal in time past, for so much time at least that our minds can come no nearer to eternity than this; eternal for the future as long as the universe shall exist; ever changing, yet the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. And I will show this with so little ambiguity that it shall be perceived not as a phantom or hallucination following upon a painful straining of the mind and a vain endeavour to give coherency to incoherent and inconsistent ideas, but with the same ease, comfort, and palpable flesh-and-blood clearness with which we see those near to us; whom, though we see them at the best as through a glass darkly, we still see face to face, even as we are ourselves seen.<sup>28</sup>

I do not propose to enter minutely into the differences between the Butlerian and Shavian ideas of evolution, except to point out that Shaw introduced into the gradualist scheme an element of vitalism and revolutionary change, and posited as the end of evolution not the achievement of a mindless stability, but of a world of pure intellect. It is not particularly relevant to discuss either the Butlerian or Shavian ideas as scientific schemes. They are imaginative projections which both express their attitude toward the world and attempt to re-establish man in the place

of centrality. They are both driven on by an emotional necessity. The Shavian fear of an unknown or mechanistic world is even more stridently expressed than the Butlerian. The classic statement of the Shavian attitude is to be found in the Preface to *Back to Methusaleh*:

As compared to the open-eyed, intelligent wanting and trying of Lamarck, the Darwinian process may be described as a chapter of accidents. As such, it seems simple, because you do not at first realize all that it involves. But when its whole significance dawns on you, your heart sinks into a heap of sand within you; there is a hideous fatalism about it, a ghastly and damnable reduction of beauty and intelligence, of strength and purpose, of honour and aspiration, to such casually picturesque changes as an avalanche may make in a mountain landscape, or a railway accident in a human figure. To call this natural selection is a blasphemy possible for many to whom nature is nothing but a casual aggregation of inert and dead matter, but eternally impossible to the spirits and souls of the righteous. If it be no blasphemy, but a truth of science, then the stars of heaven, the showers and dew, the winter and summer, the fire and heat, the mountains and hills, may no longer be called to exalt the Lord with us by praise; their work is to modify all things by blindly starving and murdering everything that is not lucky enough to survive in the universal struggle for hogwash.<sup>29</sup>

Here is the authentic voice of the poet-philosopher. Here is the Shaw described by himself in this way: "Whether it be that I was born mad or too sane, my kingdom is not of this world. I was at home only in the realm of my imagination, and at my ease only with the mighty dead."<sup>30</sup>

Butler, then, was a major part of Shaw's Victorian inheritance. For Shaw, Butler was a friend of the spirit—often perverse and wayward, occasionally intolerable, but in times of crisis, a guide and comforter. "Inheritance" here may be a misleading word: it takes account of the gap in years—about twenty years separated their births and about fifty years their deaths. But ideas are no respecters of chronology, and in a proper perspective, Butler and Shaw are best seen as contemporaries. We are led astray by the use of the word "Victorian" and its natural association with the reign of the Queen, 1837-1901. That period commands no natural unity. The world of the 1880's is far more different from the world of the 1840's than the present world is from the 1880's. (I am not referring here to technological advance, which is a superficial manifestation of man's development, but to basic changes in ideas and attitudes.) We need a new name for the era that begins in the seventies and eighties and stretches certainly to the end of the first World War, possibly even later, to end not with a whimper but a bang on August 6, 1945. Butler and Shaw are co-workers in this period, engaged in a task that, in varying ways, was undertaken by most of their major contemporaries—by Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold,

Morris, Wells, Chesterton, and Forster. It is a task of making man feel at home in a world becoming more alien and inhospitable. Butler and Shaw took the hard route: both believed that man was inseparable from natural processes, and yet, at the same time, superior to them. They thus pleased neither the church nor the schools, the men of religion nor the men of science, the pious nor the irreverent. Like all of the eminent Victorians, they strove for a compromise, and theirs was the boldest and gayest of all the compromises of the age. They attempted to bridge the gap between the world that the scientists describe and the world of the imagination, to maintain a balance between outer and inner space. In a world where the gap has widened and deepened and where the balance has been profoundly disturbed, we would do well to read Butler and Shaw, and to welcome their successors.

## NOTES

1. Shaw to Archibald Henderson, January 17, 1905. Quoted in Henderson, *George Bernard Shaw: Man of the Century* (New York, 1956), 136.
2. "Samuel Butler: The New Life Reviewed", in *Pen Portraits and Reviews* (London, 1931), 60 (originally published in the *Manchester Guardian*, November 1, 1919).
3. *Samuel Butler's Notebooks*, Selections, ed. Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill (London, 1951), 45-6.
4. *Prefaces* (London, 1934), 122.
5. *Major Critical Essays* (London, 1932), 51.
6. *Prefaces*, 162.
7. *Notebooks* (XX), 188. Unless otherwise noted, all Butler quotations are from *The Shrewsbury Edition of the Works of Samuel Butler*, ed. H. F. Jones and A. T. Bartholomew (London, 1923-25), 20 vols. Roman numerals identify volume numbers.
8. "Bernard Shaw at Eighty", in *The Triple Thinkers* (New York, 1938), 240.
9. *Prefaces*, 53.
10. *Prefaces*, 149 (*Man and Superman*).
11. *Prefaces*, 135 (*Major Barbara*).
12. *Prefaces*, 307. The following two quotations are from the same preface (300, 307). It is a general discussion on "Imprisonment" written as a preface to *English Local Government*, by Sidney and Beatrice Webb.
13. These phrases are taken from the Introduction to Muggeridge's *The Earnest Atheist, a Study of Samuel Butler* (London, 1936).
14. *Notebooks* (XX), 225.
15. *Alps and Sanctuaries* (VII), 67.
16. *Further Extracts from the Notebooks of Samuel Butler*, ed. A. T. Bartholomew (London, 1934), 26.
17. *The Way of All Flesh* (XVII), 385.
18. *Pen Portraits and Reviews*, 65.
19. *Prefaces*, 165 (*Man and Superman*).

20. *Alps and Sanctuaries* (VII), 135.
21. *Notebooks* (XX), 182.
22. *George Bernard Shaw* (London, 1914), 247.
23. "The Economic Basis of Socialism", in *Essays in Fabian Socialism* (London, 1932), 22.
24. "The Impossibilities of Anarchism", in *Essays in Fabian Socialism*, 84.
25. Preface to *Immaturity* (London, 1932), 6.
26. *Essays in Fabian Socialism*, 300.
27. Shaw to Mrs. Patrick Campbell, December 19, 1915, in *Bernard Shaw and Mrs. Patrick Campbell: Their Correspondence*, ed. Alan Dent (London, 1952), 184.
28. "God the Known and God the Unknown", *Collected Essays*, 12-13.
29. *Prefaces*, 498.
30. Preface to *Immaturity*, 43.