

SAMUEL BUTLER IN CANADA

BRIAN HILL

THE author of *Erewhon* and *The Way of all Flesh* is associated with Canada chiefly by his well-known satirical poem, "A Psalm of Montreal", which was inspired by his visit to the Museum of Natural History in that city and his discovery of a cast of the Discobolus banished from public view because it was "rather vulgar":—

Stowed away in a Montreal lumber room
The Discobolus standeth and turneth his face to the wall;
Dusty, cobweb-covered, maimed and set at naught,
Beauty crieth in an attic and no man regardeth:
O God. O Montreal.

Between 1874 and the end of 1875 Butler paid several visits to Canada, spending in all something more than a year there. He was not drawn there by any wish to see the colony, or from reasons of pleasure or health, but on sterner business—a desperate attempt to rescue a large sum of money invested by him in a Canadian company.

When he abandoned sheep-farming as a career and returned from New Zealand in 1864, he left his capital, amounting to about £8,000, invested in the colony. Some eight years later, however, he called in his money with the idea of finding suitable investments in England. Laid out at $4\frac{1}{2}$ or 5 per cent., and supplemented by what he could make by painting and writing, the capital should have produced a sufficient income for his needs. By ill-luck, however, he followed the advice of an old college friend, Henry Hoare, who was at the time a partner in the banking firm of that name. Under his guidance, Butler invested his savings in a number of companies Hoare was starting. "There was," he writes, "a patent steam-engine company; a patent gas-meter company; a company for pressing jute in India; and one for making extract from hemlock bark in Canada, which was to pay at least 60 per cent. and revolutionize the leather trade."

Such was the confidence in this Canadian undertaking that Butler took up no less than £3,500 worth of shares, and various of his friends, including Charles Paine Pauli, also put money in it. Pauli and Butler were both made directors of the Company.

Their dreams of wealth were of short duration. In less than two years Henry Hoare, who had been speculating wildly unknown

of his friends, went bankrupt, and Butler found most of his capital swallowed up in the crash. There seemed, however, some hope of saving at least a part of that invested in the Canada Tanning Extract Company.

The Company's headquarters were in Montreal, and Butler was deputed by the Board to go across and investigate matters on the spot. He accordingly took up his quarters in Montreal, returning at intervals to consult his co-directors. His view of the state of the Company's affairs was in the beginning fairly optimistic; but as his difficulties increased and the Company showed no signs of recovery, his letters home became more despondent. "I *think* I shall pull this Co. through, and recover my money," he writes to his friend, Miss Savage, on September 11, 1874; while a couple of months later he tells her in a letter dated November 11th of the same year: "I have fallen among thieves. Well, I believe I may also truly say that the thieves have fallen among *me*."

Butler found his schemes of reconstruction bitterly opposed by the Company's representatives in Canada, who resented his being put over them. In particular the resident manager, James Foley, seems to have done all he could to make his position untenable. Eventually Butler was forced to dismiss him, with the result that Foley went to law, and involved legal proceedings added to the difficulties. The only reference to these in the Memoir of Butler, published by H. Festing Jones in 1919, is the following:—

He had to give evidence in some legal proceedings, and kept the newspaper cuttings with the account of his cross-examination which lasted for hours. They tried to get his evidence set aside on the ground that he was an atheist.

These newspaper extracts were preserved, with others referring to various subjects which interested Butler, in a book of cuttings which has been given by the literary executors, with other Butler material, to the British Museum. The extracts dealing with the Canadian litigation, which bear neither the name of the newspaper nor the date upon them, are by no means a complete record of the proceedings.

But the convolutions of the case, which wandered through a maze of petitions for injunctions against Butler and the Company by Foley and counter-petitions by the defendants, need not long detain us. At one time Foley was brought up and acquitted on a charge of perjury, and a further cutting states that he prepared warrants for the arrest of Butler and Wilkins (presumably another official of the Company) on "a charge of conspiring against him

and perjuring themselves by their evidence in the case". This step, however, came to nothing, for "Mr. Butler is stated to have left for England, and Mr. Wilkins cannot be found in the city". Foley also issued a writ of injunction against Butler to restrain him from making public certain letters written by Foley to the foreman of the works. He alleged that these letters had been obtained by coercion. Butler's counsel appealed successfully against this injunction, and the letters were printed in a pamphlet issued in Montreal as a justification of his actions on the Company's behalf. There is a copy of this rare pamphlet, annotated in Butler's hand, in the British Museum.

Of greater interest to present-day readers, however, are the religious views of the author of *Erewhon*, as given in the witness-box on oath:—

Mr. Perkins (Foley's counsel): Do you believe in the existence of God?

Butler: I believe in the existence of a spiritual God who is omnipresent.

Mr. Perkins: Do you believe that God has revealed His Word to mankind in an inspired book called the Bible?

Butler's counsel objected to this question, and as the magistrate was not in Court, "having gone to the gaol to be present at an inspection of lunatics", the question was deferred until his arrival.

Foley's counsel then proceeded to quote Butler's answers in a deposition made by him before the Company's lawyer:—

Mr. Perkins: In that deposition, were not the following questions propounded to you by the Company's lawyer, and the following answers thereto given by you to such questions:—

Q. Do you believe in the existence of God?

A. In a way, certainly, and in a way certainly not. I believe in a great first cause from which springs the Universe, and "God" is my expression for that omnipotent cause, but the subject is so enormous that I cannot answer it in three lines. When I say I do not believe, I mean I do not believe in the Deity with a turban and a flowing beard, and great drapery, as represented in picture books.

Butler (interrupting): It should be flowing drapery.

Mr. Perkins (continuing to read from the deposition):

Q. Do you believe in the existence of God, as revealed in the Scriptures?

A. As revealed in some parts of them, certainly.

Q. Will you state what parts of Scripture you do not accept as revealing the existence of a God?