

# A Don's Wife a Century Ago

By CHRISTINA COLVIN

## SUMMARY

*Extracts from the memoirs and letters of Harriet Butler, wife of Arthur Gray Butler, fellow of Oriel. Settling into Oxford and the Provost's Lodgings, Oriel College. Encounters with undergraduates. Degree ceremonies. Social calls (especially the Mark Pattisons and Lewis Carroll). Dinners (especially with Jowett). Parliamentary election, 1880. Ruskin and his Slade Lectures. Mrs. Combe and her pre-Raphaelite pictures. Newman's visits to Oxford in 1878 and 1880. Sermons and the clergy (especially Pusey, Liddon, Vaughan and Jowett). A. G. Butler's re-election to a fellowship. A possible College living. The move to north Oxford.*

On 4 April 1877 25-year-old Harriet Jessie Edgeworth was married to Arthur Gray Butler, Fellow, Tutor and Dean of Oriel College; he was 20 years her senior.<sup>1</sup> Oriel was one of the earlier colleges to allow the marriage of fellows; its first non-professorial married fellow seems to have been elected in January 1876.<sup>2</sup> When Arthur Butler became engaged six months later he did not think he would probably be turned out, although he knew he would have to be re-elected.<sup>3</sup> He would have, in any case, a year's grace. He and his newly married wife returned from their honeymoon to live the first five years of their life together in the Provost's Lodgings at Oriel. Edward Hawkins, who had been Provost since 1828, had retreated finally from Oxford in 1874 to his canonry at Rochester, leaving his house to be shared between the Vice-Provost, David Monro, and the Dean, Arthur Butler. In speaking of the arrangements for sharing, Monro writes 'The combination of pococurante and invisible heads with married Tutors living in the Parks is very mischievous to the tone of a College and though the former is becoming rarer the latter is on the increase. I hope your coming into College would be the step towards having one or two houses for Tutors within the walls.' Monro kept no domestic establishment in the Lodgings and got his food from the College kitchen. He had two sitting-rooms and a few bedrooms, and Arthur Butler, in 1875 with his sister Emily as housekeeper, had drawing-room, dining-room, study and 5 or 6 bedrooms above. The drawing-room and dining-room had to be vacated whenever the Vice-Provost had a party,<sup>4</sup> but he was not a sociable man. The half house was

<sup>1</sup> Harriet Jessie Edgeworth was the only child of Michael Pakenham Edgeworth, F.R.S., botanist and Indian civil servant, and Christina Macpherson. Arthur Gray Butler was the 3rd son of George Butler, headmaster of Harrow and dean of Peterborough, and Sarah Maria Gray. This article is mainly based on the MS Memoirs of H. J. Butler (c. 1929) and the numerous letters written to her parents in the five years between her marriage and their deaths. Unless otherwise stated the letters are addressed to her mother and they remain in my possession. Mrs. Richard Butler, to whom some letters are addressed, was H. J. B's paternal aunt and no relation to A. G. B.

<sup>2</sup> J. R. King, vicar of St. Peter's in the East and formerly fellow of Merton Coll., was elected fellow of Oriel in Jan. 1876: G. C. Richards and C. L. Shadwell, *The Provosts and Fellows of Oriel College*; 1871 Census.

<sup>3</sup> See letters of A. G. B. to his fiancée during their engagement, 1876-7, esp. 30 Nov. 1876, and D. B. Monro to A. G. B., 16 June 1877 (Bodl. Butler MSS, uncat.)

<sup>4</sup> MS Memoirs (unfoliated typescript, Bodl. Butler MSS); D. B. Monro to A. G. B., 4, 11, Dec. 1876 (Bodl. Butler MSS); H. J. B., 10 Oct. 1877.

filled partly with the Provost's furniture – the Butler family only disposed of the last of 'Old Hawkins's' blankets about five years ago – and partly with Arthur Butler's own furniture from Haileybury, where he had been the first headmaster. The bride had only to find places for the wedding presents, for her big square piano and for her new black and gold writing table; she placed this 'across the corner of the oriel', she wrote to her mother, so that 'I don't have to look at the ugly Library but at a bit of the older building'.<sup>5</sup> She preferred Gothic to Classical architecture.

Harriet Butler had only been in Oxford once before, for twenty-four hours. In her memoirs she says 'How fascinating it was to look out into the grey quad and seeing young men in cap and gown flitting about in the morning to chapel or lecture or going into Hall at 6 p. m. – and the dons assembling after dinner in hall and processing not too formally to the Common Room – and men *not* in cap and gown rushing at all times about College and bawling for each other. I used to wonder why they shouted so much about 'Hall' till I discovered it was a frequent appeal to 'Ball' the senior scholar and a great favourite. That same Sidney Ball<sup>6</sup> was the first undergraduate brought in to coffee soon after we arrived. How strange if delightful it all was to a girl brought up in a strictly family circle, full of interests and pursuits but socially restricted – and especially devoid of young men for whom I had in truth no liking. And here I was surrounded by more young men than I had ever seen before and in a circle of highly cultured scholars, full of educational ideas and academic interests to which some (and notably Arthur) added athletic interests; I had never seen a game played in my life! They were all very courteous and kind but they spoke a cautious and unemotional language quite new to me who was used to very clear expressions of opinion and pretty strong prejudices.' Her daughter told me that Arthur Butler had to teach her to tone down what she said.

Three days after her arrival she was already entertaining undergraduates: 'At 8 we had in 3 young men . . . and they were very nice & friendly, only couldn't see when it was time to go! They did no harm staying, but I think I shall ask them later next time, for I feel convinced they will never go till 10, in any case.' She seems to have expected them to stay no more than an hour.<sup>7</sup> She writes 'Of course we had them to breakfast about 4 at a time from the beginning.'<sup>8</sup> Almost immediately she had to order breakfast for the boat: watching the Eights and the Torpids became an interest for her which lasted right up to the 1920s at least and in early days she used to chaperone the young ladies from Lady Margaret Hall on to the College Barge; she thought them in general rather badly dressed.<sup>9</sup> She says that she and her husband 'survived the breakfast & really the "boat" are not a bad lot. They are of the rougher set in the College, not a high bred party, but sensible & ready enough to talk. Arthur humanely took the stupid ones at his end of the table & I had the Captain, Martin by name, & 2 other conversable ones near me. Between the boat, & the training, & the colours, & Mayday we did very well . . . Our 8 did not eat so *very* much. The steak came from the college kitchen, & was wholly consumed; & they all began with 2 bits of filleted sole & each had an egg – but ate few mutton chops! I had one teapot, & Alfred [the manservant] 2 on the sideboard, so I had very little real work, only some half a dozen cups. We have now had in 16 of the College, & Arthur promises me only the same number more. I am bound to say they are easily disposed of but when did I ever see 16 young men before, in the space of 12 days? . . . Breakfasts are an excellent invention because the men can't stay

<sup>5</sup> 19, 20, 22 Apr., 3 May 1877.

<sup>6</sup> Sidney Ball, later fellow, St. John's Coll. 1882–91 and 1902–18.

<sup>7</sup> 22, 26 Apr. 1877.

<sup>8</sup> MS Memoirs.

<sup>9</sup> 12 May 1880.

too long.<sup>10</sup> They were indeed a great success. Sidney Ball says 'No undergraduate, least of all a scholar, would have missed them' and 'It would be no exaggeration to say that for many . . . the Dean's breakfast parties were not the least part of the liberal and humane education we received at Oriel.'<sup>10a</sup> In 1880, more ambitiously, the Butlers gave a dance in hall, 'an entire success, 60 dancers *altogether* filled the hall nicely, not at all too few, or enough for crowding, & they danced steadily from 9 to 1 when we cruelly insisted on closing as most of the guests are going to a ball tonight, & probably one tomorrow. Mrs. Butcher was our only married lady dancing & we had only 6 chaperones . . . Our friends ate & drank largely, & wandered romantically in the quad despite puddles & cold breezes & we hope none of them are the worse. Altogether we reflect with satisfaction on our impromptu.'<sup>11</sup>

Of course Oriel undergraduates did not visit the Lodgings only to be entertained; they had to visit the Dean officially. As an old aunt said 'There are always 2 young men waiting downstairs.' Harriet Butler writes 'This morning chapel was at 8.30, & I have been reading a little to Arthur since, retiring now at 10 as young men appear to excuse their non-attendance at chapel. This is the style of colloquy "Were you late, Mr. Smith?" "Yes" "How was that?" "I was asleep" (in a shamefaced mumble) "Just get your servant to wake you thoroughly on Sundays - call twice - It's not a very early hour".'<sup>12</sup> One day at the beginning of term she seems to have been present in the study 'when 2 knocks at the door were followed by 2 youths. "Well, Mr. Darling! Well, Mr. Smith! What *have* you been about, amusing yourselves while we were all at work?" "I've had a bad cold" murmurs the unfortunate Smith, who is always being called to account for something. He's the man who has to be wakened 3 times on Sunday. No better excuse was forthcoming for his being 4 days late of arriving, not having even written about it. "You have not got a doctor's certificate, even?" So he was dismissed with a considerable reprimand. As for Darling, . . . he had simply never asked when Term began, thought Tuesday would do. "Who ever heard of a term beginning on a Tuesday?" . . . Mr. D. looked at the ceiling & had nothing to say! "Have you worked hard during the summer?" "Not very. I meant to. I've been to Sweden & took books there." In short the young man is not an ardent student.'<sup>13</sup>

Undergraduates from other colleges did not generally come Harriet Butler's way except *en masse*. She went to a debate at the Union on a motion of censure on the Conservative Government and thought the audience more interesting than the speakers, 'wild with excitement, shouting & groaning tremendously, tho' behaving like gentlemen throughout.'<sup>14</sup> She was rather less approving of their behaviour at degree ceremonies. 'Such a row as the undergraduates have been making in honour of General Roberts' in 1881. 'They were alone in the upper gallery of the Sheldonian, & bawled continuously, too much, yet I don't suppose he minded. Professor Holland presented him with too long a speech which was rather rudely shouted down, but the enthusiasm was very real.'<sup>15</sup> A good many years later when the Polar explorer Nansen got an honorary degree she did not find the noise amusing and felt that the undergraduates might have let the Public Orator deliver his praises of the distinguished visitor, 'but he was interrupted incessantly, very poor jokes being shouted at him . . . It would have been civil to restrain themselves. It seems that at

<sup>10</sup> 30 Apr., 1 May 1877.

<sup>10a</sup> Sidney Ball, *Memories and Impressions*, ed. O. H. Ball, 256-7.

<sup>11</sup> 8 June 1880. Mrs. Butcher was the wife of S. H. Butcher, fellow of Univ. Coll. and later professor of Greek at Edinburgh.

<sup>12</sup> 29 Apr. 1877.

<sup>13</sup> 16 Oct. 1877.

<sup>14</sup> 9 Feb. 1878.

<sup>15</sup> 8 Feb. 1881. T. E. Holland was Chichele Professor of International Law.

Cambridge they made a *dreadful* row & did something with a Polar bear!<sup>16</sup> It may be noted that in 1927 she thought Encaenia had become decorous and dull.<sup>17</sup> A much more serious fracas on which she comments was the occasion in May 1880 when 39 men from University College were sent down summarily all at once: according to her the Senior Proctor, Mr. Chavasse, had suffered from some discreetly undefined outrage, coincidentally on the night of a bump supper, and no one would tell on the culprit. It seems that the college Dean's door was nailed up when he was entertaining Mr. Chavasse and some ladies to dinner and they had to exit with the aid of a ladder. When the guilty person eventually owned up, the rest of those rusticated were allowed to return.<sup>18</sup>

The great ordeals for a bride newly come to Oxford were the formal social calls to be received and returned within a month,<sup>19</sup> and the endless dinner parties of the first year or so. Harriet Butler says 'I am afraid we did not play the part of newly arrived pair properly for after lunch Arthur would hastily call a hansom and drive me off to Shotover or Boars Hill for a long walk',<sup>20</sup> but the misbehaviour was only relative: at the beginning of June 1877 Mrs. Edgeworth got a letter from her daughter saying 'Yesterday we paid 7 visits, after which Arthur felt fatigued but virtuous! One, this morning will leave us with clear consciences to begin next Term.'<sup>21</sup> A not untypical summer call was on Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Butcher - 'We found 3 gentlemen playing lawn tennis, & 3 ladies sitting in a very hot corner looking on - so Arthur joined one party & I the other, & I was quite well amused . . . & we had tea in a hot little drawing-room rather overfilled with pretty things, & came away to cool a little in the Parks, & leave cards on 1 or 2 people.'<sup>22</sup> A little later 'I was greatly amused by seeing Mrs. Mark Pattison for the first time - she civilly wrote to let me know she was at home & ill, so I called & found her on a sofa with various visitors round her - a lively clever woman about 35, in black velvet with fuzzy hair, full of talk about Italian politics on which she writes for the Annual Register, & conceives herself to be particularly well informed - & her accounts of the diplomatic squabbles &c were diverting - the Rector was in town "I don't know when he's coming back - perhaps the housemaid does" - & his quarrels with his neighbours she considers unnecessary & embarrassing - how is she to go & dine with people if he won't speak to them?' The Rector himself called on the Butlers later by himself and is described as 'a peculiar-looking man supposed to be peculiarly pleasing to ladies.'<sup>23</sup> When Harriet Butler called on Mrs. Hall, mother of an Oriel fellow, Mrs. Hall complained that she was 'a good deal tried by her daughters leaving her for spheres of their own - one is an excellent High School mistress at Exeter, another a Nurse.' Their mother did not like to interfere with them ' & greatly admires them, but finds it hard to be content with only 2 at home.'<sup>23a</sup> Another call was on Lewis Carroll in Christ Church. He was a Rugby contemporary of Arthur Butler. 'This afternoon being wet we devoted ourselves to visits, beginning with Mr. Dodgson who inhabits a room hung round with pretty children. Books & books full of photos fill his cupboards & we saw many portraits of charming little actresses & laundresses' daughters &c - And he keeps a bear that walks about gnashing its teeth & glaring at you with fierce eyes. No, don't think he's mad - it is

<sup>16</sup> H. J. B. to her daughter Olive, 18 March 1897.

<sup>17</sup> H. J. B. to the same, 2 July 1927.

<sup>18</sup> 14, 18 May 1880 and ex inf. Dr. Leslie Mitchell. The Dean of Univ. Coll. was J. F. Bright.

<sup>19</sup> 30 Apr. 1877.

<sup>20</sup> MS Memoirs.

<sup>21</sup> 9 June 1877.

<sup>22</sup> 7 May 1877.

<sup>23</sup> 18 May and 29 Oct. 1877; H. J. B. to M. P. Edgeworth, 7 Feb. 1877. Mrs. Mark Pattison, née Emilia Frances Strong, was the wife of the Rector of Lincoln. After his death in 1884 she married Sir Charles Dilke.

<sup>23a</sup> 18 March 1880.

only a foot long & walks by machinery but it's a splendid bear, & an object of fearful joy to his juvenile friends.<sup>24</sup>

Dinner parties were a more serious matter than calls. Within 10 days of their arrival in Oriel they were dining with Albert Watson, the Bursar of Brasenose, who laid himself out to catch brides for their first dinner. Harriet Butler was 'duly tucked in her wedding dress into a bath chair and trundled across to Brasenose', 'wheeling away by broad daylight through the streets' with her husband walking beside her. She was landed at the door of Mr. Watson's rooms in a way which would not have been possible if they had gone in a fly. 'We were a small party' she says 'and it only dawned upon me during dessert as I sat shy beside my still shyer host that it devolved on *me* to lead the way from dinner. And when was I to do it? and where to go? Mr. Watson gave me no help. Mrs. Wordsworth cast glances which I could not interpret. I don't know how I did move at last.'<sup>25</sup> When she dined at Balliol she found her host Dr. Jowett alarming. 'We used to assemble in the drawing-room – ladies apt to stand in semi-circles – the Master going round with a courteous stiff address to each and introducing partners for dinner. Dinner announced we simply paired off and seated ourselves where we pleased at the long table, an arrangement which didn't work out well. On one occasion Dr. Walker took me in and planted me next to Robert Browning but I was not much the better for that as Dr. Walker talked without cessation. The ladies were left of course to make the best of each other afterwards. We were asked to small Sunday dinners by Jowett but I disliked dining out on Sundays and indeed was needed at home to look after the babies. Nurse did not leave them much but she did like to go to the [Wesleyan] chapel on Sundays. So we gave up going and the Master was not pleased.'<sup>26</sup> The Butlers went in November 1877 to a 'fairly pleasant' dinner at the house of Edwin Palmer, the Corpus professor of Latin: 'Lady Selborne . . . stood in state by the fire & we were all introduced in turn to her – Lord S. has a thoughtful face but *not* one of much power, – nor, I should have said, with much of the keen lawyer look – but I suppose he is as sharp a man as you could find, & many stories are told just now of his examination of victims before the Commission, leading them on by degrees to express opinions exactly opposite to their real ones. My neighbour was a scientific Prof. Clifton whom I did not fancy – the Goldwin Smiths were there, but I did not hear any of his brilliant talk. His is a most striking head – she looks like a sick turkey, & is thought much in the way by his old friends. She warbled in the "Italian style" after dinner, & one Mrs. Prichard sang an enormously long ballad about the butterflies & church bells of her youth.'<sup>27</sup> Early in December she writes 'Last night we were very smart at the Deanery – all the world came in after dinner & there was music, more or less good . . . I had an amusing neighbour in a Professor from China, who gave us the benefit of his experiences in that country throughout dinner (I can fancy his being a bore at times), finally inducing us all to eat salt with our pineapples – I was one of the few who rather approved of the combination. The Miss Liddells were rather over-dressed, but in pretty costumes of white India muslin. They are striking girls, the elder with a very sweet

<sup>24</sup> 22 Oct. 1877.

<sup>25</sup> MS Memoirs and H. J. B. to M. P. Edgeworth, 28 Apr. 1877. Mrs. Wordsworth was the wife of John Wordsworth, fellow of Brasenose and later Bishop of Salisbury.

<sup>26</sup> MS Memoirs; 6, 9 May 1877. F. W. Walker was a contemporary of A. G. B. at Rugby and had recently been elected High Master of St. Paul's School.

<sup>27</sup> 8 Nov. 1877. Edwin Palmer was brother of the 1st earl of Selborne, Lord Chancellor 1872–4 and 1880–5. Lord Selborne was made chairman of the 2nd Oxford University Commission in 1876; Selborne: *Memorials*, Pt. II, vol. i, 371–6. R. B. Clifton was Professor of Experimental Philosophy. Goldwin Smith had been Regius Professor of Modern History 1858–68. He married his Canadian wife, Mrs. Harriet Boulton, in 1875. Mrs. Prichard was probably the wife of C. Prichard, Savilian Professor of Astronomy.



sad face – This is one of their first parties here since the death of the eldest girl.<sup>28</sup>

The first term the Butlers were the only newly married pair, but in the autumn of 1878 there was an access of eight brides to the university circle: Spooners, Barclay Thompsons, Daniels, Moores, Knoxes, Popes &c, constantly to be met when dining out. All the dinner parties, two or three a week to begin with, had to be returned, and Mrs. Spooner was the Butler's first bridal guest, 'sweeping stately in, large and fair with her long white train, and Mr. Spooner following meekly behind (Madonna and Child was one of the names given them: her stately grace and his albino colouring gave some excuse for the idea)' . . . 'Mrs. Barclay Thompson arrived at our house dressed in *black* with red beads round her neck'.<sup>29</sup> It remained for many years the custom to wear one's wedding dress out to dinner to begin with.

It is surprising how little worried Harriet Butler was about managing 4 or 5 servants and organizing parties of 18 or even 20 people, although 20 was regarded as rather a squash in the Oriel dining-room. Later on when she moved to North Oxford the number was reduced to 14, or 12 if the Vice-Chancellor was to be present, to allow room for gowns, which were *de rigueur* in his presence, even at a private dinner party.<sup>30</sup> Care had to be taken in matching the guests, for there was a strong line between Conservative and Liberal, High Church and Broad Church. Arthur Butler was not fond of dogmas, secular or ecclesiastical, and he got on with everyone. A Liberal in politics, later a Liberal Unionist, he 'had much sympathy with the "Church" party, while keeping on good terms with his old anti-clerical friends like Arthur Acland, Henry Pelham and others'.<sup>31</sup> Before a dinner party in October 1877 Harriet Butler writes to her mother: 'Do you care about the menu? Gravy soup, turbot, quenelles (both these from the college kitchen), salmi of leveret, shoulder of mutton, boiled turkey, apple pie, lemon cream, jelly. My beloved red bramble leaves really made a charming centrepiece, planted in sand in a long stalked flat glass, & mixed with asparagus & a few flowers'.<sup>32</sup> Gravy soup, as described in her grandmother's MS cookery book, was a sort of consommé with a little shredded carrot and celery floating in it.

The Butlers did not only entertain academics. They both belonged to large family groups and relations were continually coming to stay. Perhaps the most distinguished and certainly the most amusing of them was Arthur Butler's brother-in-law, Francis Galton, founder of the study of eugenics. Harriet Butler says 'He was most agreeable – his scientific turn makes him so unlike most people here & he is full of ingenious devices, & pursues his researches regarding the "personal equation" and "hereditation" with great vigour. To hear him questioning Mr. Bradley this morning about his own and his Father's lapses of memory – "& do any of your children inherit this disposition?" "They are all stupid, but I don't think they forget names especially" replies the Master, a little taken aback. "It would have been *very* interesting if one of them had been dumb" observed Mr. G. afterwards, regretfully – "but perhaps he might not have liked it."'<sup>33</sup> With such a scale of entertaining it

<sup>28</sup> 25 Dec. 1877. The Dean of Christ Church was H. G. Liddell. His daughter was Lewis Carroll's 'Alice'. Edith Liddell died in 1876.

<sup>29</sup> MS Memoirs. The dons referred to are W. A. Spooner, fellow and later Warden of New College; J. B. Thompson, student of Christ Church; C. H. C. Daniel, fellow of Worcester Coll.; A. L. Moore, formerly fellow of St. John's Coll. and now tutor at Keble; E. A. Knox, fellow of Merton Coll. and later Bishop of Manchester; and R. W. H. Pope, mathematical and divinity lecturer, Worcester Coll.

<sup>30</sup> Ex inf. H. J. B.'s daughter Ruth.

<sup>31</sup> MS Memoirs. See also 9 Feb. 1878. H. W. (later Sir Henry) Acland was Regius Professor of Medicine. H. F. Pelham was later Camden Professor of Ancient History.

<sup>32</sup> 21 Oct. 1877.

<sup>33</sup> 8 Nov. 1877. Francis (later Sir Francis) Galton, F. R. S., author of *Hereditary Genius* (1869). G. G. Bradley was Master of Univ. Coll.

seems remarkable to us in these days of inflation when she reports at the end of her first term 'We had a grand morning's work yesterday, & paid most of our bills . . . The bills were big enough, but not more than was to be expected – about £65 altogether I daresay . . . When I talk of £65 of course I included servants who are very expensive.'<sup>34</sup> The sum may have excluded some food brought in from the college kitchen, which would have been paid for through Arthur Butler's battels. She writes of the vacation when 'Oxford looks deserted – hardly a soul left in Oriel – the shops in the lane all closed – People are hardly expected to live, out of Term – food is supplied with difficulty!' When term started again she says 'The quads & streets are swarming with men again, & I feel the sight to be a natural & familiar one now.' She meets a young man at the door 'so well got up, gloves a tight fit, coat ditto, whiskers neatly trimmed! "The worst is, today, one keeps shaking hands all round, till one forgets whom one has shaken hands with" is the general sentiment, this being the only day on which it is correct to greet your friends in this fashion!'<sup>35</sup>

Inevitably most of Harriet Butler's time was spent among University people. At that date it was not easy to find the social or parish work in which she felt she ought to be involved. She started by visiting the workhouse, something she went on doing for the next 50 years, reading and singing to the old people there. They liked to tell her their life stories and to have literary conversations about the authors of the hymns she sang, what collection of hymns she had and so on. 'Hark, my soul, it is the Lord' they could not find in their books but they knew it was by Cowper and liked her to sing it.<sup>36</sup> Later she was involved in the setting up and running of a home for unmarried mothers and in the work of the Cottage Improvement Society. She writes very little of city affairs, but at the time of the two parliamentary elections of 1880 she reports the tremendous excitement aroused and says ruefully that her baby son, not yet two, waved his hands and cried 'Hurrah for Chitty' when his pram met a band of flag-waving Liberals.<sup>37</sup> She had been brought up a Conservative. She was shown on the wall of All Souls a graffito of Reform Bill days, still visible. It read 'Bristol Murder' and referred to the arch Tory Recorder of Bristol, Sir Charles Wetherell, who had provoked a riot in that town in 1831 and had stood unsuccessfully for Oxford in 1832.<sup>38</sup> The scandalous conduct of both parties in the 1880 elections in Oxford provoked an official enquiry and although a friend of the Butlers asserted that all the bad cases of bribery and treating in pubs were in the Jericho area and that the better class of poor did not take bribes, a Royal Commission recommended the disfranchisement of 141 people, including 5 city councillors, 2 J.P.s and both party agents.<sup>39</sup>

To return to the University, Harriet Butler agreed in October 1877 to go with Mrs. Butcher to hear the lectures of Mr. Laing, a fellow of Corpus, on the history of France. He turned out 'as might be expected rambling' the first time. Later he lectured 'about the human will, which may or may not be considered necessary in a course of French history' and proposed to 'overhear & repeat' a dialogue between Louis IX and Edward I on Holy Wars; she though this would be an amusing exercise but she didn't feel equal to it.<sup>40</sup> In the same term she went to the first lecture of Professor Shairp, the new professor of Poetry: 'it was thoroughly characteristic – very earnest & thoughtful – & thoroughly Scotch. It [was]

<sup>34</sup> 8, 9 June 1877. A. G. B.'s income in 1876 was £1000 from private sources and £800 from his college, 'house and all included': A. G. B. to C. Edgeworth, ? May, 1876 (Butler MSS).

<sup>35</sup> 24 July 1878, 14 Oct. 1877.

<sup>36</sup> 28 May 1880. See also ?26 Oct., 9 Dec. 1877, 1 Feb., 18 Oct. 1878 &c.

<sup>37</sup> 29 March 1880. Joseph Chitty was M. P. for Oxford 1880–1.

<sup>38</sup> H. J. B. to her aunt, Mrs. R. Butler, 20 March 1880.

<sup>39</sup> 16 Oct. 1880. For a fuller account see *V. C. H. Oxon.* iv, 251–3.

<sup>40</sup> 12, ?21, ?29 Oct., ? Nov. 1877.

on poetry in general, & he wound up by a strong protest in favour of the morality of poetry, declaring that the Christian ideal is the highest, & that no modern poet putting aside that highest aim & standard, could attain the highest position in his art . . . The theatre was full, & there was a fair amount of applause – it was a moderate success – this tone is not of course suited to the youth of the present day who will be apt to consider it a sermon.<sup>41</sup>

More interesting is her account of John Ruskin who held the first Slade Professorship from 1870 to 1879 and lectured on even when his mind was gradually failing. In 1877 he was still an immensely successful speaker, and in November of that year the Butlers found the lecture room ‘crammed – shoals of people filling up the doorways & no prospect of possible entrance. We waited just to see him come and fell in with Mrs. Acland. As we stood there up came Dr. Acland,<sup>42</sup> hastily introducing a brown haired irregular-featured clever-faced man in a professorial gown. “Please take Mrs. Butler in instead of” – & as there was clearly no time for hesitation I grasped Mr. Ruskin’s hand & held tight as Mr. Acland & he plunged thro’ the crowd – & so I found myself seated in first rate position in the front row . . . His lecture was just what one would expect from him & amused me vastly – very brilliant clever wild *talk*, not cast in any formal mould . . . He is, he says, the only man in England who knows his own business, knows how to teach art . . . He showed us some Turners & said everyone painted for money now & there was no high ideal . . . 3 things he said he had long maintained with regard to art & all were contrary to the maxims of the present day. He says 1. Religion is the life of Art – modern artists turn to sensual models & subjects. He says, the food of art is the passionate and reverent study of Nature – the world says, examine nature critically, microscopically. “If you want to draw a dog, I say, love him & look at him. Other people say vivisection him.” Thirdly he says the health of art lies in the humility & poverty of the workman; the world measures it by the riches & prosperity of the workman. He spoke well of the peculiarities of each artist, his very narrowness making his actual strength & well said too that art was not mere imitation of nature.<sup>43</sup> Later in the year she writes ‘Ruskin concluded his course yesterday by advising the undergraduates to do no work in the Long, to spend one month in the hills, one on the seashore, & one following the plough in the level country.’<sup>44</sup> In 1883 she again patronized the lectures: ‘We are going to hear Ruskin this afternoon. He will talk dreadful nonsense probably, but one likes to hear what the world in general goes to hear – Whether I shall have patience for a second lecture remains to be seen.’ She did. He was ‘madder than ever on Saturday, giving us what he called a “lecture on patience” with a (beautiful) description of a ragged and impatient little Italian girl & a great deal about St. Theodore, spiced with advice on matrimony to the undergraduates! No wonder his friend Dr. Acland sits by with an anxious face.’<sup>45</sup> ‘It is curious how people crowd to hear him & he really does preach good little sermons to the young men which they would take from nobody else.’<sup>46</sup>

One of the chief patrons of art in Oxford at this time was Mrs. Combe, the wife of the University Printer. Harriet Butler took one of her cousins to visit her in February 1878, saying ‘She was very kind & evidently liked shewing us the pictures which Janet, like us, found to grow on her very much as she lingered amongst them – The Light of the World is still there, but when it goes to Keble, the pigeons which Chris will remember are to occupy

<sup>41</sup> 23 Oct. 1877. See also 15 Feb. 1878, 10 June 1884 (to Mrs. R. Butler). J. C. Shairp, Principal of United Coll., St. Andrews, was Professor of Poetry 1877–85.

<sup>42</sup> Acland was a lifelong friend of Ruskin.

<sup>43</sup> 8 Nov. 1877.

<sup>44</sup> ? Nov. 1877.

<sup>45</sup> H. J. B. to Mrs. R. Butler, 10 Nov. 1883; 12 Sept. 1884.

<sup>46</sup> H. J. B. to Mrs. R. Butler, ? Nov. 1885.



its place, while theirs is to be filled with a view of London Bridge on the night of the Prince's marriage, all lit up with red lamps – hideous beyond all description – but she chooses to have it as the last of H[olman] H[unt]'s available! It is at present in her dining-room (& should be put in the fire) . . . & there is Woolner's wonderfully striking bust of Newman, whom it seems Mrs. C. knew well – & she talked a good deal about him, & how he had told her of his intended secession, sobbing over the thought of the grief it would cause his friends. I have just read the Apology, so feel specially interested in him.<sup>47</sup>

Later in the same month Newman was to pay his first visit to Oxford since his reception into the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. He revisited both his old Colleges, Trinity and Oriel. 'He has been here – is here still I suppose & we have been gazing from the oriel across at him & feeling our expectations more than realized. Emily<sup>48</sup> fetched Mrs. Wordsworth up at 10 when he was expected – & we all three sat in the window looking & then he came with Arthur, & an old Mr. Copeland,<sup>49</sup> one of his set had up from the country to meet him – & we saw him gazing up at the old buildings which he must have seen as one in a dream. He is the same age as Dr. Pusey,<sup>50</sup> 78, but far more vigorous & upright – none of the sternness in his face which the bust leads one to expect; it is full of power, & sweetness when he smiles [–] said it could not fail to be as he thus revisited the scenes of his happiest & greatest, & yet I suppose most anxious & perturbed days . . . You can hardly understand the intensity of interest in actually seeing *him, here*, tho' had you been beside me you would fully have shared it. They went into the Common Room, & we tried to catch glimpses thro' the windows, seeing of course a great deal of Mr. Chase and Mr. Shadwell<sup>51</sup> & everybody uninteresting, & very little of Dr. Newman. They went up to the Library, & at last walked across slowly on this side of the quad, passing in front of our window; & then we could note the look of age & fatigue which distance had hidden, & see the rare & beautiful smile that played over his face as he talked. "If they would but all go away & let him have his cry out alone", sighed Mrs. Wordsworth, & it was just what one felt he must long for – if Mr. Shadwell would have let him go alone to his old rooms but perhaps he would have feared so to indulge himself. Arthur was immensely interested last night. Newman sat between his host, the President of Trinity (such a queer fat plain shy little man),<sup>52</sup> & the Rector of Lincoln, his old comrade. Mark Pattison intended to join the Roman Church when his friend did, & ordered the 'bus to call to take him to the late train to Birmingham where he was to be received but the bus failed him, he lost the train, had to sleep on his resolution – & is still here, still a Broad Churchman! Such a contrast between his dry cynical face, & Newman's genial smile! . . . the best was when he [Newman] and Liddon<sup>53</sup> got together after dinner – bending towards each other in eager talk, the 2 keen faces with their wonderful smile. Arthur walked home with Liddon who was full of delight – said Newman went on correcting him slightly throughout their talk, (as they say the old Provost used to do) "my dear sir, I think you mean so and so". Having just read the Apology makes one feel acquainted with him, & it is such a subtle earnest mind – & seeing him, one understands the fascination of his presence. He is not so tall as I expected, & the droop of his head

<sup>47</sup> 9 Feb. 1878. The pigeons and the view of London Bridge are now in the Ashmolean. Woolner's bust is in Keble Coll. *Apologia pro Vita Sua* came out in 1864.

<sup>48</sup> A. G. B.'s sister.

<sup>49</sup> W. J. Copeland, fellow of Trinity Coll. 1832–49, rector of Farnham, Essex.

<sup>50</sup> Regius Professor of Hebrew and canon of Christ Church.

<sup>51</sup> D. P. Chase was Principal of St. Mary Hall and fellow of Oriel Coll. C. L. Shadwell was fellow of Oriel and later Provost.

<sup>52</sup> S. W. Wayte.

<sup>53</sup> Ireland Professor of Exegesis of Holy Scripture.

seemed familiar, so often have his air and gait been described, but one longed to see him in cap & gown, instead of having a horrid chimney pot on his head.<sup>54</sup> Newman came again in 1880. He was now a Cardinal and Harriet Butler reports that he did not have to have a chaperoning priest with him when he visited his old friend Mrs. Combe. He preached in Oxford and the Butlers had a ticket, but Arthur Butler thought that his position forbade his going and his wife's Protestant conscience revolted from entering a Roman Catholic chapel.<sup>55</sup> Later in life she might probably have thought differently, but one has to remember that her father was Low Church Anglo-Irish and her mother, a Macpherson from Aberdeen, a Presbyterian before her marriage. When the Edgeworths came to Oxford they liked the plain services at All Saints and in Merton Chapel, then doubling as the parish church of St. John the Baptist.<sup>56</sup>

The Butlers themselves went occasionally to the Cathedral, but more often to the University Church, which was also their parish church. In her *Memoirs* Harriet Butler writes 'The university sermons were then an immense interest with a wide range of really powerful preachers – Liddon, Vaughan, Magee, Dean Church, Westcott, Abbott.<sup>57</sup> Once on Trinity Sunday I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Pusey, whom one met occasionally in or near Christ Church, pacing with bent head, looking very, very old. But in the pulpit when he spoke of the song before the Throne, one felt that he had stood near himself and heard the "Holy, Holy, Holy".<sup>58</sup> Of Liddon she speaks more fully. She first met him in May 1877 when she and her husband 'drove up Boar's Hill . . . & walked & sat as usual along the ridges or in the woods – "This is Liddon's favourite walk" A. told me & later on, as we sat under a tree reading, I spied him coming down the path. A. hailed him, & we had a pleasant little chat, A. characteristically remaining seated with his back to the tree trunk, & his hat very dusty, quite at his ease – while the great man stood by, poking holes with his umbrella, & talking in his sweet voice about woods & nightingales & other small matters, & smiling his sweet smile, with infinite humour in it at times!' He sat next Miss Fanny Macaulay, Lord Macaulay's sister, at a dinner and afterwards Miss Macaulay described him to Harriet Butler as 'the most delightful man I've met these 20 years'. Harriet Butler goes on to say 'He might be the typical Jesuit with his sweet subtle smile, & penetrating persuasive voice. It was most strange to hear him after dinner talking of Bp. Wilberforce – "Had he lived the Public Worship Act wd have been impossible – he wd never have given in to this fashionable talk about the laity, knowing it to be contrary to the first laws of Christ's Church".<sup>59</sup> The letters report regularly on the two sermons she heard every week. On her first Sunday she went to Merton Chapel and heard in the morning a 'good sermon upon Balaam' and after dinner, at St. Mary's, 'Sermon No 2 on Balaam – this time from Dr. Vaughan, a most striking one – "a narrow place where was no way to turn" – a striking text to begin with & he brought out forcibly the lesson – that there are moments of suffering, temptation, death, when man is brought face to face with God, & there is no turning to left or right & he has to make or to abide by his one great choice.'<sup>60</sup> In 1880 she says 'I am glad

<sup>54</sup> 27 Feb. 1878.

<sup>55</sup> H. J. B. to M. P. Edgeworth, 23 May 1880.

<sup>56</sup> 22 Apr. 1877. See also C. Edgeworth to Mrs. R. Butler, 1 Jan. 1880.

<sup>57</sup> H. P. Liddon, C. J. Vaughan, W. C. Magee, R. W. Church, B. F. Westcott and E. A. Abbott (headmaster, City of London School).

<sup>58</sup> MS memoirs.

<sup>59</sup> 2 May 1877, 26 Nov. 1877. The Public Worship Act passed by the Conservative Government in 1874 was designed to help the authorities to curb ritualism. Samuel Wilberforce (1805–73) was successively Bishop of Oxford and Winchester. Liddon is referring to the ideas of the English Church Union and the second generation of High Churchmen.

<sup>60</sup> 22 Apr. 1877. C. J. Vaughan was Master of the Temple.

to have been to Balliol Chapel for once, but it seems to me very scanty fare that is there supplied – Christ's sorrow and our sorrow was the Master's theme – and there were good practical hints in it, but an utter absence of *heart*, to my thinking, which on such a subject is a woeful want.' However a Hindu pundit, an acquaintance, made a comment on the sermon which she thought 'excellent': 'That is a sermon which tells you how to live, and not about the past or the future – much to *his* taste therefore.'<sup>61</sup> It may be noted that Arthur Butler, Broad Church and friend of Jowett though he was, considered the latter to be a theist or Unitarian and not a Christian.<sup>62</sup> Harriet Butler does not write about her husband's sermons except on one occasion when he preached the assize sermon. 'It was curious on Sunday to see all the university dignitaries giving place to the Judges as representatives of Her Majesty. The Vice-Chancellor yielded to them his seat, the doctors did not don their scarlet, the preacher awaited their arrival in the pulpit instead of joining the procession . . . Arthur's sermon was on "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom they come." You can read it by & bye if so disposed. It means 5 guineas in his pocket which is not bad.'<sup>63</sup>

Arthur Butler had been duly re-elected to his fellowship in October 1877. His wife writes 'Well, they have done their duty & agreed to re-elect him as Fellow Tutor so that is all right. Various tiresome conditions were proposed, but have all been given up, & everybody is very friendly. (Privately I may observe that it would have been quite detestable of them not to have done it, especially of the married fellows who owe their late re-election to him!) Of course it has been rather worrying.' A week later 'A. got up, prepared for a grand function in honour of our Founder's day . . . After service the Statutes were to be read over solemnly – & then he was to be admitted as a new Fellow – at 8.30 he returned discomfited. "Would you believe it? the V. P. is not yet out of bed!" That worthy disregards state observances, & could not take the trouble to get up an hour earlier than usual & caring naught for the "praise of famous men & our fathers that begat us" – Deep was Mr. Shadwell's indignation at this breach of ancient custom – but indignation mattered not, the V. P. *was not* there . . . The V. P. looked into the study in the course of the morning to remark hesitatingly "I have said 1 o'clock for the Statutes" – & accordingly scrambled through them huggermugger fashion at that hour.'<sup>64</sup> When Arthur Butler had come to Oriel as Dean and Tutor in 1875 – he had held a fellowship since 1856 – old Provost Hawkins had suggested that he would be likely to be his successor; the Provostship was then attached to a canonry at Rochester and by this time Oriel had few clerical fellows. But shortly afterwards the college changed its statutes to allow the election of a lay head. After years of disagreements with Dr. Hawkins the laymen had become markedly anti-clerical.<sup>65</sup> However well he got on with his colleagues, Arthur Butler rightly thought his position in the Lodgings precarious. When in 1878 Ufton, the best of the college livings, became unexpectedly vacant Harriet Butler comments 'The first impulse might be to say, we don't want it – but it is not a matter to put so lightly aside considering the uncertainty of his present position. We know the Provost at 88 can't go on living forever, & as you know, Arthur feels confident that a layman would be elected if possible. As we are at this moment of course we are entirely satisfied but it may not last. The other would be, if we chose, a certainty. Ufton is 7 miles from Reading, in a pleasant country, on the chalk – good house, pleasant neighbours, no particular expenses, 360 people in the parish only – *net* income £430 . . . Of course this work [in Oxford] is more suited to Arthur's special powers & I

<sup>61</sup> 16, 17 Feb. 1880.

<sup>62</sup> A. G. B. to his brother H. Montagu Butler, 20 Jan. 1880, 20 Apr. 1896 (Bodl. Butler MSS)

<sup>63</sup> H. J. B. to M. P. Edgeworth, 12 March 1878. The procedure today is slightly altered.

<sup>64</sup> 10, 18 Oct. 1877. The V. P. (Vice-Provost) was D. B. Monro.

<sup>65</sup> 3 March 1878.

think he would keenly feel the loss of society & literary surroundings, more even than I should, tho' I dislike the idea more – & no one can deny the practical & deeply important interests of parish work.' After much consultation the teaching won the day<sup>66</sup> but the Butlers did not put out of their mind the precariousness of their housing.

North Oxford was of course being gradually developed at this time but not at a pace which met the demand. The Butlers knew this because ever since their marriage they had been looking unsuccessfully for a house for the elderly Edgeworths.<sup>67</sup> When at the end of 1880 they heard that Shaw Stewart, bursar of Keble, was moving away from Oxford, they went instantly to look at his house half-way down Norham Gardens. Harriet Butler writes to her mother 'Of course it is horrid to have to go but I am getting used to the idea, & I daresay we shall like it in many ways, only it is distinctly bad for the college. Arthur's fellowship is in no way affected by the change, but he can't be Dean out of college. Even if forms would allow it, he could not do the work satisfactorily without sleeping in College . . . The Vice-Provost's 2 sisters are going to live with him. The thing is no secret at all . . . We have not yet spoken of it beyond the College, but I don't doubt the whole town knows it.' Her husband lost a good deal financially by having to give up the office of Dean and having to buy a house instead of living in one rent-free,<sup>68</sup> but they found compensations. They did not actually move till six months later. The Shaw Stewarts had to leave and the drains of the new house needed drastic attention; the cholera epidemics earlier in the century had not been forgotten and town and gown disagreements over rules for the licensing of undergraduate lodgings had recently brought the subject to the fore. They had new furniture to buy; the Vice-Provost wanted to take over two of their carpets and a bookcase for the Lodgings but 'no cornices or gas brackets or any other single article.' His sister was bringing all fixtures from her house on the south coast.<sup>69</sup>

The move to North Oxford was more of a change than it would be today. 14 Norham Gardens is nearly a mile away from Oriel, 15 to 20 minutes walk. There were no cars, bicycles for ladies did not come in until the early 1890s<sup>70</sup> and a not very frequent horse tram service did not begin to operate along the Banbury Road to Carfax until late 1881. Harriet Butler in the summer of 1881 was expecting her third child, although ordinarily she was a very good walker. When term began in the autumn she told her aunt 'It is a curiously different life, living up here, from the college. Personally I gain in seeing more friends, as no ladies lived down in the town whom I care about, & they step in more readily here & the children are distinctly better off. On the other hand one feels quite away from Oxford, never seeing cap & gown. Arthur is out all morning & often goes back to college in the afternoon or to dine, so I see much less of him. However it was unusual good fortune having so much of his company as I had at Oriel. Most people's husbands are out all day so I can't complain – only the change is a little tiresome at first. Of course when I am able to walk about with him it will make a difference. He has sufficient work as a Tutor to employ him happily & rejoices in being free from the worries of the Deanship. On 3 mornings he goes to chapel at 8, breakfasting in his college rooms.'<sup>71</sup> A great many years later, in 1929, when she went over the Lodgings at Oriel with the wife of a new Provost, she said 'I feel such a property in this house'; but she lived very happily in Norham Gardens until her death in 1946.

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*, 5 Apr. 1878; A. Engel, *From Clergyman to Don*, 175 n.60.

<sup>67</sup> e. g. C. Edgeworth to Mrs. R. Butler, 1 Jan. 1880.

<sup>68</sup> 12, 14 Dec. 1880; C. Edgeworth to Mrs. R. Butler, 30 Oct. 1881.

<sup>69</sup> ? Feb., 6 Feb., 18 July 1881.

<sup>70</sup> Ex inf. H. J. B.'s daughter Violet and Miss Eleanor Price.

<sup>71</sup> 24 Oct. 1881; MS memoirs.