

# History of English Literature

by EDWARD ALBERT

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**ACQUAINTANCES**

**(5) Samuel Butler (1612 – 1680)**

**“One of the finest satirists of the seventeenth century, admired for his sharp wit, irony, and mastery of comic verse”**

## **1. His Life:**

Besides Dryden and the tragedy-writers the only considerable poet of the period is Samuel Butler, and his fame rests on one work, *Hudibras*.

Born in Worcestershire, the son of a farmer, Butler was educated at the cathedra school at Worcester. He held a number of clerical appointments in important households, and was, for a time, clerk to Sir Samuel Luke, one of Cromwell's officers for Bedfordshire, in whose service he probably obtained that experience of the Puritans which forms the basis of *Hudibras*. Although he was at one time the steward of Ludlow Castle, he spent the last years of his life in obscure penury in London.

The major poem/s of Samuel Butler are as follows:

## 2. His Poetry:

Name of Poem	Year of Publication	Notes/Type/Genre/Description
Hudibras (Part-I)	1663	<b>Hudibras was topical, for it was a biting satire on the Puritans, who were the reverse of popular when the King returned.</b> In general outline, it is modelled upon the adventures of <b>Don Quixote</b> and <b>Sancho Panza</b> , who find their respective parallels in Sir Hudibras and his squire Ralpho. Sir Hudibras is a Puritan knight who undergoes many absurd adventures with Ralpho, his Independent squire; but the poem lacks the real pathos and genuine insight of its great Spanish original. <b>It is wholly satirical. The poem is composed artfully.</b> The adventures are well chosen in order to throw the greatest amount of ridicule on the maladroit hero; the humour, though keen and caustic, is never absolutely brutal in expression; there is a freakish spattering of tropes and a mocksolemn parade of scholastic learning; and (a feature that added immeasurably to its success) it is cast in an odd jiggling <b>octosyllabic couplet</b> . This metre of <i>Hudibras</i> is remarkable. It is varied and yet uniform, and it carries the tale with an easy relish. Though it is sometimes almost doggerel, it has always a kind of distinction, and each couplet is clenched with an ingenious rhyme that is the most amusing feature of all.
Hudibras (Part-II)	1664	
Hudibras (Part-III)	1678	

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