

The Aquarian Foundation

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Introduction

In 1926, there appeared a small pamphlet entitled “A Message from the Masters of The Wisdom in 1926” proclaiming that the Masters of the Wisdom¹ were about to initiate further Work in the world. Such an assertion, especially for those sympathetic with the teachings of the Theosophical Movement, was surely to have a profound impact. And indeed, it did. Over the next seven years, from 1927 to 1933, the individual who wrote this provocative and encouraging “Message,” the inspirational yet diabolic Edward Arthur Wilson (1878–1934), would convert such a promising undertaking to one so “bizarre that it out rivalled in real life the wildest imaginings of an old-fashioned dime novel.”² As sensational as the events were that led to the dissolution of the organization that Wilson founded to further the “Work,”(the Aquarian Foundation and its colony located at Cedar-by-the-Sea on Vancouver Island, British Columbia), there is a paucity of primary sources that would give a complete picture of both Wilson and the Aquarian Foundation. As usual, the media emphasized scandalous and criminal revelations that came out of court cases in 1928 and 1933 and in typical tabloid fashion sensationalized these revelations while at the same time either misrepresenting or ignoring the often remarkably articulate and appealing esoteric teachings. During this interval, headlines appeared in many papers in the U.S. and Canada dramatizing Wilson’s often startling and disturbing conduct. Many reflect an irresponsible and flippant tone not in keeping with the supposed best traditions

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The author wishes to acknowledge the help and cooperation of the following: Grace F. Knoche, Leader of the Theosophical Society (Pasadena); Kirby Van Mater, Archivist of the Theosophical Society (Pasadena); John Van Mater, Librarian of the Theosophical University Library (Pasadena); Ted G. Davy Editor of the *Canadian Theosophist*; J. Gordon Melton of the University of California, Santa Barbara; and Nicholas Champion of Bristol, England. In particular, the author wishes to acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to Mr. John Oliphant of Vancouver, B.C. and Hong Kong for spending so much time in answering my questions, sending invaluable primary material, and lending his unique expertise to this effort.

¹ Men who are highly evolved morally, intellectually and spiritually and who belong to a Brotherhood (the Great White Lodge, as it is sometimes called) preserving the Wisdom of the Ages and guiding the evolution of humanity. See H.P. Blavatsky, “The Theosophical Masters;” *Theosophical Articles by H.P. Blavatsky*, Volume 1 (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Co., 1981), 302; Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 53f.

² “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery” *The Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.), 16 July 1939, 12.

of journalism:

“Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-the Sea”
“B.C. Love Cult Rites Bared by Witness”
“Osiris and Isis Met on Train Between Seattle and Chicago”
“Black Magic, Gold and Guns Feature Strange Cult Case”
“Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B.C. Island.”

Nonetheless, enough information is available in extant publications of the Aquarian Foundation and in external sources to provide a sketch of its teachings and operation. In doing so, this paper will summarize the teachings of Edward Wilson and the Foundation, outline what little information is known about him, why he was successful in attracting a large number of well-educated disciples with the means to carry out his plans for the Foundation, provide a description of the colony in British Columbia, and outline the events that led to his downfall.

Teaching

In *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, one of the few accessible works by Wilson (or as he was known to his followers, Brother XII), there is a significant extract that places the message of the author in perspective:

You know that my Brother H.P.B. [Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891)] founded an *esoteric school* [the Esoteric Section of the Theosophical Society, founded on October 9, 1888], which was to have been the Chalice into which the Knowledge and Power of the Masters would have been poured. For reasons well known, that school was dissolved, and the present E. S. [Esoteric Section] is not its successor. In this present Work, . . . it is the purpose and intention of the Masters to restore that inner and sacred heart of Their Work. This Work is the real Esoteric heart of True Theosophy, *and much more*.³

It is obvious that Wilson’s message was basically Theosophical in content; understandably, it was aimed at a Theosophical audience. Yet it went beyond the Theosophy of Blavatsky and her Masters, and it was that part of the message that was so fascinating and indeed troubling to those who ruminated on his occult revelations. To put it in the simplest terms, Wilson combined the Theosophy of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky with the promise of a coming New Age, the Age of Aquarius. The millenarian flavor of the latter resembled somewhat the Second-Generation Theosophical (hereafter known as SGT: sometimes known—pejoratively—as Neo-Theosophical) teachings of the imminent incarnation of Krishnamurti.

A brief overview of Theosophy and certain events within the Theosophical Society (Adyar) is necessary if Wilson’s teachings are to be understood. Theosophy or ‘Divine Wisdom’ according to Blavatsky and her followers, refers to the Ultimate Truth of the Supreme, the

³ Brother XII, “Letter XV: True Theosophy,” [dated November, 1926], *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (Akron, Ohio: Sun Publishing Co., 1927), 69.

Cosmos, and Humanity. It is a Truth that in its pure form is *primordial* in that it existed from the dawn of Humanity, thus reflecting a Perennialist⁴ flavor; *esoteric*, since it is a form of thought that is characterized by the acknowledgement of analogy as a primary means of establishing truth⁵, by the acknowledgement that nature is alive⁶, by the acknowledgement that there is a reality beyond the material plane of which one can be conscious (the imaginal), and by the acknowledgement that a transmutation or second birth is attainable through initiation⁷; and *universal*, because all great minds throughout the world enunciated the same Wisdom. In the Theosophical teachings of Blavatsky, the primordial teaching mentioned above assumes a more universal dimension by claiming that at least a portion of the Truth or Divine Wisdom was “known in every ancient country having claim to civilization,”⁸ not just the Abrahamic religions and pagan religions of the West. Furthermore, it was Blavatsky’s contention that the Wisdom could be partially recoverable from a “comparative study and analysis”⁹ of selected philosophers (Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Patañjali, and Śaṅkara) or schools of philosophies (the Greek Mystery Schools, Neo-Platonism, Vedānta, Taoism, Cabalism), and the sacred writings of the great historical religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism). A study of these philosophers, schools, and religions by Blavatsky, under the guidance of two Masters of this Ancient Wisdom¹⁰—one usually identified by the initials K. H. (Koot Hoomi), the other by

⁴ The *philosophia perennis*, an expression used during the Renaissance (most notably in the title of Agostino Steuco’s (1497–1548) tome expressed the idea that a universal philosophical tradition existed prior to the pagan and Abrahamic religions. Many of the teachings are discoverable through these later religions. Since the latter portion of the nineteenth century, Perennialism or Traditionalism has taken on more of an ideological flavor. This also comprises a component of esotericism as defined by Antoine Faivre. See note 7 for source.

⁵ This makes it possible to propose that there is a viable correspondence between the microcosm of the individual and macrocosm of the universe.

⁶ In other words, nature is possessed of hidden interconnective forces that can be manipulated by magicians.

⁷ I chose only those characteristics that are especially pertinent to Wilson’s teachings. For further information on the components of esotericism, see Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994), 12–15.

⁸ H.P. Blavatsky “What is Theosophy?” *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings, Volume II: 1879–1880*, compiled by Boris De Zirkoff (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), 89.

⁹ James A. Santucci, *Theosophy and the Theosophical Society* (London: Theosophical History Centre, 1985), 1.

¹⁰ See note 1 and H. P. Blavatsky “The Theosophical Mahatmas,” *Theosophical Articles by H. P. Blavatsky*, 1:301–307.

The connection of Theosophy with the Masters is stated in clear terms by Annie Besant in her address to The Theosophical Congress held at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, aptly titled “Theosophy is a System of Truths Discoverable and Verifiable by Perfected Men.”

These truths [are] preserved in their purity by the great brotherhood, given

the initial M. (Morya)—led to the writing of her two great works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, works that partially revealed the Ancient Wisdom in a modern form.¹¹

The ‘Truth’ that has been revealed in *The Secret Doctrine* [SD], the principal source of modern Theosophical doctrine,¹² and works based on its contents may be summarized in the following statements:

1. A single, Supreme, Eternal, Immutable, Unknown and Unknowable, Infinite Principle or Reality [SD 1: 14];
2. The fundamental unity of all existence: no thing is apart from the Infinite Reality¹³;
3. The eternal, manifested Universe and everything within it is subject to the “law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow”: such is the doctrine of cycles [SD 1: 17];
4. The evolution of nature—material and spiritual¹⁴—reflects

out from time to time as the evolution of man permits the giving; so that we are able to trace in all the religions the source whence they flow, the identical teaching that underlies them. [*The Theosophical Congress Held by the Theosophical Society at the Parliament of Religions, World’s Fair of 1893, at Chicago, IL, September 15, 16, 17: Report on Proceedings and Documents*, (NY: American Section headquarters, 1893), 24.]

¹¹ Charles D. Ryan, *What is Theosophy?* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, Inc., 1975): 3. The following quote from *The Secret Doctrine* is pertinent:

The Secret Doctrine is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages, and its cosmogony alone is the most stupendous and elaborate system It is useless to say that the system in question [of ancient cosmogony] is no fancy of one or several isolated individuals. That it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings [Masters], who watched over the childhood of Humanity No vision of one adept was accepted till it was checked and confirmed by the visions—so obtained as to stand as independent evidence—of other adepts, and by centuries of experiences. [1:272–73 of the edition cited in note 8.]

¹² H.P. Blavatsky *The Secret Doctrine*, 2 volumes in 1 (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company 1974). This is a facsimile of the original 1888 edition.

¹³ Commander Robert Bowen, “*The Secret Doctrine* and its Study,” in *Foundations of Esoteric Philosophy* by Ianthe H. Hoskins (London: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1980), 17, 64.

¹⁴ William Q. Judge, *The Ocean of Theosophy* (Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company 1915), 61 [reprint of the original 1893 edition].

progressive development and not merely repetitive action
[SD 1: 43, 277–78; 11: 653];

5. The evolution of the individual is not limited to one life but continues through innumerable lives made possible by the process of reincarnation, the entrance of Self—the trinity of Spirit, Soul, and Mind—into another (human) body¹⁵;
6. This evolution is brought about by the Law of Cause and Effect—karma (good actions leading to good consequences, bad actions to bad consequences)—thus assigning full responsibility to the individual who performs the actions as well as providing the impetus to future births or incarnations¹⁶;
7. The structural framework of the universe, humanity included, is by nature septenary in composition [SD II: 605–641]¹⁷;

The cyclic, evolving, universe, including humanity, is also hierarchical in constitution, each component—for instance, the planets in our solar system—consisting in seven components or globes that represent varying levels of the material and spiritual spheres [SD II: 68f., 434f.];

8. Human evolution on the Earth is taking place within seven major groups called Root Races, each of which is divided into seven sub-races. In our present state of evolution, we humans belong to the fifth sub-race (the Anglo-Saxon) of the fifth Root Race (the Aryan) [SD 1: 610; II: 1f., 86f., 300f., 434f., 688f.];
9. The individual is in actuality the microcosm, a “miniature copy of the macrocosm” [SD 1: 274], or to put it in terms of the Hermetic Axiom:

¹⁵ Judge, *Ocean of Theosophy*, 60f.

¹⁶ Judge, *Ocean of Theosophy*, 89f., 90: “. . . Karma produces the manifestation of it [the cause] in the body, brain, and mind furnished by reincarnation.” For a general overview of karma and reincarnation as it is taught in Blavatsky’s writings, see Ronald Neufeldt, “In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement;” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, Ronald W. Neufeldt, ed. (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 233–55.

¹⁷ In *Isis Unveiled* I: 508 [Los Angeles: The Theosophy Company, 1982 (photographic facsimile reproduction of the original 1877 edition)], Blavatsky observes that “[e]verything in this world is a trinity completed by the quaternary, and every element is divisible on this same principle.”

As in the Inner, so is the Outer; as is the Great, so is the Small;
as it is above, so it is below;
there is but ONE LIFE AND LAW; and he that worketh it is ONE.
Nothing is Inner, nothing is Outer;
nothing is GREAT, nothing is Small;
nothing is High, nothing is Low, in the Divine economy¹⁸;

10. The universe is guided and animated by a cosmic Hierarchy of sentient beings, each having a specific mission [SD 1: 274–77].

Although Blavatsky was certainly the most influential and most articulate interpreter of Theosophy, there was a subtle challenge to her position as protagonist of the Theosophical movement. The challenge came primarily from the two shining lights of the Adyar Theosophical Society during the first third of the 20th century: Annie Besant (1847–1933), the President of the Society from 1907 to her death in 1933, and Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854–1934), arguably the most influential Theosophical writer from the early years of the 20th century to his death in 1934. The two were largely responsible for the introduction of new teachings that were often in total opposition to the Theosophy of Blavatsky and her Masters. These teachings, which are today termed as Second-Generation Teachings, were usually designated by their opponents as Neo-Theosophy,¹⁹ less frequently Pseudo-Theosophy. The differences between Theosophy and Neo-Theosophy are too numerous to mention in the context of this paper,²⁰ but it is possible to capture the broad distinctions between the two:

1. The introduction of Catholicism and its attendant sacraments into the Adyar Theosophical Society through the agency of the Liberal Catholic Church and the efforts of its Presiding Bishop, James Ingall Wedgwood (1883–1950), and his close associate, Charles Webster Leadbeater;
2. The claim, based on a psychic reading by Leadbeater in 1909, that a young Indian boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti (1896–1886), would serve

¹⁸ Bowen, “*The Secret Doctrine and its Study*,” 18, 65–66. This is probably based in part on the Emerald Tablet, one of the seminal Hermetic texts.

¹⁹ The label was most likely coined in 1914 by F.T. Brooks, author of *Neo-Theosophy Exposed* and *The Theosophical Society and its Esoteric Bogeydom*. The designation, Second-Generation Theosophy, is employed in this paper as already noted above.

²⁰ An extensive overview is given in the unpublished booklet, *Theosophy or Neo-Theosophy* by Margaret Thomas, a member of the Theosophical Society in Scotland, Wales, and England. The booklet first appeared around 1925.

as the vehicle of the World Teacher, the Christ or Maitreya. With such a claim came the establishment shortly thereafter of an organization to promote this belief, the Order of the Star in the East;

3. Emphasis on the writings of Annie Besant and C.W. Leadbeater as the main purveyors of Theosophy to the almost total exclusion of the writings of H. P. Blavatsky;
4. More emphasis on the acquisition of and participation in psychic or occult powers rather than on the theoretical understanding of the occult.

Also, since charges of sexual impropriety were brought against two of the leading exponents of SGT, Leadbeater and Bishop Wedgwood (the latter also the acknowledged founder of the Liberal Catholic Church), many of their more vehement opponents associated immorality with SGT, since Leadbeater, and to a lesser extent Wedgwood, were continuously defended by Besant and others in the Second-Generation Theosophical wing of the Adyar Theosophical Society.

These teachings and the pretenses of their leaders were despised by Edward Wilson. He considered SGT (or, in his language: Neo-Theosophy) to be a “poisonous corruption of the earlier teachings [the teachings of Blavatsky] and the introduction of disharmony, error, lies and confusion.”²¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Wilson considered himself allied with the “Back to Blavatsky” Movement,²² a group composed of Theosophists within the Adyar Society as well as other Theosophical associations who looked to the writings of Blavatsky and the Masters as the source of genuine Theosophy.²³ Not surprisingly, Wilson specifically addressed this group:

If you would be true to Theosophy, you cannot go ‘back to Blavatsky,’ you must go *forward* to Blavatsky. . . . [O]ur Brother H. P. B. is not behind you, buried in the ‘eighties’ where you would enshrine her.²⁴

²¹ “Letter XVIII: Those Who Oppose,” [dated June 1297] *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 96. See also his article “Things We Ought to Know;” *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 139f. On page 146, he writes:

The Society has been irreparably discredited through its self-appointed leaders depending upon the mediumistic pronouncements of certain psychics, one of whom has been described as “standing upon the threshold of divinity” [i.e., C. W. Leadbeater].

²² A phrase coined by Henry N. Stokes in his periodical, *The O. E. Library Critic* (November 14, 1917). The *Critic* was perhaps the foremost Back-to-Blavatsky periodical between 1918 and 1940.

²³ “Letter XIV: Forward to Blavatsky” [dated October, 1926] in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 67–68.

²⁴ “Letter XIV: Forward to Blavatsky,” in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 67.

Wilson's support of the 'conservative' wing of the Theosophical Movement helped attract a number of Theosophists of this persuasion to his message. It was, however, the novel millenarian aspect of his teaching that was to be especially attractive to those who were open to Wilson's message. This and the personality of Wilson himself, who devised a means of marketing the "Truth" in such a way that there could be no doubt that the events foretold, on the one hand, would actually come about and that such events, on the other hand, were in no way contradictory or demeaning to the teachings of Blavatsky and her Masters on the other.

The mid-1920s was a time when many within the Theosophical Movement perceived the leaders of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) and their Neo-Theosophical teachings as totally opposed to genuine Theosophy. Wilson thus struck a chord when he wrote in an early article, "The Shadow,"²⁵ that Blavatsky's message of the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, first raised in 1875,²⁶ had been rejected. According to Wilson, this rejection was confirmed by a number of incidents that had taken place in the recent past, among which were crime waves, child murders, suicides, cases of "possession," growing class hatreds, multiplying instruments of death and destruction, World War I, the "capitalistic war in South Africa, and the atrocities in the Belgian Congo."²⁷

The rejection of Blavatsky's call to Universal Brotherhood was interpreted by Wilson in a typically millenarian fashion: imminent destruction of the present age and civilization and the uprising of a New Age, in this case the Aquarian Age. The timing of such an event revolved around three dates: 1875, 1925, and 1975. The year 1875 referred to the message of Brotherhood given to the world by Blavatsky, the Messenger and disciple of the Masters of the Wisdom. That having failed, the Masters of the Great White Lodge decided to renew the call to Brotherhood and to begin work towards this goal. The beginnings of this work took place in 1925 with Wilson receiving information and instructions for the preparation of the work ahead from his Master, a member of the Great White Lodge.²⁸ By the year 1975 the new Teacher and

²⁵ Reprinted in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 151f.

²⁶ This date is not entirely accurate. The first mention of a Brotherhood of Humanity as an object of the Theosophical Society appears in an informational circular dated May 3, 1878. The original 1875 objects of the society were "to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe." This is contained in the "By-Laws" of The Theosophical Society (October 30, 1875).

²⁷ "The Shadow," 151, 154. Elsewhere ("Letter III: The Vital Necessity," [dated April, 1926]: *Foundation Letters*, 18-19), he writes that prior to the commencement of the new cycle in 1975, a flood of evil would be manifested on the physical ("national wars, anarchy, bloodshed, and Bolshevism"), mental ("the thoughts and inventions of men will be placed at the service of demons and will be used for the wholesale destruction of humanity"), and psychological levels, the latter being even more terrible than the preceding two. Wilson compared it to the end of the Atlantean epoch, for all the evil forces of the lower astral planes would be unleashed, engulfing the world in "a tidal-wave of horror as no living generation has seen."

²⁸ "Letter IX: Preparations for the Work," [dated July, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 44.

the new Truth were supposed to appear. At this time, spiritually advanced egos, the grandchildren of those living in the mid-1920s, trained in “just Principles and in true Ideals” by those in the Aquarian Foundation, would be the “Rulers and Governors” ushering in an era of righteous governments.²⁹

The Aquarian Foundation and Its Colony

The beginning of the Foundation was outlined in a letter (dated July 17, 1926) by Wilson to the editor of the *O. E. Library Critic*, Henry N. Stokes, one of the more vociferous exponents of the ‘Back to Blavatsky’ Movement:

Although Master gave me personally an outline of the way He intends the Work to develop on outer planes, no name or designation was mentioned until three weeks ago [the end of June, 1926]—this has now been given to me, and it will be known as The Aquarian Foundation (I received my first instructions early in February, 1926).

This is consistent with his remarks in Letter IX in the *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (p. 45), in which he mentions the visitation from his Master in February giving the plans for the “Work” to be commenced and Wilson’s role, and who from this time on served as the personal disciple (or “chela”) of the Master. On May 15, Wilson was given further instructions to organize the Master’s Work in England. If we accept Wilson’s account, it appears that the Foundation was conceived between February and May in 1926 and that it was given the designation ‘Aquarian Foundation’ by the Master himself in June of that year. The Foundation was given legal status when it was incorporated in Canada (May 16, 1927) and granted a charter by the British Columbia government under the Societies Act.³⁰

The principles and objectives of the Foundation appear on the back cover of the official organ, *The Chalice*. They are:

1. RIGHTEOUSNESS (right action) in all the relationships of life,
2. ALTRUISM and the disinterested impersonal service of Humanity as a whole,
3. DISCRIMINATION which includes the industry and patience required to examine motives, policies and actions for ourselves,

²⁹ “Letter XVII: Great Britain’s Place in the Plan and Aquarian Characteristics,” [dated November, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 86; “Letter I: The Purpose and the Plan,” [dated February, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 10; “Letter IX,” *Foundation Letters*; “Letter III: The Vital Necessity,” *Foundation Letters*, 18. See also “A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom in 1926,” reprinted in *Foundation Letters*, 2–3.

³⁰ “Dissolution of Island Cult Urged,” *The Daily Province* (Vancouver, B. C.), 29 October 1928, 1, 17; “Bridey Murphy Case Recalls Brother XII’ by Gwen Cash, *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.), 26 February 1956. I thank Mr. John Oliphant for providing me with this latter article.

4. SERVICE: not the clap-trap variety now so widely advertised, by the solemn dedication of one's whole life to the true interests of the individual, the family, the nation, and the Race.

Since these principles reflect the ideals of a number of movements, in particular the Theosophical Movement, they cannot be considered novel but rather were meant to enhance what Wilson considered to be themes emphasized in Blavatsky's writings. In other words, they served to reiterate in a more forceful way original Theosophical teachings *and* virtues that would naturally serve as the *modus vivendi* in this present period of transition. In addition to these principles, however, certain actions and associations were to be avoided at all costs. They suggest at least the immediate causes of the evils that were rampant in the world in this present age: evils that would be wiped out in the coming Aquarian Age. Thus, the four "things to which we are unalterably opposed" exhibit Wilson's own unusual explanation of causes for the continuing suffering in the world:

1. The furtherance of selfish personal or party interests at the expense of others.
2. Corrupt Governmental and legislative actions, oppressive financial policies and combines, market "rigging," corners and Trusts. Also secret control of the Press, the suppression of truth and the deliberate creation of those sentiments, views and ideas generally known as "public opinion."
3. Those open or secret activities calculated to undermine and overthrow *good* government, amongst which are certain brands of Communism, Bolshevism, and anarchistic tendencies and practices. We are opposed to all those movements which work openly or secretly for disorder, chaos and destruction.
4. We are equally opposed to those factions which seek to preserve class privileges or unfair methods and advantages at the expense of progress and the general good. Especially and particularly are we against those who oppose freedom of thought and the right of private judgement, that they may perpetuate superstition and credulity to their own advantage. We stand for "*no bargains between Church and State.*"

This last position created considerable controversy in Theosophical circles in Canada. In a rambling article ["Canada's Peril," *The Chalice* (February, 1928)] designed to awaken paranoiac and jingoistic tendencies in Canada and the United States, Wilson, signing himself "Watchman," asserted that the Roman Catholic Church was seeking complete domination of North America through a series of machinations by its hierarchy. Wilson's insistence that Canada was in imminent danger of internal convulsions initiated by the Church led the General-

Secretary of the Theosophical Society in Canada, A. E. S. Smythe [“Blind Leaders of the Blind,” *The Canadian Theosophist* (April, 1928): 57f.], to oppose vehemently such claims with the view of protecting the Theosophical Society from a leader who prophesied that “the Society will suffer some appalling fate” if its members did not pledge themselves to the leader of the Aquarian Foundation. Smythe’s criticism led to a blistering response from Wilson in the June 1928 issue of *The Chalice* (pages 27–35) charging Smythe with a choice number of infamies and slurs, including his being “a self-convicted traitor to the principles he is supposed to represent,” a “hate-inspired misanthrope, an ancient and envenomed ‘leader’,” a “brazen and cowardly calumniator [who] would make our Order the scapegoat of his own misdeeds,” and “a pusillanimous mother of empty words, a traitor with a foot in both camps ready to kowtow to the Roman Catholic power enthroned in Eastern Canada.” If anything, a comparison of the Foundation’s four principles cited above with Wilson’s vehement defense certainly would cause many neutral observers to question his true intentions and *bona fides*. To take one example, the editor of the *O. E. Library Critic* (XVIII/3:9) concluded “either that his claim to communion with the White Lodge is a delusion . . . or that the Members of that Lodge of Masters have been singularly unfortunate in their choice of a Messenger.”

In all likelihood, however, controversies such as the above were diversionary to a minority of the members of the Foundation and the Theosophical Society. The special work of the Aquarian Foundation was to prepare for the coming New Age, a notion uppermost in the minds of all the members of the Foundation and a great many within the Adyar Theosophical Society. Such a teaching was closely connected with the Theosophical notion of the progressive development or evolution of Humanity, the latter explained in terms of the seven Root Races and seven sub-races. The New Age was not for the old Humanity, those belonging to the fifth sub-race of the fifth Root Race; most in fact would be dead by the time the New Age arrived. Humanity instead would advance under the “Law of Cyclic Periodicity” in the form of the appearance of advanced egos incarnating as the new sixth sub-race, the sub-race that would realize Brotherhood on the institutional level, a level beyond the mental or intellectual level, the only level which the fifth sub-race was capable of achieving. It was the Aquarian Foundation that had to prepare for this new spiritual impulse by replicating the methods and organization of the Great White Lodge.³¹ The Lodge itself, according to Wilson, is made up of 12 Groups corresponding in nature to the 12 astrological houses. Of these 12, the Foundation reflected the Ninth and Twelfth Houses: The Ninth House concerned with the Higher Mind, the Twelfth concerned with the unseen spiritual powers and Karmic accounts or consequences. Thus, all within the Foundation belonged to a “mental and spiritual aristocracy” leading the world to a higher spirituality.³²

³¹ “Letter XVI: A Talk About Group-Work,” [dated March, 1927] *Foundation Letters*, 74–75. See also “Letter VI: The Deep Significance of the Message,” [dated April, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 32.

³² “Letter XVI,” *Foundation Letters*, 76–77, 79. On the inside cover of *The Chalice*, a more complete explanation is given regarding the nature of the Work of the Foundation. The Ninth House “is concerned with the Higher Mind, with those spiritual and aspirational powers in man which are distinct from the ordinary activities of the lower mind.” The Twelfth House “represents those Unseen Spiritual powers and influences which work below the surface in all affairs of men, and shows that this is a work to be

A few months prior to the incorporation of the Aquarian Foundation, a community or colony was conceived, with eventual establishment on a waterfront property located in Cedar-by-the Sea on Vancouver Island.³³ There were a number of reasons why such a center was required: the first and foremost being that it would serve as the cradle of the new sixth sub-race.³⁴ The other reasons given were:

1. To serve as a retreat or place of residence for Foundation members;
2. To serve as a training ground for those selected for work of 'Restoration,' that is, the coming New Age;
3. To provide an environment wherein one might live in accordance with the Principles of the New Age;
4. To provide training of "certain great Souls," that is, the children who would inherit the coming Age;
5. To be a center from which the ancient Mysteries would be propagated;
6. To provide a pattern for the new social order based upon Truth.³⁵

Why the Foundation and its colony were headquartered at Cedar-by-the Sea (Cedar District), which was situated a few miles south of Nanaimo, reflects to a surprising degree Second-Generation Theosophical speculation. In this regard, Annie Besant, the President of the Adyar Theosophical Society, often referred to California as the site for the coming sixth sub-race, and indeed Wilson himself strongly hinted at the outset that it was to be the "heart and

accomplished in the adjustment of accounts which we term Karmic, and through which nations as well as individuals must work out the present consequences of past actions,—it is 'the writing on the wall.'" The Third House is also mentioned as "the outward and visible expression of the Ninth; it represents the channels of communication and that the present Work will be accomplished largely through literary effort; also that much of the Higher Teaching will be made available in this way."

³³ John Oliphant, "The Teachings of Brother Twelve," *Theosophical History*, vol. IV, no. 6–7 (April–July 1993): 200. Further information is found in Mr. Oliphant's *Brother Twelve: The Incredible Story of Canada's False Prophet* (Toronto, Ontario: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1991), 44–62. The land, 126 acres in all, was bought for \$20 an acre (55).

³⁴ "Cult's Revolt Eye-Opener to Old Nanaimo" [the title of a newspaper article taken from the files of Henry N. Stokes. There is no reference to the paper in which the article appears, but it would seem that it is *The Daily Province* (Vancouver, B.C.), since the author of the story is B. A. McKelvie. The date of the paper is most probably October 29, 1928].

³⁵ *Unsigned Letters from an Elder Brother*, Second Edition (Montreal: Aura Press, 1979), 213–14 [first published in 1930 by L. N. Fowler & Co., London].

centre of 6th sub-race civilization.”³⁶ The final decision for the site, however, came from Manu,³⁷ who revealed to Wilson while in a meditative trance that the location would be Southern British Columbia, a locale familiar to Wilson since he lived in Victoria prior to 1914.³⁸ According to one source, a map was given him by the Masters showing the exact spot of the headquarters or Center Building.³⁹ Most probably, it was an Admiralty chart of British Columbia’s west coast.⁴⁰

The land chosen for the colony was idyllic. When Wilson arrived in Cedar from Southampton, England,⁴¹ he soon met one of his most avid followers, a Vancouver lawyer

³⁶ “Letter XII: Europe and the United States,” [dated September, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 60. The *O. E. Library Critic* (XVIII/5:9; XIX/2:8) pointed out the similarity between Annie Besant’s colony in Ojai, California and Brother XII’s (Wilson’s) on Vancouver Island:

Mrs. Annie Besant has started to establish a colony at Ojai, ‘the Happy Valley Foundation,’ the object of which she has stated to be to form ‘a cradle for the new sixth race.’ (XVIII/5)

Mrs. Besant informs us that the Manu has told her that the starting point of the sixth race is to be in Southern California at her Happy Valley Foundation at Ojai. “Not so,” says Brother XII of the Aquarian Foundation. The Manu has told me that the cradle of the sixth race is to be in British Columbia. (XIX/2: 8)

³⁷ A Manu, a Regent of a planetary system, refers to one of the more highly advanced beings who direct the evolution of a new race type. He is also called a Watcher, that is, a Watcher of the life-waves or collective hosts of monads or incarnating “spirits” or the essence of an entity. The somewhat complicated explanation in Theosophy revolves around the Law of Periodicity or that of Cyclic Motion. The Universe is explained as a period of activity or manifestation, called Manvantara (“between the Manus”), and a period of rest or dissolution (Pralaya). A period of manifestation lasts a Day of Brahma or 4,320,000,000 years. This is the period of a Kalpa or a Planetary Manvantara. During this period 14 Manus appear: seven of which are Root-Manus, seven Seed-Manus. The Root-Manus appear at the beginning of evolution, the Seed-Manus at the close of evolution. These latter supply the seeds for human races in the coming period of evolution. The term ‘evolution’ here refers to a Round, a term referring to a passage or circuit through the seven Globes of a planetary chain [each planet, including earth, is a living evolving being existing in a septenary makeup, the seven Globes] by a monad or incarnating spirit. At present we are in the Vaivasvata Manvantara, since the seventh Manu, Vaivasvata Manu, is presiding. Most likely, it is this Manu that Wilson had in mind.

See *The Secret Doctrine* 1: 48, 36Sf.; 2: 69,308–311; Annie Besant, *The Ancient Wisdom* (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1939), 361; Geoffrey A. Barboraka, *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, Inc., 1972), 44.

³⁸ “Cult’s Revolt Eye-Opener to Old Nanaimo”; Pierre Berton, *My Country: The Remarkable Past* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976): 104–105; “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery.”

³⁹ Oliphant, *The Brother Twelve*, 57–59; “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery.”

⁴⁰ Berton, *My Country*, 105.

⁴¹ Before arriving in Cedar-by-the-Sea, Wilson spoke to a number of Theosophical lodges in eastern Canada, including the Ottawa Lodge, the Toronto Lodge, and lodges in Hamilton, London and Windsor (Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 39–43; “The Teachings of Brother XII”: 200. From eastern Canada, following successful speaking engagements, capturing “much of the Canadian membership of the Theosophical Society for the Aquarian Foundation,” he then traveled by train to British Columbia.

named Edward Lucas, who advised Wilson to incorporate the Aquarian Foundation.⁴² Following a trip to California to meet admirers, he returned to Vancouver, and with a number of followers who recently arrived from England⁴³ soon located the site of the colony, 126 acres of groves and forest area facing the Strait of Georgia. A view of the islands comprising the DeCourcy Group, opposite Cedar, provided a lovely vista as well as the outlines of Gabriola, Valdes, and Galiano Islands beyond.⁴⁴ Following the purchase of the land in May 1927, tents were put up on the property for the permanent residents, followed by the construction of a number of houses for the Barleys, Wilson, Phillip Fisher, a son of a Birmingham manufacturer and avid supporter of Wilson.⁴⁵ By the summer of 1927, the first annual general meeting was held on July 25, 1927 at the colony⁴⁶ which gave Wilson the opportunity to expand upon the teachings about the groups within the Great White Lodge.

The reaction of the local inhabitants was obviously one of surprise at this sudden influx, but because the residents and visitors—mainly Americans with a sprinkling of British subjects—

⁴² Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 45. The four objects of the Foundation were:

1. To give teaching and instructions to its members upon philosophical and occult subjects, and upon all matters concerning their physical, mental, and spiritual welfare; and to print and publish such books, magazines, or documents as may be necessary for that purpose.
2. To form and operate one or more central communities to be conducted upon mutually beneficent and fraternal principles, and to provide for the education of its members and their children in accordance with the general principles herein laid down.
3. To provide for the pursuance and carrying out of such actions and policies as may be deemed advisable for the welfare of the society and its members.
4. To cooperate directly or indirectly with all other societies, orders, or organizations which are activated by the same principles of Truth, Justice, Brotherhood, and mutual service; to the end that all may share in that greater strength and solidarity which is the outcome of unity of effort and purpose.

⁴³ These included Wilson's wife, Elma, Alfred and Annie Barley, Frederick Pope, and Sidney Sprey-Smith (Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 36–37). See note 51 for information on the Barleys. Frederick Pope was a young man about whom not much is known; Sprey-Smith was a retired British army captain (Oliphant, 37, 53–54).

⁴⁴ “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea,” *The Sunday Province* (Vancouver, B.C.), 28 October 1928, 1, 34.

⁴⁵ Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 56 and 59.

⁴⁶ Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 50–56, 66 and “The Teachings of Brother XII”: 201–202. Those in attendance were the seven Governors of the Foundation. See note 61.

were persons of means who spent large sums either for accommodations or to hire local craftsmen, carpenters, and artisans to build permanent residences at the colony, the locals did not display hostility to or excessive curiosity about their presence (perhaps also owing to the fact that many did not understand the nature and purpose of the Foundation). An example of this ignorance is reflected in a newspaper interview of a local inhabitant who was of the opinion “that they had something to do with fish,” obviously confusing aquarium with Aquarius.⁴⁷

By October, 1928, one visiting reporter, B. A. McKelvie, noted that all but two of the “eight or ten homes” built by this time were rather on the expensive side, costing from \$8,000 to \$15,000 each. An administration building (the Center Building), actually a large house, was also built by this time⁴⁸ as well as the “House of Mystery,” where Wilson alone could enter for the purpose of communing with the Masters on the Higher Planes.⁴⁹

The number of permanent residents was not very large but all were well educated and wealthy. Those who were permitted to buy land and erect homes in order to be near their leader needed to surrender all their personal possessions to prove their dedication. They included Maurice and Alice von Platen, a wealthy California couple; James Janney Lippincott, a draftsman from Los Angeles⁵⁰; George P. Hobart, a former druggist and advertising man from Hamilton, Ontario, and his wife; Coulson Turnbull, a prominent astrologer; Robert England, a man in his thirties who was a detective in with the William S. Burns Agency and a security agent with the U.S. government⁵¹; Alfred Barley, a retired chemist and sub-editor of *Modern Astrology* from 1903 to 1917, and his wife Annie, a retired teacher for the London County Council and secretary of the Astrological Institute: in all about 12 original members who accompanied Wilson or who lived at the colony at its inception.⁵²

⁴⁷ “Cult’s Revolt Eye-Opener to Old Nanaimo.”

⁴⁸ “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea.”

⁴⁹ “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery”; “Amazing Disclosures Made in Action Against Cult Leader;” *The Daily Colonist* (Vancouver, B.C.), 27 April 1933 [A clipping found in the files of H. N. Stokes. No pages are recorded, but most probably the story was found on page 2 and continued to the next page.]; Berton, *My Country*, 109.

⁵⁰ Lippincott was not a member of the publishing family as formally reported in the earlier version of this paper and in the definitive biography of Wilson, John Oliphant’s *Brother Twelve*, 90. This information comes from a telephone conversation on March 17, 2002. Mr. Oliphant also related to me that Lippincott was a frequent visitor to the headquarters of the Rosicrucian Fellowship and friend of the widow of Max Heindel, the founder.

⁵¹ Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 89.

⁵² “Vancouver Island Colony in Trouble;” *The Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 29 October 1928. Both Mr. and Mrs. Barley were members of the inner circle of the Theosophist astrologer Alan Leo, one of the most influential astrologers since 1800 and indeed the father of modern astrology. Leo published his own journal, *Modern Astrology*. I thank Mr. Nicholas Campion (letter dated September 22, 1987) and Mr. John Oliphant (letter dated July 30, 1987) for this information. Barley is the author of the *Rationale of Astrology*, an “old Leo manual” (O.E. *Library Critic*, XVII/11: 16).

Coulson Turnbull, Ph.D. is the author of *The Divine Language of Celestial Correspondences. The Life*

As soon as the colony was established, announcements were sent to the followers of Wilson, who now numbered between 1500 and 2000 divided into 125 groups throughout the U.S., Britain, Canada, and as far as South Africa and New Zealand,⁵³ to announce plans to build the City of Refuge at Cedar.⁵⁴ In response, money came pouring in. One lawyer in Topeka, Kansas, for instance, wired \$10,000.⁵⁵ The Barleys also contributed over \$12,000 for this purpose.⁵⁶

Instead of building the City, however, this money, with the added sum of \$25,000 collected from a rich widow from Asheville, North Carolina, Mrs. Mary Connally,⁵⁷ allowed Wilson to purchase 400 acres of land on Valdes Island in order to establish a new settlement, called the “Mandieh Settlement.”⁵⁸ The Settlement’s purpose, according to Wilson, was to serve as the site of an ‘Ashrama’ or a “school for occult training”; its unstated purpose, however, was perhaps to get away from the discord that arose after the arrival of a woman who was to be his live-in companion, Mrs. Myrtle Baumgartner, the wife of a wealthy physician from Clifton Springs, New York. Mrs. Baumgartner, or “the Magdalene from Chicago,” as she was called by some at the community, was declared by Wilson to be Isis in a lifetime 26,000 years previous. He also asserted that he, as the reincarnation of Osiris, and Isis would become parents of the World Teacher, the reincarnation of Horus. At the new Settlement the Teacher would be raised by the parents, Wilson and this young woman whom he had met on a train trip from Seattle to Chicago in 1928.⁵⁹ Only a few of his most loyal followers were allowed to reside at Mandieh, with the

and Mystical Teachings of Giordano Bruno, The Rising Zodiacal Sign, The Solar Logos, and The Astrologer’s Guide, all published by The Gnostic Press (Santa Cruz, California).

⁵³ A group considered of ten members each, so the membership could not have been more than 2000. See Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 62. Further information is located in “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery”; “Osiris and Isis Met on Train Between Seattle and Chicago,” *The Daily Province* (Vancouver), 31 October 1928; *O. E. Library Critic*, XVIII/5, 8.

⁵⁴ *Unsigned Letters from an Elder Brother*, 70–71.

⁵⁵ Berton, *My Country*, 107; “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery.” Mr. John Oliphant is of the opinion that the lawyer was Oliver G. Hess of Carthage, Missouri, a Civil War veteran, who endowed the Aquarian Foundation with a Trust Fund of \$20,000. His name is mentioned in “Man From Carthage, Mo., Helped Reincarnated B. C. Egyptian God,” *The Sunday Province*, 4 November 1928, 1, 2.

⁵⁶ “Failure of Brother XII to Start City of Refuge Cause of Court Action,” *The Daily Colonist*, 6 November 1932.

⁵⁷ Mary W.T. Connally was to play a central role in the downfall of Wilson and his companion, Mabel Skottowe (Rowbotham or Rowbottom), when she initiated court action against the couple, now known as Amiel de Valdes and Zura de Valdes on April 2, 1933. The case was brought before the Supreme Court of British Columbia at the courthouse in Nanaimo.

⁵⁸ “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea.”

⁵⁹ “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea.” A letter written by Myrtle Baumgartner, dated September 13, 1928, was discovered by John Oliphant after the publication of his

condition that they give their unfledged loyalty. One rule that all were to abide by was “Mind Your Own Business,” a condition designed to keep each disciple totally dependent on Wilson and isolated from the other members of the community. This dependence and isolation were attempted at Cedar as well, by his planting suspicions in each new candidate about the other residents in the colony. Another important requirement was the surrender of all worldly wealth, the same regulation that residents at Cedar were required to obey.⁶⁰ The purchase of the Valdes property with Foundation funds led to discord and a court case in late 1928. Robert England, the Secretary of the Foundation, and the plaintiffs in the case, Maurice von Platen, Robert de Luce, and Edward Alexander Lucas, all governors of the Foundation, charged that Wilson

book, *Brother Twelve*, and mentioned in his article, “The Teachings of Brother XII,” raises doubts concerning this supposedly chance meeting on the train for the first time. The letter, presumably written to her husband, Dr. Edwin A. Baumgartner (the letter was addressed to “Ed”), reveals that Myrtle had dreams since her early childhood that she would meet a man who would be her spiritual companion:

The proof that we really touch supernat. things in our night consciousness did not come to me from reading it in a book. It came to my [*sic*] from my own life experience. From earliest childhood I have had great and magnificent dreams which made lasting impressions. One of the earliest in this connection came while I was in St. Louis. I dreamed that I was crossing a long difficult, exposed bridge. At the end of the bridge a man stood and I knew he was waiting for me.

In 1922, a “long and wonderful Egyptian dream” was experienced with the “same man” appearing in it:

I knew that I never really loved anyone but him,—but it never occurred [*sic*] to me that he was on earth in physical embodiment. . . . Then in 1926 came the great experience,—a great dedication to the service of humanity, taken also in my night consciousness. This great service was a joint service which I undertook with this Beloved One with whom I had been in contact for years. Even yet though I did not know he was in physical embodiment; I thought he was on another plane, and that when the time came for my work to commence on the physical plane, he would direct and inspire it from a higher plane.

The following passage suggests that Mrs. Baumgartner knew of the Aquarian Foundation before the fateful train journey:

As the Aquarian Foundation grew I gradually began to recognize those with whom I worked at night and knew beyond a doubt that here I belonged. Even yet it did not dawn on me that this very dear and close one was on the physical plane. I gladly and willingly pledged myself to the work of the A.F., —I believe in it; I know it is good. . . . When the opportunity came to me to take a trip to the headquarters of the A.F. I came because I knew that I would meet here those people whom I knew so well on inner planes. . . .

Now for the great experience. Upon my arrival at the A.F. headquarters, I was met at the boat by Coulson Turnbull,—and an hour or so later ushered into an office where. . . I saw walking to meet me This One—I gasped and the expression on his face was of as intense a surprise. It was reunion. . . .

The episode of the chance meeting in a train, first introduced by Robert England in court proceedings held on October 30, 1928, may never have happened if the above letter is any indication of the truth.

⁶⁰ “Amazing Disclosures Made in Action Against Cult Leader”; “Vancouver Island Colony in Trouble.”

misappropriated funds given him by Mrs. Connally in August, 1928. Instead of the total sum of \$23,000 being deposited in the Foundation coffers, England charged that \$13,000 was used for the establishment of the Mandieh Settlement, considered to be a private venture and not part of Foundation oversight. Though the by-laws of the Foundation provided for seven governors to oversee its business, broad discretionary powers were given to Wilson, who was also president for life of the Foundation.⁶¹ Perhaps Wilson saw nothing wrong in doing this, but the plaintiffs and others in the Foundation were clearly upset by Wilson's claim of being the Egyptian god Osiris and his plan to procreate the World Teacher with a woman not his wife, the above-mentioned Mrs. Baumgartner.⁶²

Countercharges were then made by Wilson against England, charging him with the embezzlement of \$2,800. The outcome of the case was that charges were dropped after Mrs. Connally, in a dramatic appearance, came to his defense stating that the money was a personal gift to Wilson to be used at his discretion. Furthermore, England's disappearance caused the magistrate to cancel plans to commit both Wilson and England to stand trial.⁶³

After the court proceedings, the disaffected leaders of the Foundation left and Wilson set about building up a new group of supporters. One of his wealthier patrons, Roger Painter, a millionaire wholesale poultry farmer from Florida,⁶⁴ was invited to live at the colony together with his wife. This he did after giving up his business and turning over \$90,000 to Wilson upon arrival. Also, from Florida came Bruce Crawford and wife, proprietors of a cleaning and dyeing business in Lakeland, Florida⁶⁵ and generous contributors, who turned over their remaining \$8,000 in cash upon arrival. Mrs. Connally remained in Victoria for the winter after her court

⁶¹ The governors were Wilson, Lucas, a Vancouver barrister, von Platen, De Luce, Coulson Turnbull, P. F. Fisher, and J. S. Benner of Akron, Ohio. Benner was Secretary-General of the Foundation for the Eastern U.S. He was also the head of Sun Publishing Company, which distributed and printed much of Wilson's writings. See "Osiris and Isis Met on Train between Seattle and Chicago"; "Dramatic Surprise at Aquarian Hearing;" *Daily Province*, 2 November 1928.

⁶² Wilson denied that the Osiris-Isis story was the invention of the Secretary of the Foundation, Robert England. In a letter (dated January 2, 1929) to the Editor of the *O. E. Library Critic* (XVIII /10: 9-10), Wilson writes that:

Osiris-Isis are not personal god and goddess but *living principles in Nature* The principles are exemplified (or incarnated if you will) in every human being, one or the other being predominant in each individual case. The 'divine child' Horus was the realization of these truths in the reasoning mind, corresponding to the birth of the Christos in esoteric christianity.

⁶³ "Woman's Evidence Favors Brother XI [sic]," *Toronto Mail and Empire*, 1 November 1928; "Dramatic Surprise at Aquarian Hearing," 32; "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery."

⁶⁴ "Alfred Barley, Plaintiff and Amiel de Valdes and Zura de Valdes, Defendants." Court Proceedings held in the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Holden at Nanaimo, B.C. (April 3, 1933).

⁶⁵ "Mary W.T. Connally, Plaintiff, and Amiel de Valdes and Zura de Valdes, Defendants. Court Proceedings held in the Supreme Court of British Columbia, Holden at Nanaimo, B.C. (April 2, 1933).

appearance and again returned to live at Cedar in April 1929. She continued to contribute large sums to the Foundation, the amount itemized being at least \$40,000.⁶⁶

The court actions did not weaken the dedication of those loyal followers of Wilson and his teachings. Money continued to pour in from the outside, and membership seemed stable. Furthermore, his taste for land acquisition did not stop with Valdes Island. With Mrs. Connally's money, he purchased three islands in the DeCourcy Group, a group of islands between Cedar and Valdes Island, for the sum of \$10,000. On two of the islands, a new City of Refuge was planned; to this end, houses were constructed, a storehouse was built and provisioned, and a schoolhouse was built for the children who would later reside in the colony.⁶⁷

For all this activity, however, the situation at the colony did change. Although Wilson and the Foundation survived the insurrection, many talented individuals left, among them Will Levington Comfort, a well-known novelist and short story writer with many published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He edited the Aquarian Foundation magazine, *The Glass Hive*, from April 1927 to his departure in 1928.⁶⁸ The birth of the World Teacher in which Wilson placed so much stock went awry. Mrs. Baumgartner suffered a mental collapse brought on by her failure to give birth to "Horus," most likely due to a miscarriage and mistreatment from

⁶⁶ This is based on the accounting of the April 2, 1933 Supreme Court Proceedings. This does not necessarily represent the total figure, for Mrs. Connally does mention other expenses that she had accept, such as watching over Mrs. Baumgartner after medical and mental problems surfaced in 1929. The estimates in the popular press were therefore much higher: \$250,000 in "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery"; Berton, 111–12. The figure of \$250,000 is Mr. Oliphant's estimate. In the article, "Amazing Disclosures," a high figure of \$520,000 is mentioned whereas in "Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B. C. Island," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 28 April 1933. a low figure of \$50,000 is given.

⁶⁷ The schoolhouse was to be the site where the future "Rulers and Governors" would be trained "in just Principles and true Ideals." ("A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom," *Foundation Letters*, 3).

The souls that would incarnate in the children were said to be derived from two sources: (1) those whose last birth was prior to the Christian era, and (2) those whose bodies perished during World War I, thus balancing the account of their respective national karmas. ("Message," 3).

In this context, Wilson writes (*O. E. Library Critic*, 10) the following:

We have a small school for the training of a few. . . . We have reason to believe that many advanced souls will be born into the world in the near future—some are already born and are now children of eight or nine or ten years of age. They are of the new type, spiritually and psychologically and our hope is to give them such training as is fitted to them. These children are (and will be) born to parents who are already serving this Cause.

Yet, according to Berton (111–12), the schoolhouse was never used for its intended purpose because most of the inhabitants were beyond childbearing age.

⁶⁸ Information on Comfort (1978–1932) is available in "An American Mystic: Will Levington Comfort and His Work," by Mary Adams Stearns, *National Magazine* (July 1913): 605–608; and "Will Levington Comfort: The Man and His Books," by J. Berg Esenwein, *The Book News Monthly* (December 1912): 234–38. Comfort's novels include *Routledge Rides Alone*, *She Buildeth Her House*, and *Fate Knocks at the Door*.

Wilson.⁶⁹ Apparently, Wilson blamed the misfortune on his followers, for in his judgment they lacked sincerity. Because of this failing they had to submit to penance, the severity of which his followers would soon discover to their regret. Thus began a series of events that were most bizarre to those observing the activities of Wilson and his new companion, Mrs. Mabel Skottowe.

In mid-1929, Mrs. Skottowe (née Mabel Rowbotham; sometimes spelled Rowbottom) arrived at Cedar to become the “secretary”-companion of Wilson. How he came to meet her is not known, but she became the agent in carrying out Wilson’s verdict placed on his “insincere” followers. Possessing a ferocious temper, she both verbally abused the women in the community with a tongue sharp enough to make even the most insensitive brute blush and physically abused them if they did not comply with her commands. One example of her cruelty involved a 76-year-old retired schoolteacher named Sarah Tuckett, who was driven to attempted suicide from the repeated beatings and overwork imposed upon her. Another example involved the above-mentioned Mrs. Connally, one of Wilson’s most avid supporters. After losing a lawsuit in Washington, D.C. in December 1929, rendering her almost penniless, she was removed from her house by a group of followers on Wilson and Skottowe’s orders and taken to a beach on Valdes Island. There she was ordered to dwell in a small house that was almost uninhabitable and forced to perform physical labor that must have been torturous for her. To be sure that she followed these instructions, Mrs. Leona Painter, the wife of Robert Painter, was given instructions by Mrs. Skottowe to live with her to be sure that Mrs. Connally did what she was told.⁷⁰

These conditions continued down to 1933 except for a respite of eleven months, when Wilson and Skottowe, now known as Amiel and Zura de Valdes (also known as Madame Zee), sailed for England after appointing Alfred Barley as business agent overseeing the colony. When they returned, the abuse against the residents at the colony was resumed. They continued to submit but as Wilson and Madame Zee became more and more strident and impossible in their demands, dissent apparently emerged among some of the residents. As a result, twelve of the alleged dissenters were banished by Wilson, including Mary Connally, the Barleys and the Painters. Because of their destitute situation, the Barleys and Mrs. Connally were compelled to initiate a legal action in the Spring of 1933 in order to regain the money that they donated to the

⁶⁹ The mistreatment is mentioned in the testimony of Annie Barley in the April 2, 1933 Supreme Court Proceedings. Howard O’Hagan, “The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12.” *MacLean’s Magazine*, (23 April 1960): 39. According to O’Hagan, Mrs. Baumgartner was sent East to a mental hospital. See also “Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B. C. Island;” 1–2; “Amazing Disclosures”; Sydney Blake, “Connally vs. de Valdes,” *The Lawyer* 311 (September 1939): 13.

⁷⁰ “Amazing Disclosures”; Berton, *My Country*, 114–16; Blake, “Connally vs. de Valdes,” 13; “Amazing Disclosures Made in Action Against Cult Leader”; “Black Magic, Gold and Guns Feature Strange Cult Case,” *The Daily Colonist*, 28 April 1933, 1, 2. According to the testimony of Leona Painter in the April 2, 1933 Supreme Court Proceedings, Wilson received \$10,000 from Mary Connally to buy the DeCourcy group of islands, and he in turn promised Connally a house next to his. But Wilson wanted to renege on the agreement so attacked her character and trustworthiness. This was the beginning of a sustained bad treatment bordering on torture for Mrs. Connally.

Aquarian Foundation. It did not take long for the court to decide in favor of the plaintiffs. In the case of *Connally vs. de Valdes*, Mrs. Connally was awarded \$37,600 less \$10,000 for the value of the DeCourcy Island awarded to her as well as the 400 acres on Valdes Island. Alfred Barley was awarded \$14,232 and the legal title to the community land at Cedar.⁷¹

Wilson responded with an act of vengeance that surprised even his detractors. Deserting the colony after destroying much of the furniture, buildings, equipment and yacht, *The Lady Royal*, he and Madame Zee left on their yacht, the *Khuenathen*, for points unknown with a huge sum of money collected over the previous six years. The amount was not known, but apparently most of it was in the form of gold pieces stored in 43-quart jars as well as in Canadian one and two-dollar bills.⁷² With the flight of the couple and the court decision in favor of the plaintiffs, the Aquarian Foundation was disbanded. Mrs. Connally remained on Valdes Island with a caretaker, Sam Greenall, for a number of years after. In 1941, she left the area for good to return to North Carolina to reside in a nursing home. After her departure, Mr. Greenall searched the property on Valdes Island and uncovered a concrete vault, with its sole contents a roll of tarpaper with a message written on it in Wilson's hand. It was a message that reflected nothing of his original ideal of brotherly love; rather, it more than likely reflected his true character. The message read, "For fools and traitors, nothing!"⁷³

Edward Arthur Wilson

It should not be surprising that very little is known of Edward Arthur Wilson prior to 1926, for the less the world knows of a leader's private or early life the easier it is for the leader—religious or otherwise—and his followers to mythicize his life. Regarded in this manner, Wilson was not much different from a Cagliostro or Blavatsky, a Pythagorus or Paracelsus. He was, at least to his followers, a magus or modern-day shaman. Like other magi, we find reference to a number of traits that Wilson and others like him possessed or manifested: access to supernormal helpers or the Masters of the Wisdom, the direct experience of Truth or Wisdom through an "ecstatic experience," the use of or belief in the efficacy of magic or occult power, a long period of wandering culminating in an initiatory experience. Sometimes, as in the case of Wilson, there is an importance placed on the establishment of a sacred center serving at once as a ghetto and a Mecca: a place of separation from the evils of the outer world but at the same time serving as a place of pilgrimage to acquire the Wisdom.⁷⁴ The fact that Wilson assuredly displayed the charisma of a magus will help explain the hold that he had on his followers, no matter how

⁷¹ Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 333; Berton, *My Country*, 120; "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery"; "Failure of Brother XII to Start City of Refuge Cause of Court Action."

⁷² Blake, "Connally vs. de Valdes," 13; O'Hagan. "The Weird and Savage Cult," 39; "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery."

⁷³ Oliphant, *Brother Twelve*, 348; O'Hagan, "The Weird and Savage Cult," 39; Berton, *My Country*, 120–21; Blake, "Connally vs. de Valdes," 13.

⁷⁴ Robert S. Ellwood and Harry B. Partin, *Religious and Spiritual Groups in Modern America*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1988), 14–16, 38–40.

preposterous his teachings seemed to those not under his power.

Edward Arthur Wilson was born in Birmingham, England on July 25, 1878.⁷⁵ Although he claimed that his mother was an Indian or Kashmiri princess and a Anglican missionary father,⁷⁶ a claim that is not unique in the annals of the Theosophical Movement due to the highly charged spiritual atmosphere of India and Tibet as fonts of the Ancient Wisdom, he was actually born to Irvingites or members of the Catholic Apostolic Church, a Christian sect founded by Edward Irving (1792–1834) that conformed more to the Pentecostal form of Christianity, which recognizes the speaking in tongues, prophecies, and healings. It also recognized a Second Advent or Second Coming of Jesus, to which preparation for this event required the restoration of a proper ministry (based on Ephesians iv, 11–14) for this Second Coming. As a result, twelve apostles, called by God, govern the Church and not authorities ordained by men. In this regard, six apostles were identified during Irving’s lifetime, six after his death.⁷⁷ It appears that Wilson regarded the Catholic Apostolic Church as preparation for the work of the Theosophical Society fifty years later.

Aside from this, we know nothing about his early life until 1910 or thereabouts. At that time, he appears in Victoria, British Columbia, working first as a driver of a delivery wagon and

⁷⁵ This appears in John Oliphant’s *Brother Twelve: The Incredible Story of Canada’s False Prophet*, 17, 359. The year is also confirmed by Wilson himself, who writes in his “Greetings,” in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, by the Brother, XII (Akron, Ohio: Sun Publishing Co. 1927):

And now this body!
Seven times seven years I have trained it, taught it,
Urged it to effort, tried it to the limit of its strength,
Knowledge I gave it — a little at a time,
And as the brain could bear it.

Wilson’s age is given “Seven times seven years”: 49 years minus 1927, the date of the publication of this poem, or 1878.

⁷⁶ Oliphant, *Brother XII*, 18; Berton, *My Country*, 101; Gwen Cash, “Bridey Murphy Case Recalls Brother XII,” *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B. C.), 26 February 1956. I thank Mr. Oliphant for providing me with the latter article.

⁷⁷ “Irvingites,” in the *Catholic Encyclopedia*, located at <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08174a.htm>. It is curious that the number twelve plays such an important role in the Aquarian Foundation. It is very likely that Wilson or Brother XII was influenced by Catholic Apostolic Church’s emphasis on the twelve apostles. Regardless, on the cover of *The Chalice* appears the Aquarian explanation of the number 12, written in *italics* as XII:

The Roman numerals [III, XII, IX] indicate the nature of the Work, for it is associated astrologically with the Third, the Ninth, and the Twelfth Houses. . . . The Twelfth House represents those Unseen Spiritual powers and influences which work below the surface in all affairs of men and shows that this is a work to be accomplished in the adjustment of accounts which we term Karmic, and through which nations as well as individuals must work out the present consequences of past actions,—it is “the writing on the wall.”

then as an express clerk who handled the Wells Fargo account in the Dominion Express office on Government Street. His departure from the company in 1914 came after his request for a pay increase nearly matching that of the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway was refused.⁷⁸

While in Victoria, he spent much of his leisure time sailing the Strait of Georgia and the Juan De Fuca Strait, which helps explain his subsequent involvement in the merchant marine—either British or American—from 1914 to 1918 and, still later, his interest in sailing and skippering yachts after the formation of the Aquarian Foundation. The only solid evidence, and the evidence is meager, concerning his involvement with the merchant marine are a series of addresses listed on his membership record at the American headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Wheaton, Illinois: Ocean Beach, California as of May 16, 1915; do S.R. Maxwell and Co., Papeete, Tahiti via San Francisco a year later (June 9, 1916); and 1615 3rd Street, San Diego the following year (April, 1917). These addresses put in questions the notion that he sailed on the Atlantic in the merchant marine.⁷⁹

Besides his love of the sea, he also was deeply interested in occultism. If O'Hagan's account is accurate, his landlady, Peggy Reynolds, claims to have seen publications of the Theosophical Society and notes on astrology scattered about in his boarding house room in Victoria.⁸⁰ Such an interest explains his membership in the Theosophical Society from January 6, 1913, to June 30, 1918.⁸¹ Judging from his writings, Wilson was well informed in Theosophical teachings and kept up with the affairs of the Society even after he was no longer a member.

The only autobiographical account of the period prior to 1924 that is still available appears in his "Letter IX: Preparations for the Work" (dated July, 1926) in his *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (p. 43–46). In it, he reveals to his disciples the events that led him to his present status as personal chela, or disciple, to a Master of the Wisdom. Having undergone an initiation in 1912 called the Ceremony of Dedication, which gave him the understanding that he had a special mission, he claimed to have traveled to all parts of the world and to have undergone repeated testing in preparation for the work to be done. Then, in October 1924, while in the south of France, he underwent a second initiation or Ceremony of Dedication in which he went through a series of experiences over a three- or four-day period that connected the work he performed in the past with the work he was to undertake in the present. Almost a year later, in September 1925, while in Italy, he was given material by a Master to write *The Three Truths*,

⁷⁸ "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery"; Berton, *My Country* 101; O'Hagan, "The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12," 22. The date of Wilson's early arrival in Victoria is uncertain. In "Finis," the implication is that he was already there in the late 1890s. Berton claims that 1905 is the more likely date while O'Hagan gives 1912 as the year he joined the express company.

⁷⁹ I wish to thank the former National President of the Theosophical Society in America, Dora Kunz, for allowing me to examine Wilson's membership record. O'Hagan mentions that Wilson sailed in the British merchant marine on the Atlantic (p. 22).

⁸⁰ O'Hagan, 22; Berton, *My Country*, 101.

⁸¹ See note 66.

which was completed in early 1926. Wilson remarked that during the course of the writing, his subtle body was transported to the Master so that He could dictate some of the passages. In fact, he claimed that the third part of the book was dictated in this way.

It was only on February 13, 1926, that plans for Wilson's present Work were given in full by the Master. At this time, he was chosen personal chela to the Master, serving as His messenger. About this time, he began to call himself Brother XII, being the only earthly brother in the council of what had been the Eleven Masters of the Wisdom.⁸² About this time, correspondence apparently was also conducted, judging from the first six letters in his *Foundation Letters*, which were dated from February to April of 1926 and sent from Italy. Who the recipients were, however, is not clear, since few, if any, knew of Wilson at this time.

From Italy, he departed on May 20, 1926, for Southampton, England, where he publicized the Master's message in two articles written in a prominent English journal, *The Occult Review*,⁸³ entitled "The Shadow" and "The Tocsin" under the name "E. A. Chaylor."⁸⁴ "A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom in 1926" was also published around this time. The teaching was also spread in a number of addresses to local Theosophists in a small hall rented by him for that purpose.⁸⁵ Thus begins the story of the Aquarian Foundation. The promise of a colony in which Brotherhood was uppermost was quickly brought to fruition. Wilson's unquestioned success, however, was undermined in 1928 with the legal action taken by a group of disgruntled officers in the Foundation. From 1929 on, Wilson became more and more involved with self-aggrandizement and acts of cruelty toward his followers until legal actions destroyed his hold on the persons he and Madame Zee caused so much suffering.

What became of Wilson and Madame Zee is not certain. One plausible account accepts the story that Wilson, under the name of Julian Churton Skottowe, died in Neuchatel, Switzerland on November 7, 1934. It was only in 1939 that a London solicitor's notice of the intended settlement of his estate was announced. The amount left was surprisingly small, barely enough to cover the costs of the legal fees. If Wilson supposedly absconded with a large amount of gold and currency, it was not evident in the final accounting. Perhaps Mrs. Skottowe took the bulk of the money, but her trail disappears in Switzerland.

Conclusion

The Aquarian Foundation was an organization based on the millenarian vision of Edward Arthur Wilson, a.k.a. Brother XII, Amiel de Valdes, and Julian Churton Skottowe. Although

⁸² Berton, *My Country*, 103.

⁸³ E. A. Chaylor, "The Shadow" XLIII, no. 6 (June 1926): 391–95; E. A. Chaylor, "The Tocsin" XLIV, no. 2 (August 1926): 96–101. Both articles are reprinted in *Foundation Letters*, 151f., 157f. *The Occult Review* has been described "as the best general occult periodical in the English language" by H. N. Stokes (*O.E. Library Critic*, XVII/12: 13).

⁸⁴ O'Hagan, "The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12," 34.

⁸⁵ Berton, *My Country*, 120; Blake, "Connally vs. De Valdes," 13.

considered by most observers as a complete fraud who duped many who should have known better, Wilson had the requisite knowledge (a Theosophical substructure and astrological superstructure), the ability to communicate that knowledge, and the charisma to create an effective and sustaining messianic myth to retain and sustain his disciples. Unfortunately, the community established at Cedar-by-the-Sea on Vancouver Island was never allowed to develop to the degree promised by Wilson. The fault for this failure lay solely with Wilson, who, for reasons of greed and power, strayed from his original program of salvation. Despite this fact, the control that he had over his followers, many if not most well into middle age and wealthy, was quite remarkable. Even through the most trying of times—during the last two or three years of the Foundation’s existence when Wilson subjected his followers to physical torment, tyranny and virtual slavery—most remained loyal to him because of the force of his personality and the attractiveness of the ideals of the Foundation. These ideals of brotherly love and the promise of residing in a place of refuge from the iniquities of the world were very appealing indeed. As early as 1928 when he was challenged for his actions surrounding the purchase of land on Valdes Island and his liaison with Mrs. Baumgartner, many could not reconcile the drastic change in the Brother XII who announced the Masters call to Brotherhood. Their rationalization was that he was no longer the same individual who first inspired his followers but rather a black familiar who took possession of Wilson’s body when he attempted the sixth initiation to attain spiritual perfection.⁸⁶ This explains Mrs. Connally’s statement, before leaving Valdes in 1941, to the caretaker, Mr. Greenall: “For the old Brother, I’d give that much money again, if I had it to give.”⁸⁷

The quality of Wilson’s personality—the messenger announcing the call to Brotherhood—and the fiery, immature, and sometimes mean-minded personality were certainly present prior to 1928. One example of this latter characteristic appears in an account of the late Buddhist jurist and member of the Buddhist Lodge of London, Christmas Humphreys:

[Wilson] wished to join the Buddhist Lodge as Brother XII. Then I pointed out that we could not have people joining anonymously, though he could call himself what he liked when he had joined. He replied like a small school-boy in a huff.⁸⁸

It is clear that the tirade against Mr. Smythe and his subsequent actions against his dissenters originated from a facet of his personality that he chose not to reveal until such time that his position as absolute leader was consolidated. What he did reveal to his would-be followers in the early days was a persona of considerable charm and an intellect that was quite stimulating. An early acquaintance of Wilson’s, Walter Miles, described him as “one of the most fascinating personalities and conversationalists I ever met.”⁸⁹ Furthermore, there was his

⁸⁶ “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea,” 34.

⁸⁷ O’Hagan, “The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12,” 39.

⁸⁸ “The Sappers and Miners,” *The Canadian Theosophist*, VII / 12, 15 February 1927, 263.

⁸⁹ Cash, “Bridey Murphy Case Recalls Brother XII.”

magnetic appeal, as evidenced by an observation by the Vancouver barrister Edward Lucas that Wilson had “hypnotic dark eyes that did strange things to you.”⁹⁰ This combination is conducive to a cult figure who apparently placed his own importance and self-interest above that of the welfare of the community. Indeed, this was the true cause of the failure of the community, for the commonweal was actually discouraged by Wilson. The purpose of communal societies in the broadest sense is to create an atmosphere of mutual support for its members: physical as well as psychic. Such was the purpose of the City of Refuge, a City as we have seen that was never built. When all is said and done, the account of the Aquarian Foundation and E. A. Wilson gives further evidence of the power that myths of the New Age have over the minds of men and women of whatever culture, age, and level of education. The failure of a millenarian message to come to fruition does not necessarily cause disillusionment; it more likely will lead to rationalization for the failure—witness Wilson’s own explanation of Blavatsky’s role as a messenger who called for Universal Brotherhood and its subsequent rejection—and a future teacher’s claim to revive the message at a more appropriate time. In the words of Alexander Pope:

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast:
Man never is, but always to be, blest.”
[“Essay on Man”: Epistle I: line 95]

⁹⁰ Cash, “Bridey Murphy Case Recalls Brother XII.”