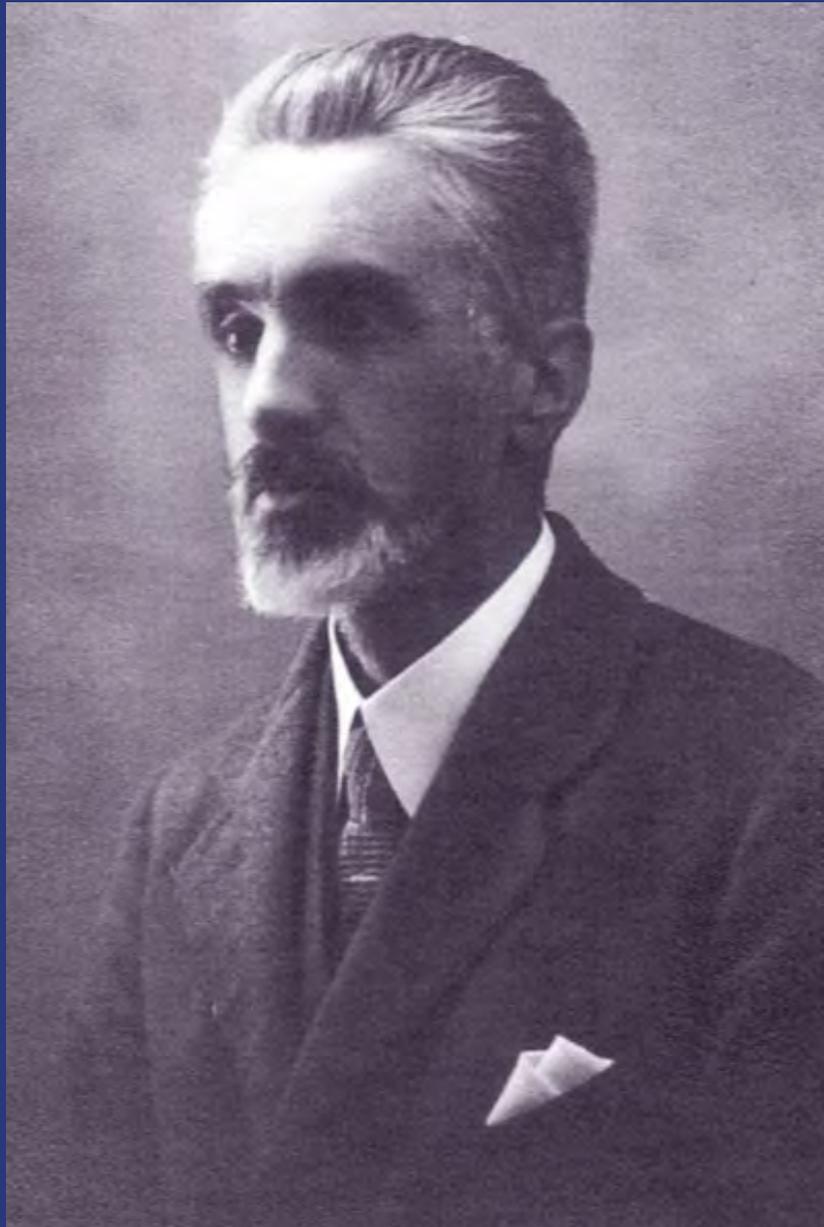


BROTHER XII'S EARLY YEARS

The Letters of Edward Arthur Wilson



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By JOHN OLIPHANT

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from

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Cover image:

Edward Arthur Wilson photographed in San Remo, Italy, about 1925, during the period when he was allegedly in contact with the “Masters of the Wisdom” and receiving the instructions and teachings that led him to establish the Aquarian Foundation.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

Editor's Comments

By James A. Santucci

Not much is known of the private life of Edward Arthur Wilson, aka Brother XII, but with the publication of selected private letters written in 1905, 1906, 1912, and 1919 more light has been shed on his personality and character. Wilson was only twenty-seven at the time he wrote the 1905 letters. Of the seven letters written in that year, three are quoted in this article, with the emphasis on Wilson's life as a dairy farmer in Rednal, a few miles south of Birmingham,

England, about as far removed from his later persona as Brother XII as one can imagine. Attempting to support both his wife Margery, whom he married in 1902, and a daughter, born in 1904, it should be as no surprise that the main priority was earning a living, something that was not so easy, since his dairy was in poor condition and the price of milk not enough to cover the cost of producing it. These difficulties led Wilson to write to his mother-in-law, in a letter of May 6, 1905, requesting her assistance, apparently without success. Because of his business failure, he and his family returned to New Zealand, where he married Margery a few years earlier, and eventually found work at a South Seas trading company, Vines, Utting & Perston. What appears in the 1906 letters is mention of his chronic on-going ill health—never defined but perhaps tuberculosis—and his occupational difficulties and the need to borrow money from his father. In his letter of July 14, 1906, he describes himself as a failure in finding an occupation or holding onto a decent job that could support his family, blaming it in part on his “[e]ven years of ill-health.” Most of the letters written in 1906 continue to detail the difficulties in supporting his family, the parsimony of his in-laws, and the continued generosity and support of his father. The lessons learned from this period in his life led to a dramatic change in his later years, from an emotionally troubled and indecisive personality to one who was self-assured, what may be described as omega to alpha-like tendencies that became apparent in the mid to late-1920s after assuming the role of Brother XII.

The beginnings of this transition could be dated about 1912, when Wilson underwent an epiphany of sorts, termed by him as a “Ceremony of Dedication,” followed by “twelve chaotic years of testing and wandering in all parts of the world,” according to his *Foundation Letters and Teachings*. Part of the training he undertook was Theosophically-inspired, since he joined the Theosophical Society (Adyar) on January 6, 1913. The 1912 letter included in the article, mentions for the first time the teaching of the Second Coming of Christ, a teaching prominent in the Catholic Apostolic Church, of which he and his family were members. The interest and passion that Wilson had towards Adventism takes on a prominence in his later years, most likely because of the Gnostic teaching, perhaps as early as Cerinthus (100 BCE), first adopted by Blavatsky and then modified by Besant and Leadbeater. The teaching that Jesus was but a human being born of normal

parents (Mary and Joseph), and who became the temporary vehicle of the Christ or Christos at the time of the baptism of Jesus, thereby infusing Jesus with miraculous powers. The “overshadowing” of a human vessel led to the Neo-Theosophical teaching of the World Teacher and the assertion of the President of the Theosophical Society, Annie Besant, and her associate, C. W. Leadbeater, to declare Jiddu Krishnamurti that vehicle who would be “overshadowed by the Christ-Maitreya-Krishna. Brother XII’s teaching was similar to the Neo-Theosophical teaching, but with different characters. The vehicle would be conceived from his parents, Isis (Mrs. Myrtle Baumgartner, a woman whom Wilson supposedly met on a train from Seattle to Chicago in 1928) and Osiris (i.e. Wilson). The vehicle produced would be the reincarnation of Horus.

The events that took place after Wilson became Brother XII and the events that led to his becoming such make for a fascinating tale. With the letters, however, Wilson is revealed in more human terms and less the Mephistophelian figure depicted both in print and visually. Many years ago, I wrote the following:

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.

This article in this issue, however, opens a window to Wilson’s earlier years, revealing a person with many of the same problems in raising a family in difficult economic times, but also revealing a man who was committed to acquiring a wisdom that would make him—at least to his followers and indeed to himself—an equal to the Masters of Wisdom. “Cult leader,” “notorious fraud,” one who practiced “weird occultism,” and “man of mystery” were descriptions given to him by those who did not know Wilson or his convictions, but to those who did know him—at least the “old Brother” during his incipient years as Brother XII—the spell of an inspiring figure who revealed the ideals of brotherly love remained

in their memories despite the drastic and inexplicable change in his personality from the late 1920s that belied such an ideal.

This unique insight into the private Brother XII arises from the alertness of the great granddaughter of Wilson's sister, Ms Melody Wilson-Claridge, and the fortuitous circumstances surrounding the realization that her great uncle Edward was indeed Brother XII. It is she who allowed the letters to be published herein and also provided many of the photos accompanying the article. In addition, Ms Margery Rowe, the granddaughter of Edward Wilson, provided three photos, including those of Wilson's wife, Margery Ellen Clark, (to whom the author, John Oliphant, dedicated the second edition of his book, *Brother XII: The Strange Odyssey of a 20th-Century Prophet*), and of his children, Margery Ellen Wilson and Charles Rupert Baron Wilson. John Oliphant, the author of "Brother XII's Early Years: The Letters of Edward Arthur Wilson," is the world's foremost authority on Wilson and on his Aquarian Foundation, devoting more than thirty years of study and investigation to the subject. He has written numerous articles (including "The Teachings of Brother XII" in *Theosophical History*, Vol. IV, Nos. 6-7 [April – July 1993]) and appeared in many television programs discussing the Brother XII. His book, *Brother Twelve: The Incredible Story of Canada's False Prophet*, originally appeared in 1991 with the second edition appearing in 2006. "Brother XII's Early Years" is but the latest insight into the life of this fascinating figure.

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Brother XII's Early Years:
The Letters of Edward Arthur Wilson

By John Oliphant

Edward Arthur Wilson, also known as Brother XII, is surely one of the most fascinating and enigmatic occult figures of the twentieth century. Though other

individuals may be more universally recognized, Wilson's story is unique and for sheer drama and intrigue is outrivaled by none. A slender, soft-spoken Englishman, he burst into prominence in the latter part of the 1920s as the self-proclaimed "Messenger of the Masters," audaciously asserting that he was carrying forward the Theosophical work of Madame H. P. Blavatsky, a declaration that would attract critics and detractors, but also a dedicated group of supporters, many of whom were highly regarded in their own right.[1] Brother XII's spectacular rise from obscurity and ignominious fall from grace constitute the parameters of an amazing and bizarre tale, one in which a dream degenerated into a nightmare of exploitation and abuse that left his disciples wandering amidst the ruins of their shattered utopia, while their leader fled, leaving broken lives and bitterness as his legacy and a myth that continues to haunt people's imaginations to this day.

Who was this prototypical cult leader, this flawed prophet, this inscrutable spiritual teacher? Despite the ample documentation that exists concerning Wilson's exploits as Brother XII, the information about his origins and life as a young man is scarce. He was born in Birmingham, England, on July 25, 1878, the son of a metallic bedstead manufacturer, but beyond that, little is known of the influences that shaped him and prepared him for his singular destiny. That has changed with the discovery of a series of letters that were written by Wilson in 1905 and 1906, their contents supplemented by two loose letters, one undated, but probably written around 1912, and another written in 1919.[2] Taken together, the letters provide some remarkable insight into the psychology and temperament of the man who would become Brother XII.

Brother XII's career was first chronicled in 1989 by James A. Santucci in his groundbreaking article, "The Aquarian Foundation," published in the journal, *Communal Societies*. [3] In 1991, this writer's book, *Brother Twelve: The Incredible Story of Canada's False Prophet*, the most comprehensive account of Wilson's activities, was published, [4] and in 2007, Amanda Sarah Klang completed a thesis, "The Charlatan of the Gulf Islands: Brother XII and Progressive Occult Discourse in the History of British Columbia," [5] in partial fulfillment of a Master of Arts degree at the University of British Columbia. Yet for all that has been learned about Brother

XII's life, he is still a classic "man of mystery," the events of his early and formative years remaining obscure and largely a matter of conjecture.



Figure 1. Wilson's father, Thomas Wilson, was a pious member of the Catholic Apostolic Church, who raised his son in an atmosphere of strict religious devotion.

Courtesy of Margery Rowe.

It is fortuitous indeed, therefore, that this collection of Edward Arthur Wilson's early letters has now come to light through Melody Wilson-Claridge, the great granddaughter of Wilson's sister, Frances Ellen Elizabeth Wilson. For many years, Melody's family had retained the letters of her great uncle, finding their contents intriguing, while remaining largely ignorant of his life. They only knew that he had become some kind of notorious religious figure, and that he had died mysteriously in Switzerland, but that was the extent of their knowledge.

One day, Melody, who works as a librarian in a theological library in Shropshire in the United Kingdom, was sorting through a box of donated books and came

upon a copy of *The Aquarian Gospel of Jesus the Christ* by Levi H. Dowling.[6] Fascinated, she researched the book online, visiting websites about cults in the process and eventually coming upon this writer's website, <http://www.BrotherXII.com>. When she examined its contents and scrutinized the photograph of Wilson posted there, she realized, in astonishment, that Brother XII was, in fact, her great uncle. Melody has graciously provided copies of Wilson's letters for the purposes of this article, as well as three new photographs of him.

The 1905 and 1906 letters were written when Wilson was twenty-seven and twenty-eight years old and supporting a young family in England and New Zealand. They are the first real autobiographical portrait of him; in them, he writes unguardedly of his daily concerns and his hopes and expectations. Surprisingly, the letters reveal an individual who was often wracked by feelings of failure and self-doubt, which seems odd, given Brother XII's supreme self-confidence; at the same time, the letters show Wilson's keen intellect and his gift for writing, as well as his perseverance as he deals with repeated setbacks and doggedly strives to fulfill his potential.

The letters also detail Wilson's concerns about money, since he was struggling to survive financially at the time, though his father, Thomas Wilson, proved to be an unfailingly generous benefactor, apparently providing funds whenever his son requested them.[7] Wilson's frequent appeals to his father for assistance may indicate an early predisposition on his part to extract money from individuals by means of language designed to tug at the heartstrings; some of his entreaties are reminiscent of financial appeals he later made as Brother XII to wealthy patrons. In some instances, the turns of phrase are remarkably similar.

That said, for all they do reveal about Wilson, the letters also add another layer of ambiguity to his life, for what he writes in them is often subject to interpretation. Is the physical distress and emotional suffering he describes genuine, or did he exaggerate his plight? In many respects, the elusive nature of Brother XII's character is also evident in these early letters.

The seven 1905 letters relate to Wilson's life as a homesteader and were written while he was trying to make a living as a dairy farmer in Rednal, about nine miles southwest of Birmingham. He had recently returned from New Zealand with his wife, Margery Clark, whom he had married in Wellington in 1902,[8] the couple having their first child, also named Margery, on March 11, 1904, in Auckland. The reason for Wilson's return to England isn't clear, but he evidently had difficulty in finding a suitable occupation to support his wife and child. The farm in Rednal, known locally as Nimmings Farm, was another attempt to achieve financial stability.

On February 9, 1905, Wilson wrote to Mr. T. Furber, the owner of the property, telling him that he would be glad to avail himself of the manure he was offering at three shillings a ton. This letter was followed by three others, all dealing with practical matters, such as the state of the fencing and ditches, the amount of hay he would require, and the deplorable condition of the pigsty. The farm appears to have been a neglected property, one which would require considerable work, yet the end came sooner than anyone, let alone Wilson, had probably expected, for two months later, on April 29, 1905, he wrote again to Furber, explaining:

The question of my continuance upon the farm has been the subject of long and anxious deliberation. I have looked at the matter from every point of view, examined every alternative way of dealing with the land and accommodation, and have made many enquiries, and the result of all is that I am unhappily forced to the conclusion that it will be impossible to make both ends meet, and do what I may, the longer I stay, the deeper the hole I should be in. The most unfortunate point and deepest disappointment to me is the impossibility of selling milk at the retail price; I have tried in every direction without any prospect of creating a round, and the wholesale price obtainable does not cover the cost of producing it. As I have no further means, the little I had and also what Father has advanced having been expended in carrying the experiment so far, you will agree that I should not be justified in carrying it further at the risk of involving myself and others.

Very likely, you will think that I ought to have seen all this earlier, and I am very sorry I did not, but I had no experience of English farming to guide me, but was principally influenced by the opinion of a friend which I find was based upon a case totally different to this, as there was an old established milk round which was the mainstay of the place.



Figure 2. Wilson's daughter, Margery Ellen Wilson, nicknamed "Poppy," photographed in 1906, when she was two years old.

Courtesy of Margery Rowe.

Wilson's failure was doubtlessly very painful to him, since he hadn't lived up to his father's expectations and wouldn't be able to pay back his investment in the venture. He decided to return to New Zealand, a decision he explained in a letter he wrote on May 6, 1905, to Margery's mother in Wellington, in which he also asked for financial assistance:[9]

My dear Mrs. Clark,

I am writing you this letter on behalf of Margery and myself after many weeks of careful discussion and anxious thought; the matters to which we refer are of the utmost importance and will affect our whole future life and well-being. From our recent experiences in England, we are quite assured that we have far better opportunities of achieving ultimate success in New Zealand than here, and have arranged to return as soon as our affairs here are concluded.

One of the chief causes of our previous non-success in New Zealand was the great mistake we made in trying month after month to live in town (in deference to Margery's supposed dislike for the country), dependent upon precarious situations, especially as my own health will only admit of an out-door occupation; we have therefore decided to get back as quickly as possible with the ultimate intention of taking up land and making a home for ourselves once again.

Before going further, we should like to draw your attention to certain facts. When Margery and I became engaged, I received from my Father a sum of £150 to enable me to commence in some business on my own account; on our marriage, he gave us as a wedding present a further sum of £100, and since our arrival in England, he has advanced still another £100 to enable us to stock this farm, making in all a total amount of £350.[10]

My Father has thus helped us willingly and generously to a far greater extent than his now limited means justified him in doing, and any fair-minded person will see at once that all the help and interest extended to us has been most markedly all on one side.

Margery, instead of receiving, at any rate, something by way of a marriage portion, has had, with the exception of a few items of personal clothing, absolutely nothing.

We also remember that when our little girl was born, Margery would have been left entirely alone and at the mercy of any strange woman had it not been for the loving forethought of Uncle Henry and Aunt Mary. We also know that Lorna[11] thought of us and offered to nurse Margery and give up her own room to her, and only from the one from whom we were most justified in expecting it was there an entire lack of effort to do something for us at so trying a time, a fact which was more than once remarked and wondered at by many persons in Auckland.

The past is the past, however, and we have now to face the future. Our present position is briefly this—we are enabled to return to N. Zealand through the extreme goodness of my own parents, who are thus once more coming to our help at so critical a moment, but we shall be practically without any means when we get there. Our intentions, so far as can now be arranged, are for Margery to stay in Wellington for the time being, while I am engaged in settling upon a suitable locality and trying to make a home for those whom the Lord has given me. If there be such a thing as practical Christianity, such a thing as family affection, such a thing as a friendly hand outstretched to those in sore need, now is the time for it to be manifested.

For myself, I ask nothing, but what we do ask for is for the display of a little maternal affection towards Margery and a temporary home for herself and her little girl, and we are sure that all who know the true facts of the case will agree that we are only asking such assistance as is due to her in common humanity.

We have been brought into this most trying position principally through my ill-health and a long series of anxieties, but if we can only find a helping hand to help us over this rough place in our journey, we shall soon, with God's blessing, be on our feet again. You know that Margery is a bright, willing girl, true as steel and a hard worker, while I am prepared to devote all the health and strength I have to the task in front of us, and I am sure that knowing the full circumstances of our case, you, dear Mrs. Clark, will do all in your power for Margery and our little child.

We hope to be able to leave England about the middle or end of July next, but Margery or I will write you again later when we know the exact date and route. Baby is a dear little soul now and can just toddle about—you ask for her photograph, and if we can afford to have it taken before we leave England, we will do so and send you one. We both of us thought it advisable to tell you thus plainly and straightforwardly our position, and the facts both past and present of the whole case as they appear to us and to our dear ones here who have done so much for us, and we hope and believe you will receive this letter in the same spirit in which it is written.



Figure 3. A view of Queen Street, Auckland, New Zealand, circa 1906. The offices of Wilson's employer, a South Seas trading company, were located here.

Wilson's appeal evidently fell upon deaf ears, for in subsequent correspondence with his parents, he upbraids the Clarks for not doing their share in helping him and Margery. Still, with his father's assistance, Wilson and his wife made the return voyage to New Zealand, Margery pregnant with the couple's second child, to begin the next phase of their life together.

Upon his arrival, Wilson began investigating various business opportunities that he might pursue with the financial backing of his father. He seemed most interested in starting a small retail business of some kind, though he

also contemplated purchasing between forty and fifty acres of land for a farm or orchard. He made a trip to Nelson, at the northern end of the South Island, without apparent results, later justifying the trip to his father: "As to my reasons for going to Nelson, these were pretty well explained, I believe, at the time and were I in the same position again, I should decide on the same course; the journey was very far from useless, and the object I had in going there was fully accomplished." [12]

When none of these prospects worked out, Wilson found employment with Vines, Utting & Perston, a South Seas trading company with offices in the Victoria Arcade building on Queen Street in Auckland. [13] He was dispatched to the Friendly Islands, now known as Tonga, as an agent of the company, but appears to have worked for only a matter of months. He wrote to his employers on January 1, 1906, advising them that he had returned to Auckland the day before because of ill health:

Dear Sirs,

You will see by this heading that I have been sent back to Auckland by the *Manapouri*, and arrived here at 2 pm yesterday (31st Dec). In my last letter, I mentioned to you that I had been exceedingly unwell for some time past, and on our return to Nukualofa, Mr. Hutchinson sent me to see Dr. McLennon, and after examining me, he was of the opinion that I was not in a condition to undergo the long passage to Niue and from thence to New Zealand, so Mr. Hutchinson decided to send me up to Haapai with the *Ysabel* to pick up the steamer at that port. Dr. McLennon thinks I should do well to go into the hospital if I do not get right after a week on shore, but I hope this course will not be necessary. [14]

I take this opportunity to express my great regret at having had to return from Haapai. It would have been much more satisfactory to me to have gone right round with the *Ysabel* had I been at all able to have done so. I will call at your office on Wednesday morning at 10 o'clock, (today and tomorrow being a holiday) to settle up the business matters between us. Wishing you a happy New Year.

Believe me,
Faithfully Yours,
E.A. Wilson



Figure 4. A native village, Tonga. Wilson's initial sojourn in the South Seas was brief, though he no doubt enjoyed the exotic locale, including this typical scene of village life in the Islands. The native population of Tonga was largely employed in the harvesting of coconuts for the copra trade.

Wilson's reference to health problems is an underlying theme of the letters, as he repeatedly raises the issue as one of the reasons for his lack of success. His most detailed description of his condition occurs in a letter that he wrote to his father on October 6, 1906:

As to myself personally, I am forced to see that I cannot do heavy work, though, of course, can manage light work as well as anyone, so although I can and do go perhaps two or three or even four weeks sometimes without a bad attack, yet these do at times come along. Since I received the Anointing,[15] I have never had them so frightfully bad, though they make work of any sort for the time-being quite impossible—still, I find that now when I have one coming on, if I can keep quiet and, if necessary, lie down for an hour or two, they will pass away; whereas if I had to keep going until I am in a state of collapse, as has usually been

the case when in a situation, the attack was so bad as to leave me weak and ill for two or three days after.[16]

Wilson's health problems appear to have been chronic, for in several of the letters published in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, he makes reference to being ill or to not feeling well,[17] and in 1928, when his associates had him arrested and attempted to have him incarcerated by asking a judge to deny him bail, he wrote to one of his supporters: "This they knew would kill me physically as I am an invalid, and can only keep my body going with the greatest of care." [18]

After returning from the South Seas, Wilson was hired as the secretary at a flax mill in Te Rapa on the outskirts of Hamilton, eighty miles south of Auckland. Flax milling was an important industry in New Zealand at the time, its flax being exported to Australia, Great Britain, and other markets abroad, where it was used in making rope and other hemp products. Wilson's job was no doubt demanding, for in addition to working long hours, he would have had to contend with the constant, high-pitched shriek of the mill's machinery, the ever-present mud on the site and the frequently cold and damp weather. He lived in a small cabin near the mill with his wife Margery and their two children, Margery and Rupert, who had been born in Wellington on January 13, 1906.



Figure 5. Flax mill workers, Foxton, New Zealand, 1902, posing with cut and processed flax. This mill would have been typical of the one in which Wilson worked in Te Rapa.

Palmerston North City Library, Palmerston North, New Zealand.

On May 22, 1906, Wilson wrote to his father about his new job:

You will be glad to know that I have reason to hope that I shall be able to get through the work alright, and I mean to hang on there to the last possible moment. You must bear in mind that while I have thrown up a lot of billets[19] (mostly through ill health or inability to do the work), I have never yet had a really good billet or even one that would pay current expenses. It is not natural that any man would strive very hard to keep a job that he was losing ground on all the time he held it; perhaps this aspect of things has not struck you before.

This billet, although far from overpaid (indeed the pay is inadequate considering the responsibility and amount of the work) is nevertheless a perfect goldmine to me. I am drawing £2 a week, which keeps us going easily and a few shillings to save each week, and is more than I ever got in my life before—and I don't reckon to lose it for an orchard or business or anything else. As long as it lasts, I shall be there.

Also, I am getting a good insight (as I predicted) into the running of a general store business, and getting into touch with wholesale houses, etc., and should I have need to fall back upon the employment of any capital you may advance, I think I can see a way of investing it with a far better hope of success and good return than in taking up the land.

Wilson closed the letter on a more personal note:

There is little in the way of news this time, thank Heaven, so I must finish off this hastily scribbled letter. M., Little M. and the youngster all well; self pretty well, though half-asleep at the moment of writing. Am sending you the photos of little Margery by this mail. They are absolutely splendid, so perfectly natural.

Wilson appears to both respect and care about his wife, given the positive comments he makes about her in his letters. He was also a protective husband; in one instance, after the family had moved to Auckland, he wrote to the suburban sanitary contractors, complaining that their agent had been “unnecessarily offensive” to her: “I think it would be a very good thing if this man received a severe reprimand for his lack of courtesy, and I certainly hope he will

not call here again while I occupy this house, as my wife was quite upset by his bullying manner.”[20] He was also sensitive to Margery’s feelings regarding the conflict between their respective families, for he writes to his parents on June 13, 1906:

I think, from your last letter to Margery, that you do not quite understand her position or attitude regarding her own people and yourselves. She—poor girl—is only too conscious of the miserable parsimony of her Mother, and very much alive to the wonderful contrast between her Mother’s behaviour and yours. To bring these things before her in your letters gives her great grief, and cannot effect any good or useful purpose.



Figure 6. The barquentine *Ysabel* carried Wilson from Nukualofa to Haapai in the Tonga archipelago in 1905.

Alexander Turnbull Library, New Zealand.

At the same time, he is clearly the one who makes the decisions in the household. Referring to Margery’s grandfather, George Clark, who was languishing on his deathbed, he writes:

As to Margery expecting great things under Grandpa’s will, she has had no time to think about the matter at all, and certainly understands nothing about it. Margery simply does as she is told in all these matters, (such as coming to Te Rapa, etc.). I decide everything, and any credit or blame, as the case may be, must

be laid upon me. I am writing this straight to the point, so that you may have a clear conception of the position here. Margery doesn't influence me one way or the other. We both endeavour to live one day at a time, and when any occasion arises for decisive action in any direction, we talk the case over together as is right and proper, but the decision is always mine in the end.

Wilson's job at the Te Rapa mill apparently left him little time for reading, or anything else for that matter. He wrote to his parents in a letter of July 1, 1906: "I get down there at 7 o'clock, and am there all day till 6 in the evening, and even then I have to bring the books home at night and work part Sunday when the work drops behind." It must have been frustrating for him to be so overwhelmed by work, especially since it was not intellectually challenging, but simply clerical. It was also too much for one man to do efficiently, he added, though he was determined to hang on at the mill for as long as he could.

1

The Nimmings Farm
Grovely Lanes, Rednal.
Feb. 20th 1905.

Mr T. Furber.
Beech Lanes.

Dear Sir.

My father wishes me to ask you to be good enough to let us have the agreement (re Edward's Tenancy) for a day or two, as we should like to ascertain exactly how we stand regarding the fencing, none of which has so far been done since you were here. We will see that you receive it again quite safely, either by hand, or registered post. He would have written you about it himself, but is ill in bed.

Faithfully Yours
E. Wilson

Figure 7. Wilson's letter of February 20, 1905, to T. Furber, owner of the property in Rednal, West Midlands, Birmingham, England, where Wilson attempted to establish a dairy farm.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

The primary focus of Wilson's religious life remained the Catholic Apostolic Church, although he had little time for actual Church attendance. An earlier letter to his father indicates the strength of his faith when he refers to the so-called "Blessed Hope" of the Church, the return of Jesus Christ within the lifetime of the Church's twelve Apostles: "Love to you all, from all. And send me any Church news there is. We expect to hear anything now. After all, that hope eclipses everything else as far as we are concerned." [21]

On July 1, 1906, Wilson also advised his parents that the mill had been put up for sale and that he might lose his job as a result. He asked his father if he would be willing to send out additional funds, so that he could start his own business, as they had previously discussed:

I shall be glad to know if you would be willing to advance the same amount £200 for me to go into a store business on my own account. There are very often opportunities in this line; the running of the business is not difficult and I could do it easily enough; in fact, I am running this store entirely (Mathers [22] never interferes in any way; I order what I want and sell at what price or profit I like to put on). The chief need for care is in the selection of a good locality, and in this one needs local knowledge or reliable advice from a competent and disinterested person. I do not care much about the idea of a partnership in any line; it generally (and in my case almost certainly) means a host of minor disagreements and a lot of friction, which takes attention off the business in hand. I am convinced that I would do far better alone in whatever line I may engage in. What is really wanted is the ability to close upon a good opportunity when it offers, and to do this it is necessary to have a certain amount of available capital on hand. There are, at the present moment, hundreds of men in the country with not half the ability or education I have (though I say it myself) who are making a fair living in a store business. I know one or two myself, and why should not I do the same? I think there is a better chance of making a little money in this way than in taking up land; it does not require so much capital, and the work would be more congenial and not half so much “bollocking.” If this present billet at the Mill falls in, I see very little prospect of keeping a loaf on the table unless I can make some such arrangement as I have mentioned; it is almost impossible to get steady work locally, or indeed anywhere in N. Z. without a trade or powerful influence, and I certainly cannot shift about the country now. I think I might do very well if I can only get a little to start with, but without it, the outlook is threatening; in fact, I don't look ahead any at all now; if I did, I should be like Peter when he looked at the waves and began to sink. I just live one day at a time and hope for a turn of the tide.

In light of Wilson's subsequent mission as Brother XII, it seems ironic that he would have once aspired to the mundane occupation of running a store, yet he

was eager to try it. He suggested to his father that they use a private code when they communicated about the £200 and how it would be invested;^[23] evidently, Brother XII's penchant for secrecy manifested itself even at this date. He also invited his father to visit, indicating that the two had a close relationship, which was understandable, since Wilson was the only son in the family:

I do wish you could manage to come out for a month or even two this fall. The Shaw Saville,^[24] I hear, are running absurdly low fares for the Exhibition;^[25] someone said about £13^[26] for 2nd class single. The *Corinthic* and *Athenic* 2nd class accommodation is very good, and you would not need to be away more than three or four months at longest if you were in a hurry. I think Mother would spare you for that long and it might mean a lot to me.

The reply that Wilson received from his parents shocked him; though the contents of their letters isn't known, what they wrote provoked an anguished response. It appears that they somehow rebuked him or otherwise expressed their disappointment in his efforts in New Zealand; perhaps they recognized that he had many talents, but their patience was wearing thin. Whatever the case, Wilson was devastated.

45

Dear Father and Mother, let us face
the facts of the case; I have from
various causes, sometimes not
entirely my own fault, made a
failure of everything I have under-
-taken; and as a result of this I
am at this moment a man who
has lost all confidence in himself
and knows that it is useless to hope
any more. Eleven years of ill-
-health and consequent failure
have done their work too surely
for me to ever hope for anything
else. I thank God that you have
not sent anymore capital out
to me - do not do so for I can
never do any good any more.
For myself I feel that there is
nothing to hope, but I will not
do anything to bring you nearer
to the miserable depths of poverty
and wretchedness that he before
(me

Figure 8. Extract from Wilson's letter of July 14, 1906, to his parents.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

45

Dear Father and Mother, let me face
the facts of the case; I have from
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For myself I feel that there is
nothing to hope, but I will not
do anything to bring you nearer
to the miserable depths of poverty
and wretchedness that lie before
me

Figure 9. Extract from Wilson's letter of July 14, 1906, to his parents.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

On July 14, 1906, he wrote an agonized reply in which he admitted to being a failure and described himself as a man who has lost all hope:

My dear Father and Mother,

Your two letters dated 3rd and 4th June and enclosing £20 safely to hand. To read them has filled my eyes with tears of sorrow and of shame when I think of how much you have done for me, and then of the money I have cost you, and the miserable failure I have made. The remembrance of these things is double bitter

when I realise that I have never made you any return for these things, but have cost you untold hours of anxious thought and have been a source of trouble and expense. The consciousness of these things has made me strive very hard of late to do well, so that I might send you good news, but alas, with the same result—failure.

Dear Father and Mother, let us face the facts of the case; I have from various causes, sometimes not entirely my own fault, made a failure of everything I have undertaken, and as a result of this, I am at this moment a man who has lost all confidence in himself and know that it is useless to hope any more. Eleven years of ill-health and consequent failure have done their work too surely for me to ever hope for anything else. I thank God that you have not sent any more capital out to me—do not do so, for I can never do any good any more. For myself, I feel that there is nothing to hope, but I will not do anything to bring you nearer to the miserable depths of poverty and wretchedness that lie before me. God forgive me for the money I have already had, and I can only pray to Him to make it up to you, as I long to do in my heart, but am not able to.

With regard to the position I am now in, it cannot last much longer; there is far too much for one man to do, and the work gets farther behind every day, and I shall not be able to keep the fact to myself much longer. I can say with all truthfulness and without reservation that I have stuck to this billet right up to the limit of strength and endurance and shall do so right up to the very last, so that in this I may have the comfort of a clear conscience towards those dependent on me. I have got up day after day at 5 o'clock in the morning and worked till 6 o'clock at night, and often have brought home work with me then and worked till late in the night, but the incessant strain and the knowledge of the slow but sure approach of the inevitable result are doing their work, and my health is breaking up again.

Here, one sees men strong as horses who are out of work and going under every day, so why should I deceive myself any longer in the hope of getting a good billet that never comes? I who have but a small amount of strength and am utterly friendless and without influence. I am like a drowning man; there comes a time when it's better to throw up one's hands and go down quietly than to prolong the struggle by useless effort. If I lose this job, as I must do very soon, I shall take a

hook[27] and go into the swamps again as long as I can stand up to it, but if the rising waters[28] drive us from the place we are now camped in, I shall try and get Margery and my two kiddies into rooms in Auckland, give her what money I have been able to get together here, and then try and get work wherever I can find it. If the worst comes to the worst, the Church will look after them until some arrangement can be made for them, and I shall simply drop out of sight, like many another poor devil before me, for I have nothing here now, but I have a hope and blessed assurance of Peace and rest in the Kingdom of God, and I hope He will soon let me in.

I will not be a burden to others any longer and if I cannot get enough to keep them going, I won't help to eat up the few pounds I have got together for them. Also, I do not want to keep on writing miserable letters to you; it will be better not to write any more. I have had my chance and lost it. I have been a source of trouble and expense to all who have had the misfortune to know me, and I will be the cause of trouble to others no longer. If I had health and strength, I might have made a living at home, seeing that you got Charlie Slater into a bank, and other young men into billets. However, I suppose even your influence has gone now that you have left business, and as I must go under anyhow, it is better to do so here than at home. Mother says she is sorry I ever went to N. Z. Well, I had no hope of employment at home, and I do not know anyone who would have given me a job, and, as you see, I am done both sides of the water.

Do not send me any more help, dear Father & Mother. I am almost choked with shame each time I get any money from you, as I remember how my debt increases. Do not send any capital, for I have no confidence left in myself any longer and would only lose it. If, as you say, you could help me on to my feet again with, say £200, would it be possible to get a share in and a place in the bedstead business? It is the only chance I ever had or ever shall have. Mind, I don't ask you to try and arrange this. I know I have exhausted your patience and tried your faith too often to hope you would ever have any confidence in me again, for I have none in myself, but I would not now consent to your putting any capital into anything for me unless it was under your own eye and you knew all the circumstances. However, I do not hope for any more chances; I am a man without hope, miserable and broken and wretched and ill, and pray God daily like

Elijah, “Lord take away my life,” for He knows I am an unprofitable servant, but I am worse off than he was, for he had no children.

The £20 you sent by this mail, I shall get Mr. Sanderson^[29] to put into a bank as a Trust Account, same as the Church money, and if he can do so, to put it in your name; when the end comes here, I shall give Margery what I have been able to save, and then look for work. God helping me, I won't touch a penny of it; the bitter memory of the £650^[30] is burnt into my soul as with a red hot iron. I feel myself a wretched, ungrateful brute; you have done everything for me and I have done nothing for you in return and now the last hope of ever being able to has been taken away from me. And yet, as I have opened my heart in this letter to you, I ask you to remember one thing only in my favour, for it is the only one I have; I have never willfully wasted a penny, but have always scraped and screwed; I have never drank or gambled, but mostly through bad health and its effects, I am first a failure.

I will not write again, dear Father and Mother, for my letters can give you no pleasure to read. Margery will write and let you know something about me now and again—I will tell her to do so. Do not write to her about her wretched relations; she is often in tears at your letters, for she sees how true they are, and is as brave and generous-hearted as they are mean and despicable. You will never realise all she has gone through for me.

We often tell little Margery about you, dear ones—she says, “Dear Gran-Gran, Poppy^[31] loves Gran-Gran.” Yes, May's^[32] old clothes would have come in grandly for her, but as you say, we are too far away now. I feel ashamed of myself every time I look at that little soul and think of the prospect in front of her and of us all, yet God knows I have done my best for her. My life is now in His hands and He will, I suppose, bring me to a haven of rest some day, though at the present time, I see no gleam of hope or any way out of the misery and darkness and uncertainty. Do not send any more money and don't waste any time or money coming out to this place (this letter cancels all previous ones), so waste neither, for as for me, I am poor and wretched and blind and miserable, have lost my last hope and my last chance. I send you my truest love, which is all I have left to send; good news I have none and bad news ends with this letter.

Wilson's letter surely represents an unprecedented low point in his life, one in which he felt such utter despair that he fervently wished to be dead. Despite his abject distress, though, he appealed for additional funds from his father through three "negative requests," telling him not to send more money. Was he being needlessly melodramatic? Skeptics might think so, but perhaps his response was the result of years of struggle and feelings of personal inadequacy, his parents' letters being the trigger that finally caused him to break down emotionally.

Eleven days later, on his twenty-eighth birthday, July 25, 1906, Wilson wrote to his parents again, advising them that events had moved quickly since his last letter and that the family had been flooded out of their home:

We have had worse floods than have been known in the district for 40 years. We were flooded out of our whare.[33] On Tuesday 18th, I sent Margery and the children to a neighbour's, who came in their cart for them; the water was up to my knees when we got them out. I went to Auckland to get rooms for them, and on Saturday I took them down together with what luggage we could pack. Margery had a very severe cold, and by the time we got down to Auckland, she was too ill to do anything. I got them to bed as best I could, but we found the rooms and people quite unsuitable, and all Sunday I was running about trying to get a better place and nursing M. On Monday, I moved them to some rooms a couple of miles away, and on Monday night, M. was so bad that I had to try and find someone to take the baby away and look after it. I had great difficulty in finding any person who would take the child, and went from one place to another for three or four hours. Some said the Salvation Army people would look after him, but they were full up. You see, Margery had to be able to lie down and keep covered up, and I had done what I could, but could not look after the child entirely.

Wilson arranged for the woman next door to look after Margery and the children, while he returned to the Te Rapa mill. "The Mill is closing now, owing to the flooded swamps, and, of course, my job ends too," he continued. "Oh, it is heart-breaking to have to break up our bit of a home again; I shall never try to get another. Even a whare is home after one has lived there for a while, and to have to break it up and be homeless again is a bitter grief to us."

Poor Margery and I have talked it over and we hardly know what to do. In a week or two, I shall be looking for work again, with no chance of a settled or permanent billet and the few pounds we have will be steadily melting away. I think if I could only get back to those who have always helped me in my extremity, I might get something to do to keep going, and if I can only get near friends and shelter again for the sake of my dear little child, I would do anything. This letter ought to be well written, for I feel the only hope we have hangs on it, but I have one of my old turns coming on again, and yet I must finish before morning, before the mail leaves. No letter can give you to know the horror and misery of the last few weeks of ever haunting dread of seeing those I love and would gladly die for wanting bread and a shelter over their heads.

Wilson explained to his parents that he thought the best thing to do would be for the family to return to England, though they only had enough money for a single passage. He would write to Margery's father, requesting the money for her fare, while he would go ahead with Poppy, who would travel free because of her age, while Margery would follow with Rupert: "Margery is a wonderful girl to face a Cape Horn passage in winter by herself with the baby. I can think of no other way out of it. It is a last desperate throw." If his parents agreed with the idea, he asked them to cable the single word "come" and he would put the plan into execution. He concluded:

You see, we no longer have even a whare of our own, and I do not know, from day to day, what will befall us. It has pleased God to bruise and to break us, taking away even the little that we had, and I don't know what the next disaster will be. We are homeless and almost friendless, and now separated and our family life broken up. I shall never try to make another home here; it is useless. The only home I hope for now is the eternal one, for we have learnt our bitter lesson and are broken in the learning. Today is my birthday; God grant I never see another one like this.

Wilson's two letters from this period are particularly striking, since they stand in stark contrast to the letters he wrote as Brother XII, in which he seemed impervious to any kind of emotional weakness. Reading them, it's difficult to fathom how the same man could have written them. Or was there an incredibly

tough nut underneath it all, an individual who would never crack, no matter how trying the circumstances?

Thomas Wilson replied to his son's letter with a cable that read, "remain mailed 200 via italy seventeenth," indicating that he had sent £200 pounds to help Wilson through the crisis.

On September 4, 1906, Wilson replied to his parents in a letter that was markedly different in tone from his previous letters, for in the aftermath of the flooding and the loss of his job, he had miraculously landed on his feet. He had obtained work as a carpenter in Auckland and was earning six shillings a day. "I think it will be a pretty constant job, and if so, I will soon be earning 7/- or 8/- a day," he advised them. "Above all, it is an opportunity of getting a trade, which is the best thing in the Colonies, and I think that if I can keep steadily on at this for about 12 months, I shall be alright for the future." He liked the job and it suited him, he added, for he could work outdoors, though "I shall have to go to the dentist soon, I think, as my teeth are going to pieces very quickly."

Wilson had now rented a five-room house in the Mount Roskill district of Auckland, close to where he and Margery had lived three years earlier. The joys of family life were a source of satisfaction to him, for he tells his parents in the same letter: "The children are both well and growing splendidly. Rupert weighs 21 pounds; he was weighed about a week ago; little Poppy says her prayers at night now; she finishes up with 'Amen' and she evidently thinks this is a good way to round up a sentence, for tonight I heard her talking to herself and saying, 'Please, Daddy, shut door, Amen.' She talks quite well now."

And a few weeks later, on September 27, 1906, he adds: "Our two kiddies are really splendid and growing at a frightful pace. We have some dresses which we had kept for Poppy to wear for the warm weather, but find they are a lot too small round the chest, so must keep them for R. Miss Heath was in Auckland a week or two ago and Margery went to see her. She took a fancy to Poppy and sent her a nice book the following day."

Meanwhile, Wilson had banked the £200 that his father had sent him, assuring him in a letter of October 6, 1906, that he wouldn't make use of it until an opportunity arose for its successful employment. He thanked his father profusely

for his faith in him, despite his letters from Te Rapa, which, he said, had been written when he was “much run down,” and he expressed his deep appreciation for his generosity: “I tell you that it is marvellous to me who had lost all confidence in myself to find that through all, you still hoped for me and trusted me, and be very sure that there is nothing I will not do to prove such love is not misplaced, and I pray God that I may be able to repay you again in some small measure, at any rate in the future, for such love is beyond mere money or anything else temporal.”

The help and support that Thomas Wilson extended to his son was in no way matched by the Clarks, and relations between the two families continued to be strained. On October 28, 1906, Wilson wrote to Margery’s mother, declining to pay a doctor’s bill that she had sent him for her daughter’s treatment in Wellington,[34] though he offered to pay her back in monthly installments, as his salary permitted, if she settled the bill. In this respect, he explained, he was acting in accordance with the dictates of his father:

I will give you an extract from a letter received from my Father on this very subject; he says: “I noted that you had been sending a considerable sum (for your circumstances) to Margery, and thought possibly you had been asked to pay the Doctor’s bill. Not one penny of my money is to go to Wellington, either to pay Drs. bills or anything else. I may say I have been strongly counselled against making it so easy for the Clark family, who, it is pointed out, are not likely to do anything so long as there is a Mr. Soft on this side.”

The money here referred to was the 3g’s I sent Margery for the Nurse’s fee, and you must also remember that I sent her three other amounts of 10/- each while she was in Wellington and five pounds to come to Auckland with, making a total of £9.13.0; not bad considering I was only earning £1 a week and had heavy travelling expenses myself. Therefore, regarding this Drs. account, I may say at once that I shall follow my Father’s directions to the letter.

The letter also gave Wilson a chance to air his grievances against his mother-in-law for the gossip that he believed she had spread about him when he was in Wellington:

You wrote to him some time ago about me and gave him to understand that the reason of my non-success was not due to ill health, but rather to the fact that I did not like work, and would not stick to anything. Both my Father and I consider that such a letter shows an utter lack of Charity, besides being grossly untrue, and we wish to inform you that we can (and if necessary will) produce ample evidence to prove this. Do you think for a moment that I could have asked for and received the Holy Anointing and have got a great blessing from it if I had been a malingerer? Also, when I was in Wellington, it was being said of me that while I had plenty of good clothes, M. and the children had scarcely anything, and that Layton[35] had to buy Poppy new shoes because she had nothing fit to wear. It is easy to see where such stories originated—now remarks such as these, even when told to friends or mayhap to relations, leak out quite easily and travel very quickly, and I would venture to suggest that it will be more comfortable for many people in Wellington that all gossip about me ceases at once. You are welcome to hold any opinion you choose about me personally, but always remember that whatever that opinion may be, I have never been a drunkard, and I have never been shipped to S. Africa by relations who were ashamed to own me. I have never put myself within pale of the law, and I have never robbed a friend. Now there are persons to whom even these negative virtues cannot apply; you may even have heard (quite indirectly, of course) of such people yourself. However, although these subjects are very interesting, they are not altogether pleasant, but it will not do you any harm to...

Wilson was apparently interrupted while composing the letter, for it breaks off in mid-sentence, abruptly ending Melody Wilson Claridge's collection of 1905 and 1906 letters.

In general, the letters paint a rather bleak picture of Wilson's life as he struggles to make a living and to support his family in often adverse circumstances. Yet the money he received from his father was considerable, so the situation could not have been quite as dire as he depicted. Still, it seems that he had trouble finding his place in the world and felt a sense of frustration and failure; perhaps his struggles were simply typical of life in that era, when it was often difficult for people to survive; still, one senses that he doesn't always want to have to scramble for a living; he wants something more out of life.



Figure 10. Wilson's wife, Margery Ellen Clark, in an undated photograph probably taken around the time of her marriage.

Courtesy of Margery Rowe.

Ironically, Wilson's grandfather, Thomas Wilson Sr., was an exceedingly rich man. A mechanical engineer and the holder of numerous patents, he was the inventor of the Wilson straight pull rifle,[36] which was tested by the British Armed Forces in 1867-68. Though it was passed over in favor of the Snider rifle, Wilson Sr. was given a share of the Snider royalties and left an estate valued at £21,447[37] when he died in 1905.[38] None of this money was inherited by Wilson, though a portion of it went to his father, who divided it with his three brothers. The money that Thomas Wilson sent to his son was a significant sum, so why Wilson should plead poverty in his letters remains problematic; perhaps

he had a complex about money, one which continued to manifest itself when he was soliciting funds from members of the Aquarian Foundation as Brother XII.[39]

The hardships that Wilson experienced as a young man may have also influenced Brother XII's attitude towards the more affluent members of his organization. Mary Connally, for example, was one of the richest of his disciples, yet after she had surrendered her fortune to him, she was treated atrociously, being forced to labor long hours at the colony's farm and endure the most primitive living conditions. Aside from the ostensible reason for such privation, that it constituted a spiritual test, Brother XII's mistreatment of her and other wealthy followers may have been motivated by an underlying resentment he felt for the privileged upper classes who hadn't suffered as he had in his early years.[40]

How much longer Wilson remained in New Zealand isn't known, but at some point in the next several years, he immigrated with his wife and children to Canada, where he worked as a clerk for the Dominion Express Company in both Calgary, Alberta, and Victoria, British Columbia; as a rancher in the province's Okanagan district; and as a pilot on coastal steamers plying the waters between Seattle and San Francisco. Anecdotal accounts from individuals who claim to have known him at this time suggest that he had considerable personal charisma, but was chronically dissatisfied with his job and station in life.[41]

Wilson's chronic restlessness and search for a larger life undoubtedly put a strain on his marriage. In or around 1912, while living in Victoria, he and Margery separated. The breakup was a rancorous one, with bitter feelings on both sides, though it was probably more painful for Margery, for she had selflessly devoted herself to her husband for many years. Wilson was fond of his children, so the split must have been painful for him as well. His daughter Margery recalled that one of the last times she saw him was when he brought her a gift of strawberries while she was confined to the hospital in Victoria with diphtheria, a memory that remained precious to her.[42] Sometime afterwards, Wilson left on a ship bound for the Orient, beginning a career as a deep sea mariner and a new stage in his life.[43]

In the midst of these external upheavals, Wilson's interior world was also changing. On January 6, 1913, he became a member of the Theosophical Society, while still maintaining his ties to the Catholic Apostolic Church.[44] Following the breakup of his marriage, he would also have had more time to read and study, especially since he spent long periods at sea. In 1912, by his own account, he had some kind of awakening, a profound inner experience that he termed a "Ceremony of Dedication," which signaled to him that a greater destiny awaited: "This was followed by twelve chaotic years of testing and wandering in all parts of the world. Outwardly, I was unsuccessful in everything I did, but the inner work of preparation must have been going quietly on." [45]



Figure 11. Wilson's two children, Margery Ellen Wilson, aged ten, and Charles Rupert Baron Wilson, aged eight, photographed in 1914 after returning to Auckland, New Zealand, with their mother, following the breakup of her marriage to Wilson.

Courtesy of Margery Rowe.

In this context, the two additional letters in Melody Wilson-Claridge's collection can perhaps be better understood. The first was written on May 12th,

from Victoria, British Columbia, where Wilson was living at the time. Although there is no year on the letter, its contents indicate that it was probably written around 1912, as Wilson and his wife Margery had evidently only recently separated.[46] The first part of the letter, oddly enough, refers to an advertisement that Wilson was attempting to place in several English newspapers; what it concerned and why he was doing so remains a mystery:

My dear Father,

I received your letter of 15th April a few days ago; also the returned order for \$5.00. As the papers did not see their way clear to accept the advertisement, there is no more to be said about the matter, and it only remains for me to thank you for the trouble you took. The latter part of your letter, however, I feel that I must deal with at some length, namely regarding Rupert's illness, etc. You must know that until quite recently, I have called at their house from time to time to see how the children were getting on. I noticed some time ago that Rupert never seemed to be about, but little Margery was always there. I asked her always, "Where is Rupert?" and she would say, "Oh, he is out somewhere," but I could never get any more out of her, and thought the child was probably playing somewhere near with companions. M. herself was never there, and I have reason to believe that she was working somewhere, but do not know for sure. I discovered that Rupert had been sick by the merest chance; I met the man who owns the house they live in one day, and he said, "Is your little boy any better now, Mr. Wilson?" and that was the first inkling I had of the matter. In the light of recent events, I can plainly see that little M. was told to give me no information, for I remember how she shuffled her feet and looked away when answering me, though at the time, I thought nothing of it.

There is no doubt at all in my mind that this was deliberately concealed from me in order that my apparent neglect might be used to put me in a worse light than ever with yourself & others. I met M. herself about 12 or 14 days ago and said to her, "I hear Rupert has been sick; what was the matter with him?" and she replied quite off handedly, "Oh, measles and one thing or other," and said not another word on the subject.

I can assure you that the hatred of that woman against myself is nothing less than devilish; it glares from her eyes whenever I have the misfortune to meet her—I never know from day to day what she will publish about me next, and would ask you to enquire very fully before you believe anything she writes about me and to give me the opportunity of explanation or denial, as in the present instance.

Another point—she believes, rightly or wrongly, that any money she can obtain from you will be ultimately charged up against me, and I have reason to believe that she will spare no effort to get what she can from you, if only to ultimately strike at me in that way. I know that she is in receipt of assistance from her own family, but to what extent I cannot say; also, she gets the \$15 from me each month,[47] and I have reason to believe that she has in some way got additional funds from you. Now, if you will remember at the time we separated, I wanted to take Rupert, but she brutally refused to let me have him. I told you the circumstances and pointed out that I hoped and believed that pinched circumstances would ultimately bring her to another mind. You will therefore see that by sending her money, you will expressly delay or defeat that end.

Wilson continues the letter by telling his father that both he and Margery will not be allowed to attend services at the Catholic Apostolic Church in Victoria because of their separation:

Yesterday, after months of delay, I saw Hewitt[48] (Deacon) re Church and was advised that I would not be permitted to attend Eucharist while living separate from M. I also understand that this applies to her. I have not the slightest intention of ever resuming such a condition of earthly Hell as associating with her in any way would entail, and am, therefore, I presume, permanently excommunicated. Well—thanks to God, the C.A. persuasion are not the only one and exclusive “Body,” and I shall withdraw, definitely and permanently, from them: I prefer attendance at the Anglican Church in any case; there is greater tolerance and a broader view in general; at least, I have found it so in Victoria.

I know that this will cause you some grief, and am much more sorry for you than for myself, but my dear Father, I can truly say (and I trust you will as truly believe) that in this matter, I have the approval of a good conscience. I myself am

not at all distressed—God does not lead us all by the same path, but by various ways, but it is His leading just the same. Here is a thought that may be new to you. No one can say of me, “Oh, he has lapsed or fallen away” (though possibly He who is all compassion might say that I was driven away). Remember that I was never, strictly speaking, a member of that communion; I was not baptised by them, and, furthermore, never received the Sealing.[49] No, I attended that particular body for a time (and at times) because you yourself did so, and as a child, I had no option. Therefore, having never belonged, I cannot have lapsed.

There is no doubt in my mind that those gathered under the (late) restored Apostles have probably the purest form of worship at present extant; also, they possess truths that have been lost sight of by the Church as a whole, but that form does not contain all of God’s truth and Grace; He has left, at any rate, some small portion of it to the rest of His Body, the Church.

Wilson then goes on to discuss his belief in the Second Coming of Christ:

As to the Second Advent of the Christ, I believe in and look for this from day to day, but I also believe that those who will recognise Him when he comes are those who have developed within themselves, to some extent at any rate, the qualities of purity, gentleness, and devotion. The great majority of mankind (I might say of Christendom) will not recognise Him when once again in human form He treads the paths of Earth, for you will remember that this next advent is not in clouds and great Glory, but “as a thief in the night”; therefore, the necessity for the injunction to watch; there will be no necessity to watch for that occasion on which He comes to judge all men, for then, “every eye shall see Him.”

Whether we shall know Him or not will depend upon whether or not we have developed Something of His character within ourselves; knowing this, I humbly (and very imperfectly) strive to live each day that I may be amongst those who realise the glory of the privilege given to this our generation, we to whom it shall be given with our earthly eyes to behold the King in His beauty; this I believe, and for this I live and pray.

I think I will close this letter now, letting that be the last thought, and if it differs in any way from your own, let us both remember the grace of tolerance,

knowing that in our hearts, we hold the same hope, looking for the day of His appearing.[50]

Best love to you all,

Your affectionate Son,

E.A.Wilson.

The second letter in Melody Wilson Claridge's collection was written on July 25, 1919, Wilson's 41st birthday. It is particularly interesting, for it anticipates some of the views that he later articulated as Brother XII; namely, his rejection of the current social order and his desire to live a life close to nature, ideas which found expression in the alternative spiritual community that he subsequently established, and which was intended to be a place of refuge from the coming collapse of modern civilization that he predicted.

Wilson also cryptically alludes to a transcendent experience that has given him "absolute Knowledge," but he regrettably does not elaborate.[51] By the time he was the head of the Aquarian Foundation, meditation had become an essential feature of his life and a discipline that he strongly advocated as a daily practice for members of the organization. He himself periodically retreated to a small cabin in the woods that he called the "House of Mystery," where he was purported to enter exalted states of consciousness and to communicate with the Masters of Wisdom who were directing his spiritual work. His ability to achieve the state of *samadhi*[52] was confirmed by witnesses[53] and likely originated in the years preceding the writing of this letter, during a period in which he became a dedicated practitioner of meditation.[54]

The letter was written from Bellingham, Washington, about twenty miles from the Canadian border and not far from Cedar-by-the-Sea, the rural enclave on Vancouver Island, near the colliery town of Nanaimo, British Columbia, where Brother XII established the headquarters of the Aquarian Foundation. Wilson had already been working for a number of years in the merchant marine and he begins the letter by telling his parents about his maritime employment:

for one thing. I want to get right away
from the ordinary life of this country -
to be by myself, near to Natural Things,
and away from the hideous strife
and wickedness of the modern world.
Such things as quietness, fair-dealing,
and a contented spirit seem to have
permanently disappeared, and I am
convinced that there is no cure for
the spirit of modernity that rules the
masses in all countries today. As
far as I am concerned, I ask nothing
but to leave them to work out their
own damnation in their own way.
I feel more than ever the impossibility of
being a citizen, or even a national,
as I have no sympathy with any group
or sangerie, or party; I would be
an individual, not one of any mob.
The leaders are crooks and the public
are fools, so I would go my own way,
interfering with none.

Figure 12. Extract from Wilson's letter of July 25, 1919, to his parents.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

Dear Father and Mother,

I had your last letters a couple of weeks ago, but have been exceedingly busy and have not found time to reply until today. I was assigned to a 10,000 ton ship as 2nd officer in May last, loading wheat for France, but was not able to sail, owing to a return of my old stomach trouble. You may infer how disappointed I was, for I had to recognise that I must have several months of my own particular kinds of food and cooking in order to get right again. After a lot of planning, I concluded that I would put in the season salmon fishing here in Puget Sound, as in that way I can live in the open, cook what and how I like, and, I hope, make enough to keep

things going. I picked up a second hand bark (a sailboat) in Vancouver, B.C., and put in a month making necessary alterations. I then sailed her down here and leaving the boat went to Seattle to get an engine, an outboard motor. I got this last week and have since been busy getting it fitted. Tomorrow, I hope to go to Orcas Island and start the actual fishing. I expect to operate from a place called Doe Bay, where there is a store and a post office, while a fish cannery is across the strait eight or ten miles off, where I can dispose of what I catch. The run has just started and should last six or eight weeks; when the season is over, I expect to lay up my boat and go to sea again Oct. or November.

This will give you an idea of present conditions with me—it is a case of doing the best I can under rather adverse circumstances.

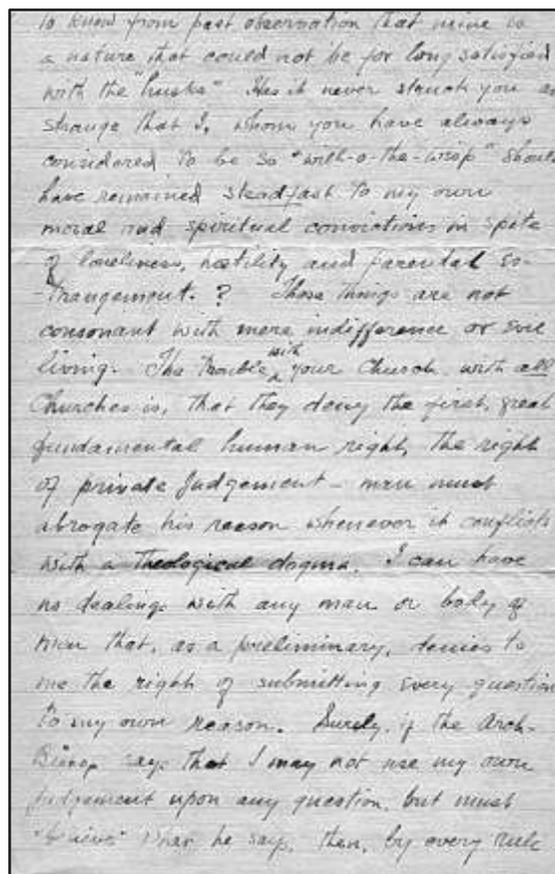
For one thing, I want to get right away from the ordinary life of this country—to be by myself, near to natural things and away from the hideous strife and wickedness of the modern world. Such things as quietness, fair-dealing, and a contented spirit seem to have permanently disappeared, and I am convinced that there is no cure for the spirit of madness that rules the masses in all countries today.[55] As far as I am concerned, I ask nothing but to leave them to work out their own damnation in their own way. I feel more than ever the impossibility of being a citizen, or even a national, as I have no sympathy with any group or congerie or party; I would be an Individual, not one of any mob. The leaders are crooks and the public are fools, so I would go my own way interfering with none.

By now, Wilson had severed all ties with his wife and children, and had formed a relationship with a Scottish woman named Elma, whose maiden name isn't known. He introduced her as his wife[56] to Aquarian Foundation members, and she was a stalwart companion to him when he was first starting his work as Brother XII. According to one informant, the two had first met in the South Seas,[57] where she had nursed Wilson back to health when he was ill; she is said to have followed him in his travels as a mariner, remaining steadfast to him until the fall of 1928, when she discovered that he was having an affair with a New York doctor's wife named Myrtle Baumgartner,[58] who was secretly staying at the headquarters. Needless to say, she was devastated.

In his letter to his parents, Wilson described the love and commitment that the two felt for each other:

You say recently that I never tell you of my private life—that you are “in the dark,” etc. You forget that when I told you of an important event in April 1914, you wrote, “We never wish to see her or to hear anything of her.” Well, I am quite content to take you at your word.

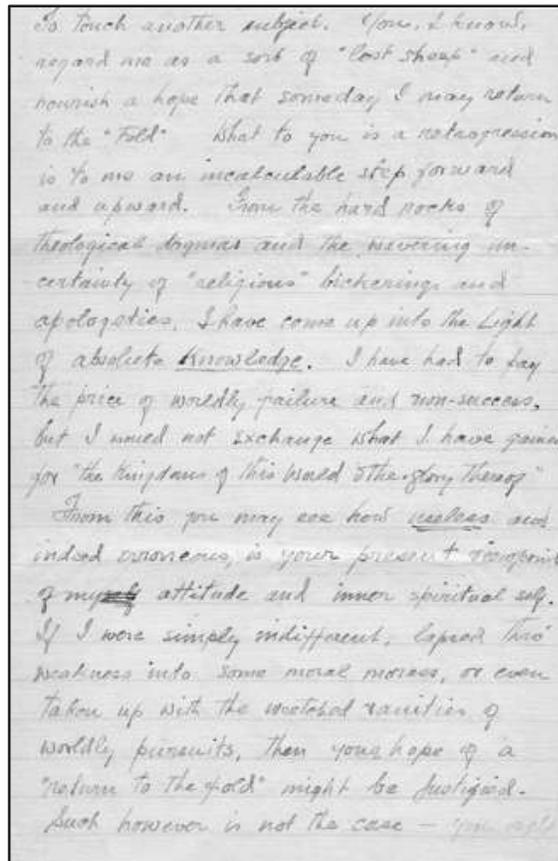
You may as well know, however, that I have never known such heroism or self-sacrifice and selfless love as the past five years have revealed; with us, it is very surely a case of “till death us do part.” Constant struggle, sickness, want and separation have afflicted us, but they make no difference to the deep things of life. I should be really grateful if you will refrain from any comment—our thoughts are absolutely at variance on many vital points, but my ideals are mine, and yours or any other persons or any body of persons, can never be a substitute for them. I have written only that you might have information.

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The handwriting is in cursive and matches the text of the third paragraph above. The text discusses the author's moral and spiritual convictions, their stance on church authority, and their commitment to private judgment. The paper shows some signs of age and wear.

to know from past observation that mine is
a nature that could not be for long satisfied
with the "hush" Has it never struck you as
strange that I, whom you have always
considered to be so "with-o-the-wisp" should
have remained steadfast to my own
moral and spiritual convictions in spite
of loneliness, hostility and parental so-
frangement? These things are not
consonant with mere indifference or self-
living. The trouble ^{with} your Church with all
Churches is, that they deny the first, great
fundamental human right, the right
of private judgment - men must
abrogate his reason whenever it conflicts
with a Theological dogma. I can have
no dealings with any man or body of
men that, as a preliminary, denies to
me the right of submitting every question
to my own reason. Surely, if the Arch-
Bishop says that I may not use my own
judgment upon any question, but must
obey: What he says, then, by every rule

Figure 13. Extract from Wilson's letter of July 25, 1919, to his parents.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.



To touch another subject. You, I know, regard me as a sort of "lost sheep" and nourish a hope that someday I may return to the "fold." What to you is a retrogression is to me an incalculable step forward and upward. From the hard rocks of theological dogmas and the hovering uncertainty of "religious" bickering and apologies, I have come up into the light of absolute knowledge. I have had to pay the price of worldly failure and non-success, but I would not exchange what I have gained for "the kingdom of this world & the glory thereof." From this you may see how useless and indeed erroneous, is your present viewpoint of my ~~my~~ attitude and inner spiritual self. If I were simply indifferent, I could turn weakness into some moral morass, or even take up with the material pursuit of worldly pursuits, then your hope of a "return to the fold" might be justified. Such however is not the case - you will

Figure 14. Extract from Wilson's letter of July 25, 1919, to his parents.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

Wilson also responded to his parents' concerns that he'd strayed from the path when it came to the teachings of the Catholic Apostolic Church; he'd evidently debated religion with them in his other letters, but this particular one seems to mark a turning point for him in regards to the Church and its doctrines:

To touch another subject. You, I know, regard me as a sort of “lost sheep” and nourish a hope that someday I may return to the “Fold.” What to you is a retrogression is to me an incalculable step forward and upward. From the hard rocks of theological dogmas and the wavering uncertainty of “religious” bickerings and apologetics, I have come up into the Light of absolute *Knowledge*. I have had to pay the price of worldly failure and non-success, but I would not exchange what I have gained for “the Kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof.”

From this, you may see how *useless* and indeed erroneous is your present viewpoint of my attitude and inner spiritual self. If I were simply indifferent, lapsed through weakness into some moral morass, or even taken up with the wretched vanities of worldly pursuits, then your hope of a “return to the fold” might be justified. Such, however, is not the case—you ought to know from past observation that mine is a nature that could not be for long satisfied with the “husks.” Has it never struck you as strange that I, whom you have always considered to be so “will-o-the-wisp,” should have remained steadfast to my own moral and spiritual convictions in spite of loneliness, hostility and parental estrangement? These things are not consonant with mere indifference or evil living.

The trouble with your Church, with *all* Churches, is that they deny the first great fundamental human right, the right of private judgement—man must abrogate his reason whenever it conflicts with a theological dogma. I can have no dealings with any man or body of men that, as a preliminary, denies to me the right of submitting every question to my own reason. Surely, if the Archbishop says that I may not use my own judgement upon any question, but must “believe” what he says, then, by every rule of fair play, I may tell the Archbishop that he must not follow his judgement, but must believe what I say.

“Oh no,” says the Archbishop, “what I tell you is not the result of my own reason, but is what somebody else placed on record that somebody else said—it *must* be true because I read it in a book.” Well—even the churchmen are beginning to see the absurdity of such a proposition of late.

My dear parents, after all, what is there to quarrel about; I say to you with all sincerity—you may adhere to what creed, sect or form you choose; you may hold

those beliefs you choose and form such opinions as appeal to your individual reason; such is your undeniable right. Why then, can you not grant to me the same right? Why, because I see some things differently to you, must I have fallen into “error” or “delusion” and be accounted a subject to be “prayed over”? If we differ on some opinion of religion, why must you, of a cosmic necessity, be right, and I, of equal necessity, be wrong? I will tell you why—*because the Church says so*. Do you believe that all the church says is the truth? The Church, when she worked up the Athanasian Creed, had the wickedness to write, “This is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe rightly, *he cannot be saved.*”

Do you believe that, honestly and without reservations, remembering that it was written when there was, according to Instruction, only one alternative to “salvation”? If you don’t believe it absolutely, and without the teeniest little mental reservation or doubt, then you question the validity of Church “authority” and are really as I. If you do accept it, holus bolus, then you are an anachronism and different from the great majority of church officials who for twenty years have been trying to wriggle out of it, or to tone it down.

I say, with Bob Ingersoll,[59] “We may have to believe it, but thank God, we don’t have to understand it.”

Well, this a longer letter than I thought to write, but it is written with an honest desire to try to reach some common ground of understanding—to let you see where I really “am at,” though I have only touched on the *negative* side, remember, and all progress must be constructive. Why can’t you bury this wretched religious “hatchet,” accord to me the right to my own opinion, as you do to yourself? Remember that the *sincere* Roman Catholic regards you as a heretic and beyond the pale of salvation—is he right? He is *perfectly certain* that he is—because the church says so.

I would love to be able to write and to receive free, frank letters, to have greetings and some common bond of family interest and intercourse—but I am no hypocrite, and if you can’t accept me as I am—if, as the price of family interest, I must surrender the right of reason and judgement, then I must ever remain outside and alone, walled off by the bitter walls of a rock-ribbed brand of

theology. Christ said, “Other sheep have I that are not of this fold.” And what about the “many mansions”; mayhap they are all glass houses in one sense.

Best love to you all,

From Your affectionate Son,

Edward A.Wilson.[60]



Figure 15. Edward Arthur Wilson, San Francisco, 1919, aged forty-one years old, photographed when he was working in the merchant marine. The contrast between this photograph and the one taken in San Remo, Italy, half-a-dozen years later is striking and seems to bear witness to some profound change that had taken place in his life.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.



Figure 16. Wilson as a child, pictured with his younger sister, Elsie Marian Wilson, in an undated photograph taken at a portrait studio in Birmingham, England. Seven years his junior, she died in June, 1893, aged eight years old.

Courtesy of Melody Wilson-Claridge.

Thus concludes the final letter in the Melody Wilson-Claridge collection. The letters as a whole provide an unprecedented glimpse into Wilson's character and the events that molded him as a young man; the last two letters show that he was wrestling with the doctrines of the religion in which he was raised, though he appears, by his own account, to have been intrinsically motivated in his search for truth,[61] a quest that reached its zenith during his career as Brother XII. Given his sensibilities, one can appreciate how frustrating it must have been for him to

be working in a series of menial jobs for little money and how trapped he must have felt as a result; he was unquestionably aware of his lack of material success, a failure that must have been made all the more difficult to accept because of his parents' expectations, a pressure that must have significantly added to his determination to find his place in the world.

The letters make clear that Wilson was an extremely single-minded, driven individual, a characteristic that he would exhibit to an even greater degree as Brother XII. The adversities that he faced as a young man no doubt prepared him for the challenges that he would face in establishing the Aquarian Foundation, and being recognized as a bona fide spiritual teacher. By that time, perhaps by virtue of the lessons he had learned, he had developed an impregnable persona and a self-confidence that was absolute. When he writes to his parents in the letters, he is still a vulnerable human being, yet when he expresses himself as Brother XII, there is a world of difference, for he is now authority itself speaking—authority personified, his only allegiance being to the spiritual Brotherhood from which he claims to receive his inspiration. By this time, Wilson had obviously undergone some kind of apotheosis, though the letters in the collection indicate that he already possessed the required platform from which to launch his ascent: the gift of language, the religious sensibility, and the compelling desire to fulfill what he felt was a sacred mission; the seeds are there in the letters, though the full expression of Wilson's power as Brother XII lay another half-dozen years in the future.



Figure 17. Edward Arthur Wilson as Brother XII (wearing hat) seated among the Governors of the Aquarian Foundation on the occasion of the first Annual General Meeting of the Aquarian Foundation, July 25, 1927. Left to right: Edward Lucas (back to camera), Joseph Benner, Maurice Von Platen, E. A. Wilson, Phillip Fisher, Will Levington Comfort, Coulson Turnbull.

Wilson's years as a mariner appear to have corresponded with his own voyage of self-discovery, and to have wrought a profound change in him, providing the catalyst for his later transformation. The sea has long been known to exert a mystical influence over certain individuals, as dramatized in the works of writers such as Coleridge, Melville and Conrad; it seems to have had the same effect upon Wilson, and one must remember that in his era, mariners spent a far longer time at sea than they do today. It's also reasonable to assume that Wilson could not have transformed himself in the way that he did had he remained tied to a wife and family; he needed to be alone, unencumbered by domestic responsibilities, in order to follow what he perceived to be a higher calling.

Brother XII was a man of extremes; he was a mystic with an apocalyptic view of the world, together with a personality that was, in many respects, predatory, manipulative, cunning, selfish, vindictive, narcissistic—detractors could no doubt extend the list. Yet despite that, he also had a more sympathetic side; inexplicably, many of his disciples remained loyal to him to the very end, enduring often intolerable conditions for the ultimate spiritual reward that he promised, such was the power of the man and the devotion that he inspired as the “Messenger of the Masters.”

Wilson’s letters are a harbinger of things to come; they bear witness to the unfolding process of his life as he navigates his way towards an uncertain future. Reading them today, one can see him as he himself could not, as he moves inevitably towards his fate, as that moment approaches when the man who speaks in them, in all his doubt and desperation, hope and conviction, leaves his past behind and emerges into the light as the fascinating figure known as Brother XII.

* * * * *

The author wishes to thank Melody Wilson-Claridge for making the letters of her great uncle available for publication, and for providing three previously unpublished photographs of Wilson for use in the present article. He would also like to gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Wilson’s granddaughter, Margery Rowe, for providing the photographs of Wilson’s family members.

* * * * *

Endnotes

I Some sense of the excitement Brother XII generated in his followers is to be found in the Introduction contributed to his book *Foundation Letters and Teachings* by the prominent American novelist Will Levington Comfort, a

frequent contributor to *The Saturday Evening Post*, who described Wilson's writings as carrying "the very light of Contact," and as coming from "a personality aligned, inspired. We now read in them the Story of the Age—of all ages—the drama of an individual called to specific action for the whole of humanity.": *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, Sun Publishing Company, Akron, Ohio, 1927: xiii-xiv.

2 There are seven letters dating from 1905 and nineteen letters dating from 1906. The total word count, including that of the two loose letters, is approximately 14,500 words. The 1905 and 1906 letters were written in a duplicate order book; the top page was removed after the completion of the letter and mailed to the intended recipient; the bottom page remained in the book as an identical copy.

3 Vol. 9 (1989): 39-61.

4 Reviewed in *Theosophical History*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (April, 1992): 56. Originally published by McClelland & Stewart, the book was republished by Twelfth House Press in 2006 in a revised second edition as *Brother XII: The Strange Odyssey of a 20th-Century Prophet*, the new title being thought to more accurately reflect Brother XII's place in the history of New Religious Movements.

5 Available online at <<https://circle.ubc.ca/handle/2429/31540?show=full>>.

6 Interestingly, Brother XII recommended this book to Aquarian Foundation members in his July 1928 monthly Instruction, stressing that all great Initiates had received their training in the Temples of Egypt, a country which for countless thousands of years, he claimed, had been the center of light, learning and civilization for the entire world.

7 Thomas Wilson was relatively well-off, being a partner with two of his brothers in a brass and iron bedstead manufacturing business on Ledsam Street in the district of Ladywood, Birmingham. Of greater significance, though, was his membership in the Catholic Apostolic Church, an unusual religious movement which grew out of the ministry of Scottish preacher Edward Irving (1792-1834), and whose members were commonly known as "Irvingites." E. A. Wilson's upbringing in this sect undoubtedly played a major role in his development and world view.

8 Wilson arrived in New Zealand while working on a ship and was introduced to his future wife by mutual acquaintances, according to his daughter, Margery Ellen Bell, in an interview with the writer in December, 1993. The couple was married on Christmas Eve in the Catholic Apostolic Church on Webb Street.

9 The Clark family were well-to-do sheep farmers in Australia, but apparently disliked Wilson and had given no money to support him and their daughter during their marriage.

10 The equivalent of £27,900 in today's currency as measured by the retail price index.

11 Margery's older sister by two years. Margery was born on July 23, 1880, and was two years younger than Wilson. Uncle Henry and Aunt Mary were Margery's relatives.

12 Letter of May 22, 1906.

13 The company had twenty-four trading stations throughout the Friendly Islands and an extensive copra business that included schooners, jetties and copra warehouses. Wilson's specific job duties are unknown, but he evidently traveled between the islands; in one letter, he mentions photographs he has taken, but these have unfortunately been lost.

14 Nukualofa is the capital of Tonga and is located on Tongatapu, the largest island in the archipelago. Haapai, the second largest island, lies about 65 miles north, while Niue lies about 325 miles northeast. Dr. Daniel McLennon was the Government medical officer at Nukualofa and a former personal physician to the King of Hawaii.

15 At the age of twenty, Wilson would have been "sealed" with a laying on of hands by one of the apostles of the Catholic Apostolic Church; it was believed that members who received this anointing would escape the Great Tribulation.

16 What kind of attacks Wilson is referring to remains a mystery. His statement to Margery Clark that he could only do outdoor work because of his health seems to suggest tuberculosis. It is perhaps worth noting that Elsie Marian

Wilson, one of Wilson's three sisters, died in 1893 at the age of eight, though the cause of her death is unknown.

17 In April, 1926, while staying in Italy, Wilson wrote to an unnamed correspondent: "That within me has overcome sickness and bonds, and a weak body; make no mistake, Brothers, I am not a person filled with Power, but *a Power* using a personality.": *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, Sun Publishing Company, Akron, Ohio, 1927: 29.

18 Letter to Oliver G. Hess, October 27, 1928.

19 A billet is a position of employment, a job.

20 Letter of October 6, 1906.

21 Letter of May 22, 1906.

22 Joshua Mathers, the manager of the mill and a well-known figure in the flax industry in New Zealand.

23 The code used key words to refer to the financial details of the business prospects that Wilson had in mind, including the amount of the initial investment and the mortgage and interest rates. The information was to be transmitted by cable, but kept confidential by means of the code.

24 A British shipping company which operated a passenger service to New Zealand.

25 The New Zealand International Exhibition, held in Christchurch from November 1, 1906 to April 15, 1907. It was the brainchild of New Zealand Prime Minister Richard Seddon, who died five months before it opened, while on board a ship returning from a trip to Australia. On learning of his death, Wilson commented wryly in a letter to his parents, written on June 11, 1906: "Have just heard that Dick Seddon is dead; he has died coming over from Australia, I believe, but no particulars are to hand yet. There will be great changes here if it is so. I expect he had been overeating himself at the Sydney banquets."

26 £1,040.00 in today's currency as measured by the retail price index.

27 The knife that the workers used to cut the flax.

28 Te Rapa was subject to flooding from severe rains and the rising waters of the Waikato River. At the time Wilson was writing, heavy rains were threatening the settlements along the river.

29 His former supervisor at Vines, Utting & Perston.

30 In addition to the money that his father had given him on his engagement (£150), his marriage (£100), and for the farm in Rednal (£100), Wilson had also received two additional sums of £100 and £200 respectively from his father after he returned to New Zealand, making a total of £650, the equivalent of £51,800 in today's currency as measured by the retail price index.

31 Margery's nickname.

32 Wilson's sister, Mabel Gladys Wilson.

33 A Maori word for house, hut or dwelling place, especially on the beach or in the bush. In 1912, Robert W. Felkin used the word when he established Whare Ra or "House of the Sun," a branch of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn in New Zealand. Wilson probably had no connection with it, having departed the country prior to its formation.

34 The reason why Margery needed medical care isn't explained in the letter, though perhaps the bill is related to complications arising from the birth of Rupert.

35 George Layton Clark, Margery's 22-year-old brother.

36 A detailed description of the rifle, including photographs, is posted online at: <http://www.hbsauk.isonlinehere.com/resource/Wilson.pdf>.

37 £710,000 in today's currency as measured by the retail price index.

38 The information about Thomas Wilson Sr. is based on the findings of Melody Wilson-Claridge, who possesses some of Wilson's technical sketches and several of his patents, including patents in French. In *Rifles of the World*, 3rd edition, 2006, John Walker observes that Wilson was a most prolific patentee.

39 In October, 1928, the Foundation's Secretary-Treasurer, Robert England, wrote a highly critical letter to Wilson, accusing him of only being concerned with the getting of money and a place: "You added up the total receipts of cash roughly in your mind one day when we were out in your boat not many weeks ago, and remarked in a tone of satisfaction that it was not too bad considering the time you had been at it."

40 As an Englishman, Wilson would have been acutely aware of class distinctions. One of the members of his group, Ada Phillips, the wealthy widow of a U.S. Congressman, later recalled: "And I remember when we went into town, he wore a grey suit. He asked me what I thought of his clothes. 'Don't you think I ought to dress better now?' he said. I asked him if that was his best suit. He said, 'Yes, I was a poor man when I came into the Work. I had nothing to bring in except my brains and the work of my hand.'"

41 Herbert Wilkinson, who drove a delivery wagon for the Dominion Express Company in Calgary, remembers Wilson in 1910, aged thirty-two, as five-foot-six in height, slim, clean-shaven and as being a dapper dresser; his eyes were his most compelling feature, he recalled in an article by Howard O'Hagan in *Macleans Magazine*, August, 1952. This account confirms Wilson's daughter Margery's own recollection that the family initially lived in Calgary, where it was so cold, the milk froze in the milk bottles.

42 Personal conversation with the writer, December, 1993. Margery passed away on July 28, 1994.

43 Margery Clark returned to New Zealand on funds provided by her brother, George Layton Clark. She never remarried; her daughter Margery recalls her burning all of her wedding photographs. Layton, who became a bank manager, also paid for the education of Rupert, while Wilson's father, Thomas Wilson, paid for the education of Margery; both children went on to live productive and fulfilling lives. Rupert never forgave his father for abandoning the family and forever afterwards refused to speak of him, so great was his bitterness. Margery was less hostile and over time adopted a more forgiving attitude towards her father and his shirking of family responsibilities.

44 Writing as Brother XII in *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (139), Wilson asserted that the Catholic Apostolic Church and the Theosophical Society were part of the same spiritual impulse, and that the work of the Aquarian Foundation was a continuation of those earlier efforts. Given his later belief concerning the relationship between the three movements, it's not surprising that he would have retained his membership in the Church.

45 *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, Sun Publishing Company, Akron, Ohio, 1927, 44.

46 Wilson is listed in the Victoria city directory of 1912 as being employed as a clerk by the Dominion Express Company, and in 1913 as working as an electrician. The return address on the letter is 330, Pemberton Building, the office of the International Correspondence Schools of Scranton, Pennsylvania; Wilson may have been taking a course by mail, using the company's office as a return address rather than his residence at 257 Cook Street. There is no listing for Margery Clark, either under Wilson's name or her maiden name. After 1913, Wilson's name disappears from the Victoria directories.

47 The equivalent of \$335.00 in today's currency as measured by the retail price index. The fact that Wilson gave money to help support his wife and children indicates that he was not a so-called "deadbeat dad," and that the view that he heartlessly abandoned his family may be an oversimplification of a more complex situation.

48 Deacon Hewitt led one of twelve congregations of the Catholic Apostolic Church in Canada.

49 This assertion appears to contradict Wilson's statement in his letter of October 28, 1906, to Margery Clark that he had received the Holy Anointing (also called the Holy Sealing) and derived a great blessing from it.

50 By 1926, Wilson had moved beyond the literal interpretation of this teaching. In his article, "Things We Ought to Know," reprinted in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, he writes of the Catholic Apostolic Church and its members: "Their central teaching was the 'Second Advent,' and they daily expected the appearance of a physical Christ descending upon the Earth. Once again, the spiritual truth of

the coming of the Christos, the Higher Self, the Spiritual Man, was materialised. In many cases, this was carried to such absurd lengths as refusing life insurance on the grounds that it was evidence of ‘lack of faith’” (145).

51 The experience to which he refers was evidently a prelude to the increasingly frequent and intense inner experiences that eventually culminated in his early inspired writings, including his manifesto, *A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom in 1926*, his metaphysical treatise, *The Three Truths*, and the powerful visions that he described in *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, which are written with a persuasive authenticity that makes it difficult to believe that they were fabricated; if one gives Wilson the benefit of the doubt, he would appear to be a genuine mystic who was truthfully recording his remarkable and often overwhelming experiences of transpersonal consciousness.

52 A Sanskrit word used to describe the highest states of consciousness that an individual can achieve; enlightenment; self-realization.

53 In April, 1927, Brother XII met with members of the Aquarian Foundation in California. One of his disciples later told reporter Bruce McKelvie: “A friend of mine saw him there when he was in *samâdhi* for six days and his face was wonderfully beautiful.” “Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-the-Sea,” *The Sunday Province* (Vancouver, B.C.), 28 October 1928: 34.

54 In an interview with the writer on January 12, 1981, Brother XII’s housekeeper, Alice Rudy, stated that Wilson had spent time in Italy in a “School of Silence,” where it was forbidden to speak and where students spent every day in deep meditation.

55 Wilson would later give powerful expression to such sentiments in two articles that he contributed in 1926 to *The Occult Review*, “The Shadow” (May, 1926) and “The Tocsin” (August, 1926); they took as their theme, “Whom the Gods would destroy, they first make mad,” and thrust him into prominence as an implacable critic of modern civilization.

56 The two lived together as husband and wife, but never married as Wilson and Margery Clark were never legally divorced.

57 Interview by the writer on December 2, 1982, with Margaret Salwyn, whose mother once rented rooms to Wilson in Nanaimo, and befriended Elma when she was living at the Aquarian Foundation as Wilson's wife. Her account of his having met Elma in the South Seas is given credence by the address that Wilson provided to the Theosophical Society on June 9, 1916: c/o S.R. Maxwell & Co., Papeete, via San Francisco, indicating that he was once again working for an Island trading company; in this case, a well-known Auckland firm with extensive holdings in Tahiti and other South Seas islands.

58 Myrtle Baumgartner was the estranged wife of Dr. Edwin A. Baumgartner of Clifton Springs, New York. Brother XII justified his relationship with her by claiming that she was also an Initiate and that the two had incarnated together in order to restore a knowledge of the "Dual Law" to mankind: esoteric teachings regarding sex and marriage. He described their meeting as "a marvel in an aeon," and attempted to have a child with her who, he believed, would become his successor and a World Teacher in 1975, but Myrtle miscarried twice and subsequently had a nervous breakdown.

59 Robert. G. Ingersoll (1833-1899), the greatest orator in the United States during the late 19th century; a fearless free-thinker, humanist and scientific rationalist, he enthralled audiences for thirty years with his lectures and was known as "The Great Agnostic" for his devastating critiques of the Bible and orthodox Christianity.

60 In a postscript to the letter, Wilson instructed his parents to write to him c/o the Masonic Club, Arcade Building, Seattle, Washington.

61 In *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (43-44), he writes: "From early childhood, I have been in touch with super-physical things, and have often received visitations from highly developed Beings, and these always brought me help or comfort or instruction; in their nature, these visitations were both visible and audible to my senses, but now I know that they were the inner senses and not the outer as I used to suppose. At first, I thought that these were 'Angels,' but as I grew older and received teaching, I learned of the Masters and Their work for humanity. This direct contact continued all through my life from time to time, but it was not until

much later that I learned the reason for these experiences and the teaching that was given me.”

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