

The Aquarian Foundation

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Introduction

In 1926, there appeared a small pamphlet entitled “A Message from the Masters of The Wisdom in 1926” proclaiming that the Masters of the Wisdom¹ were about to initiate further Work in the world. Such assertion, especially for those sympathetic with the teachings of the Theosophical Movement, was surely to have a profound impact. And indeed it did. Over the next seven years, from 1927 to 1933, the individual who wrote the inspiring and uplifting “Message” and who also established the Aquarian Foundation and its community at Cedar-by-the-Sea on Vancouver Island (British Columbia), Edward Arthur Wilson, would likewise be responsible for events so “bizarre that it out rivalled in real life the wildest imaginings of an old-fashioned dime novel.”² As sensational as the events were that led to the dissolution of the Foundation and the [40]

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

1980), 53f.

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

[40] colony, there is a paucity of written sources that would give a complete picture of the functionings of both; as usual, the media emphasized scandalous and criminal revelations that came out of court cases in 1928 and 1933 and in typical tabloid fashion sensationalized them accordingly. Thus, during these years' headlines dramatizing Wilson's startling conduct appeared in many papers in the U.S. and Canada. Many of the headlines reflect an irresponsible and flippant tone not in keeping with the supposed best traditions of journalism; these include the following:

"Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-the Sea"

"B.C. Love Cult Rites Bared by Witness"

"Osiris and Isis Met on Train Between Seattle and Chicago"

"Black Magic, Gold and Guns Feature Strange Cult Case"

"Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B.C. Island."

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

Teaching

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

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

It is obvious that Wilson's message was basically theosophical in content; understandably, it was aimed at a theosophical audience. Yet it went beyond the Theosophy of Blavatsky and her Masters, and it was that part of the message that was so fascinating and indeed troubling to those who ruminated on his occult revelations. To put it in the simplest terms, Wilson combined the Theosophy of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky with the promise

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

[41] of a coming New Age, the Age of Aquarius. The millenarian flavor of the latter resembled somewhat the Neo-Theosophical teachings of the imminent incarnation of Krishnamurti.

A brief overview of Theosophy and certain events within the Theosophical Society (Adyar) is necessary if Wilson's teachings are to be understood. Theosophy or 'Divine Wisdom' according to Blavatsky and her followers, refers to the Ultimate Truth of the Supreme, the Cosmos, and Humanity. It is a Truth that in its pure form is primordial, in that it existed from the dawn of Humanity; esoteric, since only those few individuals capable of understanding such knowledge are allowed to receive it; and universal, because all great minds throughout the world enunciated the same Wisdom. Though esoteric, at least a portion of the Wisdom was "known in every ancient country having claim to civilization!"⁴ Furthermore, it was Blavatsky's contention that the Wisdom could be partially recoverable from a "comparative study and analysis"⁵ of selected philosophers (Pythagoras, Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, Proclus, Patañjali, and Shankara) or schools of philosophies (the Greek Mystery Schools, Neo-Platonism, Vedanta, Taoism, Cabalism), and the sacred writings of the great historical religions (Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism). A study of these philosophers, schools, and religions by Blavatsky, under the guidance of two Masters of this Ancient Wisdom⁶—one usually identified by the initials K. H. (Koot Hoomi), the other by the initial M. (Morya)—led to the writing of her two great works, *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, works that partially revealed the Ancient Wisdom in a modern form.⁷ [42]

4. H.P. Blavatsky "What is Theosophy?," in Boris De Zirkoff, *H. P. Blavatsky: Collected Writings*, Volume II (Wheaton, IL: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1967), 89.

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

6. See note 1 and H. P. Blavatsky "'The Theosophical Mahatmas,'" *Theosophical Articles by H. P. Blavatsky*, 1:301-7

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

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

7. Charles D. Ryan, *What is Theosophy?* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, Inc.,

1975):3. The following quote from *The Secret Doctrine* is pertinent:

The Secret Doctrine is the accumulated Wisdom of the Ages, and its cosmogony alone is the most stupendous and elaborate system... It is useless to say that the system [42] in question [of ancient cosmogony] is no fancy of one or several isolated individuals. That it is the uninterrupted record covering thousands of generations of Seers whose respective experiences were made to test and to verify the traditions passed orally by one early race to another, of the teachings of higher and exalted beings [Masters], who watched over the childhood of Humanity... No vision of one adept was accepted till it was checked and confirmed by the visions — so obtained as to stand as independent evidence — of other adepts, and by centuries of experiences. [1:272-3 of the edition cited in note 8.]

[42] The ‘Truth’ that has been revealed in *The Secret Doctrine* [SD]. the principal source of modern theosophical doctrine,⁸ and works based on its contents may be summarized in the following statements:

1. a single, Supreme, Eternal, Immutable, Unknown and Unknowable, Infinite Principle or Reality [SD 1:14];
2. the fundamental unity of all existence: no thing is apart from the Infinite Reality⁹;
3. the eternal, manifested Universe and everything within it is subject to the “law of periodicity, of flux and reflux, ebb and flow”: such is the doctrine of cycles [SD 1:17];
4. the evolution of nature—material and spiritual¹⁰—reflects progressive development and not merely repetitive action [SD 1:43, 277-78; 11:6531];
5. the evolution of the individual is not limited to one life but continues through innumerable lives made possible by the process of reincarnation, the entrance of Self—the trinity of Spirit, Soul, and Mind —into another (human) body¹¹;
6. this evolution is brought about by the Law of Cause and Effect— Karma —a teaching that assigns full and individual responsibility to the individual who performs the action as well as providing the impetus to future births or incarnations¹²;
7. the structural framework of the universe, humanity included, is by nature septenary in composition [SD II:605-41]¹³; [43]

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

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

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

11. *Ibid.*, 60f.

12. *Ibid.*, 89f., 90: “. . . Karma produces the manifestation of it [the cause] in the body brain, and mind furnished by reincarnation!’ For a general overview of Karma and reincarnation as it is taught in Blavatsky’s writings, see Ronald Neufeldt, “In Search of Utopia: Karma and Rebirth in the Theosophical Movement;” in *Karma and Rebirth: Post Classical Developments*, Ronald W Neufeldt, ed. (Albany: State University of New

York Press, 1986), 233-55.

13. In *Isis Unveiled* 1:508, Blavatsky observes that “Everything in this world is a trinity completed by the quaternary, and every element is divisible on this same principle!” The edition employed is published by The Theosophy Company (Los Angeles, 1982), a photographic facsimile reproduction of the original 1877 edition.

[43]

8. the cyclic, evolving universe is hierarchical in constitution, each component—for instance, our Solar System, Planetary Round, Globe Round—repeating the same divisions of time as the Universal Solar System but on different scales [*SD* II:68f., 434f.J;]
9. with regard to Humanity evolution on the Earth is taking place in seven major groups called Root Races, each of which is divided into seven sub-races. At the present time, we humans belong to the fifth sub-race (the Anglo-Saxon) of the fifth Root Race (Aryan) [*SD* 1:610; II:lf., 86f., 300f., 434f., 688f.];]
10. the individual is in actuality the microcosm, a “miniature copy of the macrocosm” [*SD* 1:274], or to put it in terms of the Hermetic Axiom:

As in the Inner, so is the Outer; as is the Great, so is the Small; as it is above, so it is below;
there is but ONE LIFE AND LAW; and he that worketh it is ONE.
Nothing is Inner, nothing is Outer;
nothing is GREAT, nothing is Small;
nothing is High, nothing is Low, in the Divine economy¹⁴;

11. the universe is guided and animated by a cosmic Hierarchy of sentient beings, each having a specific mission [*SD* 1:274-77].

Although Blavatsky was certainly the most influential and the most brilliant interpreter of Theosophy, there was a subtle challenge to her position as protagonist of the Theosophical movement. The challenge came primarily from the two shining lights of the Adyar Theosophical Society during the first third of the 20th century: Annie Besant, the President of the Society from 1907 to her death in 1933, and Charles Webster Leadbeater, arguably the most influential theosophical writer from the early years of the 20th century to his death in 1934. The two were largely responsible for the introduction of new teachings that were often in total opposition to the Theosophy of Blavatsky and her Masters. These teachings were designated by their opponents as Neo-Theosophy¹⁵ or less often Pseudo-Theosophy. The differences between Theosophy and Neo-Theosophy are too numerous to mention in the context of this paper,¹⁶ but it is possible to capture the broad distinctions between the two:

1. the introduction of Catholicism and its attendant sacraments into the

Adyar Theosophical Society through the agency of the Liberal
Catholic Church [44]

14. Bowen, "*The Secret Doctrine* and its Study," 18, 65-66.
15. The label was most likely coined in 1914 by F.T. Brooks, author of *Neo-Theosophy Exposed* and *The Theosophical Society and its Esoteric Bogeydom*.
16. An extensive overview is given in the unpublished booklet, *Theosophy or Neo-Theosophy* by Margaret Thomas, a member of the Theosophical Society in Scotland, Wales, and England. The booklet was written around 1925.

[44] and the efforts of its Presiding Bishop, James Ingall Wedgwood, and his close associate, the leading theosophical writer of the day, Charles Webster Leadbeater;

2. the claim, based on a psychic reading by Leadbeater in 1909, that a young Indian boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti, would serve as the vehicle of the World Teacher, the Christ or Maitreya. With such a claim came the establishment shortly thereafter of an organization to promote this belief, the Order of the Star in the East;
3. emphasis on the writings of Annie Besant and Charles Webster Leadbeater as the main purveyors of Theosophy to the almost total exclusion of those of H. P. Blavatsky;
4. more emphasis on the acquisition of and participation in psychic or occult powers rather than on the theoretical understanding of the occult.

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

These Neo-Theosophical teachings and the pretenses of their leaders were despised by Edward Wilson. He considered Neo-Theosophy to be a "poisonous corruption of the earlier teachings [the teachings of Blavatsky] and the introduction of disharmony, error, lies and confusion."¹⁷ It is not surprising, therefore, that Wilson considered himself allied with the "Back to Blavatsky" Movement,¹⁸ a group composed of theosophists within the Adyar Society as well as other theosophical associations who looked to the writings of Blavatsky and the Masters as the source of genuine Theosophy.¹⁹ Not surprisingly, Wilson specifically addressed this group:

If you would be true to Theosophy, you cannot go 'back to Blavatsky,' you must go *forward* to Blavatsky. . . .our Brother H. P. B. is not behind you, buried in the 'eighties' where you would enshrine her.²⁰ [45]

17. "Letter XVIII: Those Who Oppose," [dated June 1297] *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 96. See also his article "Things We Ought to Know;" *Foundation Letters and Teachings*, 139f.

On p. 146:

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

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

19. "Letter XIV: Forward to Blavatsky." [dated October, 1926] *Foundation Letters and Teachings*. 67-68.

20. *Ibid.*, 67.

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

The mid-1920's was a time when many in the Theosophical Movement perceived the leaders of the Theosophical Society (Adyar) and their Neo-Theosophical teachings as a total rejection of genuine Theosophy. Wilson thus struck a chord when he wrote in an early article, "The Shadow,"²¹ that Blavatsky's message of the ideal of Universal Brotherhood, first raised in 1875,²² had been rejected. In fact, it was never accepted by many within the Theosophical Movement and by most, if not all, outside the Movement. According to Wilson, this rejection of Brotherhood was confirmed by a number of incidents that had taken place in the recent past: crime waves, child murders, suicides, cases of "possession," growing class hatreds, multiplying instruments of death and destruction, World War I, the "capitalistic war in South Africa, the atrocities in the Belgian Congo,"²³ were only a few of the signs.

The rejection of Blavatsky's call to Universal Brotherhood was interpreted by Wilson in a typically millenarian fashion: imminent destruction of the present age and civilization and the uprising of a New Age, in this case the Aquarian Age. The timing of such an event revolved around three dates: 1875, 1925, and 1975. The year 1875 referred to the message of Brotherhood given to the world by Blavatsky, the Messenger and disciple of the Masters or the Wisdom. That having failed, the Masters of the Great [46]

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

22. This date is not entirely accurate. The first mention of a Brotherhood of Humanity as an object of the Theosophical Society appears in an information circular dated May 3,

1878. The original 1875 objects of the society were “to collect and diffuse a knowledge of the laws which govern the universe.” This is contained in the “By-Laws” of the T. 5. (October 30, 1875).

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

[46] White Lodge decided to renew the call to Brotherhood and to begin work towards this goal. The beginnings of this work took place in 1925 with Wilson receiving information and instructions for the preparation of the work ahead from his Master, a member of the Great White Lodge.²⁴ By the year 1975 the new Teacher and the new Truth were supposed to appear. At this time, spiritually advanced egos, the grandchildren of those living in the mid-1920’s, trained in “just Principles and in true Ideals” by those in the Aquarian Foundation, would be the “Rulers and Governors” ushering in an era of righteous governments.²⁵

The Aquarian Foundation and Its Colony

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

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

This is consistent with his remarks in Letter IX in the *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (p. 45), in which he mentions the visitation from his Master in February giving the plans for the ‘Work’ to be commenced and the role to be played by Wilson, who from this time on served as the personal disciple (or “chela”) of the Master. On May 15, Wilson was given further instructions to organize the Master’s Work in England. If we accept Wilson’s account, it appears that the Foundation was conceived between February and May in 1926 and that it was given the designation ‘Aquarian Foundation’ by the Master himself in June of that year. The Foundation was given legal status when it was incorporated in May 1927 in Canada and granted a charter by the British Columbia government under the Societies Act.²⁶

The principles and objectives of the Foundation appear in its official organ, THE CHALICE. The four principles are quoted as follows: [47]

24. "Letter IX: Preparations for the Work," [dated July, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 44.
25. "Letter XVII: Great Britain's Place in the Plan and Aquarian Characteristics," [dated November, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 86; "Letter I: The purpose and the Plan," [dated February, 1926] *Foundation Letters*, 10; "Letter IX," *Foundation Letters*; "Letter III: The Vital Necessity," *Foundation Letters*, 18. See also "A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom in 1926," reprinted in *Foundation Letters*, 2-3.
26. "Dissolution of Island Cult Urged," *The Daily Province* (Vancouver, B. C.), 29 October 1928, 1,17; "Bridey Murphy Case Recalls Brother XII' by Gwen Cash, *Daily Colonist* (Victoria, B.C.), 26 February 1956. I thank Dr. John Oliphant for providing me with this latter article.

[47]

- (1) RIGHTEOUSNESS (right action) in all the relationships of life,
- (2) ALTRUISM and the dis-interested impersonal service of Humanity as a whole,
- (3) DISCRIMINATION which includes the industry and patience required to examine motives, policies and actions for ourselves,
- (4) SERVICE: not the clap-trap variety now so widely advertised, by the solemn dedication of one's whole life to the true interests of the individual, the family, the nation, and the Race.

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

- (1) The furtherance of selfish personal or party interests at the expense of others,
- (2) Corrupt Governmental and legislative actions, oppressive financial policies and combines, market 'rigging,' corners and Trusts. Also secret control of the Press, the suppression of truth and the deliberate creation of those sentiments, views and ideas generally known as 'public opinion.'
- (3) Those open or secret activities calculated to undermine and overthrow *good* government, amongst which are certain brands of Communism, Bolshevism, and anarchistic tendencies and practices. We are opposed to all those movements which work openly or secretly for disorder, chaos and destruction.
- (4) . . . those factions which seek to preserve class privileges or unfair methods and advantages at the expense of progress and the general

good. Especially and particularly are we against those who oppose freedom of thought and the right of private judgement, that they may perpetuate superstition and credulity to their own advantage. We stand for 'no bargains between Church and State.'

This last position created considerable controversy in theosophical circles in Canada. In a rambling article ["Canada's Peril," *The Chalice* (February, 1928)] designed to awaken paranoiac and jingoistic tendencies in Canada and the United States, Wilson, signing himself "Watchman," asserted that the Roman Catholic Church was seeking complete domination of North America through a series of machinations by its hierarchy. Wilson's insistence that Canada was in imminent danger of internal [48] convulsions initiated by the Church led the General-Secretary of the Theosophical Society in Canada, A. E. S. Smythe ["Blind Leaders of the Blind," *The Canadian Theosophist* (April, 1928):57f.], to oppose vehemently such claims with the view of protecting the Theosophical Society from a leader who prophesied that "the Society will suffer some appalling fate" if its members did not pledge themselves to the leader of the Aquarian Foundation. Smythe's criticism led to a blistering response from Wilson in the June 1928 issue of *The Chalice* (pages 27-35) charging Smythe with a choice number of infamies and slurs, including his being "a self-convicted traitor to the principles he is supposed to represent," a "hate-inspired misanthrope, an ancient and envenomed 'leader'," a "brazen and cowardly calumniator [who] would make our Order the scapegoat of his own misdeeds," and "a pusillanimous mother of empty words, a traitor with a foot in both camps ready to kowtow to the Roman Catholic power enthroned in Eastern Canada." If anything, a comparison of the Foundation's four principles cited above with Wilson's vehement defense certainly would cause many neutral observers to question his true intentions and *bona fides*. To take one example, the editor of the *O. E. Library Critic* (XVIII/3:9) concluded "either that his claim to communion with the White Lodge is a delusion . . . or that the Members of that Lodge of Masters have been singularly unfortunate in their choice of a Messenger."

In all likelihood, however, controversies such as the above were diversionary to a minority of the members of the Foundation and the Theosophical Society. The special work of the Aquarian Foundation was to prepare for the coming New Age, a notion uppermost in the minds of all the members of the Foundation and a great many within the Adyar Theosophical Society. Such a teaching was closely connected with the theosophical notion of the progressive development or evolution of Humanity, the latter explained in terms of the seven Root Races and seven sub-races. The New Age was not for the old Humanity, those belonging to the fifth sub-race of the fifth Root Race; most in fact would be dead by the time the New Age arrived. Humanity instead would advance under the "Law of Cyclic Periodicity" in the form of the appearance of advanced egos incarnating as the new sixth

sub-race, the sub-race that would realize Brotherhood on the institutional level, a level beyond the mental or intellectual level, the only level which the fifth sub-race was capable of achieving. It was the Aquarian Foundation that had to prepare for this new spiritual impulse by replicating the methods and organization of the Great White Lodge.²⁷ The Lodge itself, according to Wilson, [49]

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

[49] is made up of 12 Groups corresponding in nature to the 12 astrological houses. Of these 12, the Foundation reflected the Ninth and Twelfth Houses: The Ninth House concerned with the Higher Mind, the Twelfth concerned with the unseen spiritual powers and Karmic accounts or consequences. Thus, all within the Foundation belonged to a “mental and spiritual aristocracy” leading the world to a higher spirituality.²⁸

Around the time that the Aquarian Foundation was incorporated, a community or colony was established at Cedar-by-the Sea on Vancouver Island. There were a number of reasons why such a center was required: the first and foremost being that it would serve as the cradle of the new sixth sub-race.²⁹ The other reasons given were:

1. to serve as a retreat or place of residence for Foundation members;
2. to serve as a training ground for those selected for work of ‘Restoration,’ that is, the coming New Age;
3. to provide an environment wherein one might live in accordance with the Principles of the New Age;
4. to provide training of “certain great Souls,” that is, the children who would inherit the coming Age;
5. to be a center from which the ancient Mysteries would be propagated;
6. to provide a pattern for the new social order based upon Truth.³⁰

Why the Foundation and its colony were headquartered at Cedar-by-the Sea (Cedar District), which was situated a few miles south of Nanaimo, reflects to a surprising degree Neo-Theosophical speculation. In this regard, Annie Besant, the President of the Adyar Theosophical Society, often referred to California as the site for the coming sixth sub-race, and indeed Wilson himself strongly hinted at the outset that it was to be the “heart and centre of 6th sub-race civilization.”³¹ The final [50]

28. Ibid., “Letter XVI,” 76-77, 79.

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

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

31. “Letter XII: Europe and the United States,” [dated September, 1926] *Foundation*

Letters, 60. The *O. E. Library Critic* (XVIII/5:9; XIX/2:8) pointed out the similarity between Annie Besant's colony in Ojai, California and Brother XII's (Wilson's) on Vancouver Island:

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

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

[50] decision for the site, however, came from Manu,³² who revealed to Wilson while in a meditative trance that the location would be Southern British Columbia, a locale familiar to Wilson since he lived in Victoria prior to 1914.³³ According to one source, a map was given him by the Masters showing the exact spot of the headquarters.³⁴ Most probably, it was an Admiralty chart of British Columbia's west coast.³⁵

The land chosen for the colony was idyllic. When Wilson and his followers arrived in Cedar from Southampton, England, they found 200 acres of groves and forest area facing the Strait of Georgia. A view of the islands comprising the De Courcy Group, opposite Cedar, provided a lovely vista as well as the outlines of Gabriola, Valdes, and Galiano Islands beyond.³⁶ Immediately upon arrival, around the Spring of 1927, tents were built on the property purchased at Cedar for the permanent residents. By the summer many more visitors³⁷ came to the Foundation Headquarters to receive the new teachings from Wilson himself. The reaction of the local inhabitants was obviously one of surprise at this sudden influx, but because the residents and visitors; mainly Americans with a sprinkling of British, were persons of means who spent large sums either for accommodations or to hire local craftsmen, carpenters, and [51]

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

See *The Secret Doctrine* 1:48, 36Sf.; 2:69,308-11; Annie Besant, *The Ancient*

Wisdom (Adyar: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1939), 361; Geoffrey A. Barborka, *Glossary of Sanskrit Terms* (San Diego: Point Loma Publications, Inc., 1972), 44.

33. “Cult’s Revolt Eye-Opener to Old Nanaimo”; Pierre Berton, *My Country: The Remarkable Past* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1976):104-5; “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery.”

34. “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery.”

35. Berton, *My Country*, 105.

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

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

[51] artisans to build permanent residences at the colony, the locals did not display hostility to or excessive curiosity about their presence (perhaps also owing to the fact that many did not understand the nature and purpose of the Foundation). An example of this ignorance is reflected in a newspaper interview of a local inhabitant who was of the opinion “that they had something to do with fish,” obviously confusing aquarium with Aquarius.³⁸

By October, 1928, one visiting reporter, B. A. McKelvie, noted that all but two of the “eight or ten homes” built by this time were rather on the expensive side, costing from \$8,000 to \$15,000 each. An administration building, actually a large house, was also built by this time³⁹ as well as the “House of Mystery,” where Wilson alone could enter for the purpose of communing with the 11 Masters on the Higher Planes.⁴⁰

The number of permanent residents was not very large but all were well educated and wealthy. Those who were permitted to buy land and erect homes in order to be near their leader needed to surrender all their personal possessions to prove their dedication. They included Maurice and Alice von Platen, a wealthy California couple; James Janney Lippincott, a member of the publishing family and a former Los Angeles craftsman; George P. Hobart, a former druggist and advertising man from Hamilton, Ontario, and his wife; Coulson Turnbull, a prominent astrologer; Robert England, a man in his thirties who was perhaps a former member of the U.S. Secret Service; and Alfred Barley, a retired chemist and sub-editor of *Modern Astrology* from 1903 to 1917, and his wife Annie, a retired teacher for the London County Council and secretary of the Astrological Institute: in all about 12 original members who accompanied Wilson or who lived at the colony at its inception.⁴¹

As soon as the colony was established, announcements were sent to the followers of Wilson, who now numbered, according to one account, [52]

38. Ibid.

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

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

41. “Vancouver Island Colony in Trouble,” *The Mail and Empire* (Toronto), 29 October 1928. Both Mr. and Mrs. Barley were members of the inner circle of the theosophist astrologer Alan Leo, one of the most influential astrologers since 1800 and indeed the

father of modern astrology. Leo published his own journal, *Modern Astrology*. I thank Mr. Nicholas Campion (letter dated September 22, 1987) and Mr. John Oliphant (letter dated July 30, 1987) for this information. Barley is the author of the *Rationale of Astrology*, an “old Leo manual” (O.E. *Library Critic*, XVII/11:16).

Coulson Turnbull, Ph.D. is the author of *The Divine Language of Celestial Correspondences. The Life and Mystical Teachings of Giordano Bruno, The Rising Zodiacal Sign, The Solar Logos, and The Astrologer's Guide*, all published by The Gnostic Press (Santa Cruz, California).

[52] 8,000 divided into 125 groups throughout the U.S., Britain, Canada, and as far as South Africa and New Zealand,⁴² to announce plans to build the City of Refuge at Cedar.⁴³ In response, money came pouring in. One lawyer in Topeka, Kansas, for instance, wired \$10,000.⁴⁴ The Barleys also contributed over \$12,000 for this purpose.⁴⁵

Instead of building the City, however, this money, with the added sum of \$25,000 collected from a rich widow from Asheville, North Carolina, Mrs. Mary Connally, allowed Wilson to purchase 400 acres of land on Valdes Island in order to establish a new settlement, called the “Mandieh Settlement.”⁴⁶ The Settlement’s purpose, according to Wilson, was to serve as the site of an ‘Ashrama’ or a “school for occult training”; its unstated purpose, however, was perhaps to get away from the discord that arose after the arrival of a woman who was to be his live-in companion, Mrs. Myrtle Baumgartner, the wife of a wealthy physician from Clifton Springs, New York. Mrs. Baumgartner, or “the Magdalene from Chicago,” as she was called by some at the community, was declared by Wilson to be Isis in a lifetime 26,000 years previous. He also asserted that he, as the reincarnation of Osiris, and Isis would become parents of the World Teacher, the reincarnation of Horus. At the new Settlement the Teacher would be raised by the parents, Wilson and this young, beautiful woman whom he had met on a train trip from Seattle to Chicago.⁴⁷ Only a few of his most loyal followers were allowed to reside at Mandieh, with the condition that they give their unfledged loyalty. One rule that all were to abide by was “Mind Your Own Business,” a condition designed to keep each disciple totally dependent on Wilson and isolated from the other members of the community. This dependence and isolation were attempted at Cedar as well, by his planting suspicions in each new candidate about the other residents in the colony. Another important requirement was the surrender of all worldly wealth, the same regulation that residents at Cedar were required to obey.⁴⁸ [53]

42. “Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery”; “Osiris and Isis Met on Train Between Seattle and Chicago,” *The Daily Province* (Vancouver), 31 October 1928; O. E. *Library Critic*, XVIII/5, 8.

43. *Unsigned Letters from an Elder Brother*, 70-71.

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

45. “Failure of Brother XII to Start City of Refuge Cause of Court Action,” *The Daily*

Colonist, 6 November 1932.

46. "Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea."

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*; "Amazing Disclosures Made in Action Against Cult Leader"; "Vancouver Island Colony in Trouble."

[53] The purchase of the Valdes property with Foundation funds led to discord and a court case in late 1928. Robert England, the Secretary of the Foundation, and the plaintiffs in the case, Maurice von Platen, Robert de Luce, and Edward Alexander Lucas, all governors of the Foundation, charged that Wilson misappropriated funds given him by Mrs. Connally in August, 1928. Instead of the total sum of \$23,000 being deposited in the Foundation coffers, England charged that \$13,000 was used for the establishment of the Mandieh Settlement, considered to be a private venture and not part of Foundation oversight. Though the by-laws of the Foundation provided for seven governors to oversee its business, broad discretionary powers were given to Wilson, who was also president for life of the Foundation.⁴⁹ Perhaps Wilson saw nothing wrong in doing this, but the plaintiffs and others in the Foundation were clearly upset by Wilson's claim of being the Egyptian god Osiris and his plan to procreate the World Teacher with a woman not his wife, the above-mentioned Mrs. Baumgartner.⁵⁰

Countercharges were then made by Wilson against England, charging him with the embezzlement of \$2,800. The outcome of the case was that charges were dropped after Mrs. Connally, in a dramatic appearance, came to his defense stating that the money was a personal gift to Wilson to be used at his discretion. Furthermore, England's disappearance caused the magistrate to cancel plans to commit both Wilson and England to stand trial.⁵¹

After the court proceedings, the disaffected leaders of the Foundation left and Wilson set about building up a new group of supporters. One of his wealthier patrons, Roger Painter, a millionaire poultry farmer from Florida, was invited to live at the colony together with his wife. This he did after giving up his business and turning over \$90,000 to Wilson [54]

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

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

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

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

[54] upon arrival. Also from Florida came Bruce Crawford and wife, pro-

prietors of a cleaning and dying business and generous contributors, who turned over their remaining \$8,000 in cash upon arrival. Mrs. Connally remained in Victoria for the winter after her court appearance and again returned to live at Cedar from the Spring of 1929. She continued to contribute huge sums of money to the Foundation, one estimate being \$250,000.⁵²

The court actions did not weaken the dedication of those loyal followers of Wilson and his teachings. Money continued to pour in from the outside, and membership seemed stable. Furthermore, his taste for land acquisition did not stop with Valdes Island. With Mrs. Connally's money, he purchased three islands in the De Courcy Group, a group of islands between Cedar and Valdes Island, for the sum of \$10,000. On two of the islands, a new City of Refuge was planned; to this end, houses were constructed, a storehouse was built and provisioned, and a schoolhouse was built for the children who would later reside in the colony.⁵³

For all this activity, however, the situation at the colony did change. Although Wilson and the Foundation survived the insurrection, many talented individuals left, among them Will Levington Comfort, a well-known novelist and short story writer with many published in the *Saturday Evening Post*. He edited the Aquarian magazine, *The Glass Hive*, from April 1927 to his departure in 1928.⁵⁴ The birth of the World Teacher [55]

52. "Finis Written to Long Search for Man of Mystery"; Berton, 111-12. The figure of \$250,000 is Mr. Oliphant's estimate. In the article, "Amazing Disclosures," a high figure of \$520,000 is mentioned whereas in "Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B. C. Island," *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 28 April 1933, a low figure of \$50,000 is given.

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

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

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

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

Yet, according to Berton (pp. 111-2), the schoolhouse was never used for its intended purpose because most of the inhabitants were beyond childbearing age.

54. Some information on Comfort (1878-1932) is available in "An American Mystic: Will Levington Comfort and His Work," by Mary Adams Stearns, *National Magazine* (July 1913): 605-8; and "Will Levington Comfort: The Man and His Books," by J. Berg Esenwein, *The Book News Monthly* (December 1912):234-38. Comfort's novels include *Routledge Rides Alone*, *She Buildeth Her House*, and *Fate Knocks at the Door*.

[55] in which Wilson placed so much stock went awry. Mrs. Baumgartner

suffered a mental collapse brought on by her failure to give birth to “Horus,” most likely due to a miscarriage.⁵⁵ Apparently, Wilson blamed the misfortune on his followers, for in his judgment they lacked sincerity. Because of this failing they had to submit to penance, the severity of which his followers would soon discover to their regret. Thus began a series of events that were most bizarre to those observing the activities of Wilson and his new companion, Mrs. Mabel Skottowe.

In mid-1929, Mrs. Skottowe (née Mabel Rowbotham) arrived at Cedar to become the “secretary”-companion of Wilson. How he came to meet her is not known, but she became the agent in carrying out Wilson’s verdict placed on his “insincere” followers. Possessing a ferocious temper, she both verbally abused the women in the community with a tongue sharp enough to make even the most insensitive brute blush and physically abused them if they did not comply with her commands. One example of her cruelty involved a 76-year old retired schoolteacher named Sarah Tuckett, who was driven to attempted suicide from the repeated beatings and overwork imposed upon her. Another example involved the above-mentioned Mrs. Connally, one of Wilson’s most avid supporters. After losing a law suit in Washington, D.C. in December 1929, rendering her almost penniless, she was removed from her house by a group of followers on Wilson’s and Skottowe’s orders and taken to a beach on Valdes Island. There she was ordered to dwell in a small house that was almost uninhabitable and forced to perform physical labor that must have been torturous for her. To be sure that she followed these instructions, Mrs. Leola Painter, the wife of Robert Painter, was given instructions by Mrs. Skottowe to live with her to be sure that Mrs. Connally did what she was told.⁵⁶

These conditions continued down to 1933 except for a respite of 11 months, when Wilson and Skottowe, now known as Amiel and Zura de Valdes (also known as Madame Zee), sailed for England after appointing Alfred Barley as business agent overseeing the colony. When they returned, the abuse against the residents at the colony was resumed. They continued to submit but as Wilson and Madame Zee became more and more strident and impossible in their demands, dissent apparently emerged among some of the residents. As a result, 12 of the alleged [56]

55. Howard O’Hagan, “The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12.” *MacLean’s Magazine*,

23 April 1960, 39. According to O’Hagan, Mrs. Baumgartner was sent East to a mental hospital. See also “Cult Holds Members as Slaves on B. C. Island,” 1-2; “Amazing Disclosures”; Sydney Blake, “Connally vs. De Valdes,” *The Lawyer* 311 (September 1939):13.

56. ‘Amazing Disclosures’; Berton, *My Country*, 114-16; Blake, “Connally vs. De Valdes,” 13; ‘Amazing Disclosures Made in Action Against Cult Leader’; “Black Magic, Gold and Guns Feature Strange Cult Case,” *The Daily Colonist*, 28 April 1933, 1, 2.

[56] dissenters were banished by Wilson, including Mary Connally, the Barleys and the Painters. Because of their destitute situation, the Barleys and

Mrs. Connally were compelled to initiate a legal action in the Spring of 1933 in order to regain the money that they donated to the Aquarian Foundation. It did not take long for the court to decide in favor of the plaintiffs. In the case of Connally vs. de Valdes, Mrs. Connally was awarded \$37,600 less \$10,000 for the value of the De Courcy Group awarded to her as well as the land on Valdes Island. Alfred Barley was awarded \$14,000 and the legal title to the community land at Cedar.⁵⁷

Wilson responded with an act of vengeance that surprised even his detractors. Deserting the colony after destroying much of the furniture, buildings, equipment and yacht, The Lady Royal, he and Madame Zee left on their yacht, the Kunathen, for points unknown with a huge sum of money collected over the previous six years. The amount was not known, but apparently most of it was in the form of gold pieces stored in 40 quart jars as well as in Canadian one and two dollar bills.⁵⁸ With the flight of the couple and the court decision in favor of the plaintiffs, the Aquarian Foundation was disbanded. Mrs. Connally remained on Valdes Island with a caretaker, Sam Grunall, for a number of years after. In 1941, she left the area for good to return to North Carolina to reside in a nursing home. After her departure, Mr. Grunall searched the property on Valdes Island and uncovered a concrete vault, with its sole contents a roll of tarpaper with a message written on it in Wilson's hand. It was a message that reflected nothing of his original ideal of brotherly love; rather, it more than likely reflected his true character. The message read, "For fools and traitors, nothing!"⁵⁹

Edward Arthur Wilson

It should not be surprising that very little is known of Edward Arthur Wilson prior to 1926, for the less the world knows of a leader's private or early life the easier it is for the leader—religious or otherwise—and his followers to mythicize his life. Regarded in this manner, Wilson was not much different from a Cagliostro or Blavatsky, a Pythagorus or Paracelsus. He was, at least to his followers, a magus or modern-day shaman. Like other magi, we find reference to a number of traits that Wilson and others like him possessed or manifested: access to supernatural helpers or the Masters of the Wisdom, the direct experience of [57]

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

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

59. O'Hagan, "The Weird and Savage Cult," 39; Berton, *My Country*, 120-21; Blake, "Connally vs. De Valdes," 13.

[57] Truth or Wisdom through an 'ecstatic experience,' the use of or belief in the efficacy of magic or occult power, a long period of wandering culminating in an initiatory experience. Sometimes, as in the case of Wilson, there is an importance placed on the establishment of a sacred center serving at once as a ghetto and a Mecca: a place of separation from the evils of the

outer world but at the same time serving as a place of pilgrimage to acquire the Wisdom.⁶⁰ The fact that Wilson assuredly displayed the charisma of a magus will help explain the hold that he had on his followers, no matter how preposterous his teachings seemed to those not under his power.

Although we do not know for certain when and where Wilson was born, it is very likely that he was born sometime in the 1870's, judging from his physical description in newspaper accounts. A biography, *Canada's False Prophet: The Notorious Brother Twelve*,⁶¹ by Wilson's purported brother, Herbert Emmerson [sic] Wilson, gives 1871 as the date of his birth, which may be one of very few accurate statements made in it.⁶² He was probably born in England or India to an Anglican missionary father and an Indian woman, but there are no documents to substantiate this presumption. Wilson himself claimed that his mother was an Indian princess, an assertion that has even less foundation in fact.⁶³ We know nothing about his early life until 1910 or thereabouts. At that time, he appears in Victoria, British Columbia, working first as a driver of a delivery wagon and then as an express clerk who handled the Wells Fargo account in the Dominion Express office on Government Street. His departure from the company in 1914 came after his request for a pay increase nearly matching that of the President of the Canadian Pacific Railway was refused.⁶⁴ [58]

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

61. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Simon and Schuster of Canada, Ltd., 1967.

62. John Oliphant informs me in a letter dated July 30, 1987 that H. E. Wilson was no relation to E. A. Wilson; he was, in fact, a bank robber in the 1930's and an ex-convict who even wrote a book of his career. He first learned of Brother XII (E. A. Wilson) while living on Vancouver Island during the 1960's. After he and his wife researched their subject, they sent the material to a Toronto writer named Thomas P. Kelley, who wrote the book for him. Much of the account came from Kelley's fertile imagination.

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

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

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

following year (April, 1917). These addresses put in questions the notion that he sailed on the Atlantic in the merchant marine.⁶⁵

Besides his love of the sea, he also was deeply interested in occultism. If O'Hagan's account is accurate, his landlady, Peggy Reynolds, claims to have seen publications of the Theosophical Society and notes on astrology scattered about in his boarding house room in Victoria.⁶⁶ Such an interest explains his membership in the Theosophical Society from January 6, 1913, to June 30, 1918.⁶⁷ Judging from his writings, Wilson was well-informed in theosophical teachings and kept up with the affairs of the Society even after he was no longer a member.

The only autobiographical account of the period prior to 1924 that is still available appears in his "Letter IX: Preparations for the Work" (dated July, 1926) in his *Foundation Letters and Teachings* (p. 43-6). In it, he reveals to his disciples the events that led him to his present status as personal Chela, or Disciple, to a Master of the Wisdom. Having undergone an initiation in 1912 called the Ceremony of Dedication, which gave him the understanding that he had a special mission, he claimed to have traveled to all parts of the world and to have undergone repeated testing in preparation for the work to be done. Then, in October 1924, while in the south of France, he underwent a second initiation or Ceremony of Dedication in which he went through a series of experiences over a three or four day period that connected the work he performed in the past with the work he was to undertake in the present. Almost a year later, in September 1925, while in Italy, he was given material by a Master to write *The Three Truths*, which was completed in early 1926. Wilson remarked that during the course of the writing, his subtle body was transported to the Master so that He could dictate some of the passages. In fact, he [59]

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

66. Ibid., Berton, *My Country*, 101.

67. See note 65.

[59] claimed that the third part of the book was dictated in this way.

It was only on February 13, 1926, that plans for Wilson's present Work were given in full by the Master. At this time, he was chosen personal Chela to the Master, serving as His messenger. About this time, he began to call himself Brother XII, being the only earthly brother in the council of what had been the Eleven Masters of the Wisdom.⁶⁸ About this time, correspondence apparently was also conducted, judging from the first six letters in his *Foundation Letters*, which were dated from February to April of 1926 and sent from Italy. Who the recipients were, however, is not clear, since few, if any, knew of Wilson at this time.

From Italy, he departed on May 20, 1926, for Southampton, England, where he publicized the Master's message in two articles written in a prominent English journal, *The Occult Review*,⁶⁹ entitled "The Shadow" (the

May issue) and “The Tocsin” (the July issue) under the name “E. A. Chaylor.”⁷⁰ “A Message from the Masters of the Wisdom in 1926” was also published around this time. The teaching was also spread in a number of addresses to local theosophists in a small hall rented by him for that purpose.⁷¹ Thus begins the story of the Aquarian Foundation. The promise of a colony in which Brotherhood was uppermost was quickly brought to fruition. Wilson’s unquestioned success, however, was undermined in 1928 with the legal action taken by a group of disgruntled officers in the Foundation. From 1929 on, Wilson became more and more involved with self-aggrandizement and acts of cruelty toward his followers until legal actions destroyed his hold on the persons he and Madame Zee caused so much suffering.

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

Conclusion

The Aquarian Foundation was an organization based on the millenarian vision of Edward Arthur Wilson, a.k.a. Brother XII, Amiel de Valdes, [60]

68. Barton, *My Country*, 103.

69. Both articles are reprinted in *Foundation Letters*, 151f., 157f.

The Occult Review has been described “as the best general occult periodical in the English language” by H.N. Stokes (*O.E. Library Critic*, XVII/12: 13).

70. O’Hagan. “The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12,” 34.

71. Berton, *My Country*, 120; Blake, “Connally vs. De Valdes,” 13.

[60] and Julian Churton Skottowe. Although considered by most observers as a complete fraud who duped many who should have known better, Wilson had the requisite knowledge (a theosophical substructure and astrological superstructure), the ability to communicate that knowledge, and the charisma to create an effective and sustaining messianic myth to retain and sustain his disciples. Unfortunately, the community established at Cedar-by-the-Sea on Vancouver Island was never allowed to develop to the degree promised by Wilson. The fault for this failure lay solely with Wilson, who, for reasons of greed and power, strayed from his original program of salvation. Despite this fact, the control that he had over his followers, many if not most well into middle age and wealthy, was quite remarkable. Even through the most trying of times—during the last two or three years of the Foundation’s existence when Wilson subjected his followers to physical torment, tyranny and virtual

slavery—most remained loyal to him because of the force of his personality and the attractiveness of the ideals of the Foundation. These ideals of brotherly love and the promise of residing in a place of refuge from the iniquities of the world were very appealing indeed. As early as 1928 when he was challenged for his actions surrounding the purchase of land on Valdes Island and his liaison with Mrs. Baumgartner, many could not reconcile the drastic change in the Brother XII who announced the Masters call to Brotherhood. Their rationalization was that he was no longer the same individual who first inspired his followers but rather a black familiar who took possession of Wilson's body when he attempted the sixth initiation to attain spiritual perfection.⁷² This explains Mrs. Connally's statement, before leaving Valdes in 1941, to the caretaker, Mr. Grunall: "For the old Brother, I'd give that much money again, if I had it to give."⁷³

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

[Wilson] wished to join the Buddhist Lodge as Brother XII. Then I pointed out that we could not have people joining anonymously, though he could call himself what he liked when he had joined. He replied like a small school-boy in a huff.⁷⁴

It is clear that the tirade against Mr. Smythe and his subsequent actions against his dissenters originated from a facet of his personality [61]

72. "Weird Occultism Exemplified in Amazing Colony at Cedar-by-Sea," 34.

73. O'Hagan, "The Weird and Savage Cult of Brother 12," 39.

74. "The Sappers and Miners," *The Canadian Theosophist*, VII / 12, 15 February 1927, 263.

[61] that he chose not to reveal until such time that his position as absolute leader was consolidated. What he did reveal to his would-be followers in the early days was a persona of considerable charm and an intellect that was quite stimulating. An early acquaintance of Wilson's, Walter Miles, described him as "one of the most fascinating personalities and conversationalists I ever met."⁷⁵ Furthermore, there was his magnetic appeal, as evidenced by an observation by the Vancouver barrister Edward Lucas that Wilson had "hypnotic dark eyes that did strange things to you."⁷⁶ This combination is conducive to a cult figure who apparently placed his own importance and self-interest above that of the welfare of the community. Indeed, this was the true cause of the failure of the community, for the commonweal was actually discouraged by Wilson. The purpose of communal societies in the broadest sense is to create an atmosphere of mutual support for its members: physical as well as psychic. Such was the purpose of the City of Refuge, a City as we have seen that was never built. When all is said

and done, the account of the Aquarian Foundation and E. A. Wilson gives further evidence of the power that myths of the New Age have over the minds of men and women of whatever culture, age, and level of education. The failure of a millenarian message to come to fruition does not necessarily cause disillusionment; it more likely will lead to rationalization for the failure—witness Wilson’s own explanation of Blavatsky’s role as a messenger who called for Universal Brotherhood and its subsequent rejection—and a future teacher’s claim to revive the message at a more appropriate time. In the words of Alexander Pope:

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