WOODROW WILSON AND COLONEL HOUSE

A Personality Study

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Wilson's Boyhood

> *A boy never gets over his boyhood, and never can change those subtle influences which have become a part of him, that were bred in him when he was a child.*
>
> *Woodrow Wilson*

One day when Woodrow Wilson was sixteen years old, his younger cousin, Jessie Bones, came up to him as he sat at his desk practicing shorthand. On the wall where he could see it every time he glanced up hung the portrait of an austere-looking man. Jessie inquired who it was. "That is Gladstone, the greatest statesman that ever lived," the boy answered reverently. "I intend to be a statesman, too."

There is, of course, nothing remarkable in this avowal. Countless adolescents boldly proclaim their intention of becoming statesmen, military heroes, incomparable surgeons or, in this atomic age, explorers of outer space. What is remarkable in this instance is that the young dreamer succeeded in converting his high-flown fantasy into reality. The traits of character which enabled him to do so were forged in his childhood, as such traits usually are. So too were those compulsive tendencies which caused him to be perpetually dissatisfied with himself, his very great accomplishments notwithstand-

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ing, and drove him to ruinously self-defeating behavior when the supreme goal of his life — ratification of the League of Nations Covenant — was at stake. It is to Wilson's early years, then, that we must look for the origins of his superb strength and of his truly classical tragic weakness.

Thomas Woodrow Wilson was born on December 28, 1856, in Staunton, Virginia. His mother, Jessie Woodrow Wilson, came of a learned, religious Scottish family, distinguished through many generations for its scholars and Presbyterian ministers. His father, Joseph Ruggles Wilson, was a Presbyterian minister of Scotch-Irish extraction.

For many generations back Wilson's forebears on both sides were for the most part ministers, elders, professors of theology, or their dutiful wives or children. All, including those who were attracted to other occupations, were deeply religious. Their religion was the very core of their existence. It was a stern Calvinistic doctrine they believed, according to which man is innately depraved, a corrupt sinner who deserves eternal punishment. His only chance for salvation lies in being elected by God to a state of grace and eternal life.

It is not surprising that true subscribers to this dogma are greatly preoccupied with the problem of their state of grace and engage in anxious, sometimes terrified, self-examination for signs that they are or are not among the elect. The tension is heightened by the fact that, strictly speaking, there are no such reliable signs: God, according to His inscrutable will, has preordained each individual's fate and nothing the individual does on this earth can alter the decision as to his eternal destiny. Through the years, however, this severe concept has been mitigated by widespread acceptance of the notion that good works and pure thoughts are signs of election, whereas sinful behavior is a sign of one's doom. It therefore becomes a matter of momentous consequence for the believer to be able to deduce from his examination of his conduct and thoughts that he is among the elect. There is great pressure to do good works and to resist all forms of temptation — indeed, to conquer even the feeling that he is tempted.

It is painful to accept the notion that all men (all infants, even) share a heinous guilt, and to struggle against impulses which are part of the nature of the human animal. Those who succeed in persuading themselves that they may indeed be subjects of God's electing grace are sometimes rewarded with a thrilling sense of freedom from human authority. For such a man is convinced that nothing can separate him from the love of God, that in doing what he conceives to be God's works he is guided and protected by divine strength. Small matter what other men think. No matter, even, if it be necessary to fly in the face of temporal authority. A man's only real responsibility is, through his conscience, to his Lord and Maker.

Such a creed produces men of conviction, who find it possible to cling to their principles no matter what the opposition. Young Tommy heard many tales of the courage of his ancestors. In his youth, he witnessed an example of this variety of tenacity on the part of his uncle, Dr. James Woodrow, a professor of science at the Columbia Theological Seminary. Dr. Woodrow became convinced of the validity of Darwin's theory of evolution, and taught it, at a time when it was anathema to the orthodox. After a long controversy, during which he refused to repudiate his opinion, he was ousted from his position. Wilson's parents admired Dr. Woodrow for his steadfastness. So did Wilson.

The boy Wilson was steeped in a tradition which extolled moral achievement above all else. His family unanimously accepted Calvinistic doctrine and their faith was firmly knitted to the same faith of generations of their forebears. Religion must have appeared to the boy an overwhelming, immutable component of everyday existence. There is ample evidence that this was the case and, further, that it remained so throughout his life. He never permitted himself to question the basic tenets of his church. "So far as religion is concerned," he once remarked, "argument is adjourned." He prayed, on his knees, daily; read the Bible daily; said grace before every meal, attended church regularly. These were the outer expressions of a faith which penetrated to his innermost being.

The Wilsons neither had nor coveted wealth. They did not lack for the necessities, but they were among the genteel poor. In later years, Wilson loved to relate how one day his father met a member of his congregation on the street. The minister's horse and trap were drawn up

to the curb. "Your horse looks very well, Mr. Wilson. Much better than you do," said the parishioner. "Yes," Dr. Wilson retorted. "You see I keep my horse, but I am kept by my congregation!"

Wilson's mother was a rather plain, serious woman, extremely reserved, greatly devoted to her family. There is little in the historical record on the boy's relationship with his mother. He was his parents' third child, their first son. His sister Marion was six years old when he was born; his sister Anne was two. We know from contemporary letters that he was a placid infant — "a fine healthy fellow," "just as fat as he can be," "*beautiful*" and "just as *good* as he can be," according to one description written by Wilson's mother when he was four months old.

". . . I remember how I clung to her (a laughed-at 'mama's boy') till I was a great big fellow," Wilson wrote of his mother many years later in a letter to his wife. "But love of the best womanhood came to me and entered my heart through those apron-strings. If I had not lived with such a mother I could not have won and seemed to deserve — in part, perhaps, deserved, through transmitted virtues — such a wife . . ."

From earliest childhood, his father took an extraordinarily active role in his education. They were closely bound together, the boy and this handsome, impressive, somewhat frightening minister to whom Wilson later habitually referred as "my incomparable father."

Dr. Joseph Ruggles Wilson was an eloquent preacher, a man of learning, wit and great presence — a personage in the community. His physical appearance, too, was distinguished: he was large and well built, with a gaunt face which conveyed something of the intelligence and moral fiber of its owner.

Dr. Wilson spent much time with his family. There were daily prayers, with all the family kneeling together. Evenings, the Doctor often led in the singing of hymns. Or he would read aloud to the assembled household, his rich bass voice full of expression. The novels of Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens were especial favorites. Sundays, Tommy attended church services and listened, awestruck, as his father delivered his carefully composed sermons expounding the austere doctrine of his denomination. Sometimes, when certain sad hymns were played, the boy would cry.

Dr. Wilson was noted for his caustic wit. This he directed not only at his contemporaries but at his young son as well. Tommy never retorted and he never rebelled. Instead, he accepted his father's demands for perfection, tried to emulate him, and interpreted his stinging criticisms as humiliating evidence that, try as he might, he was inadequate. He felt eternally inferior to his father, in appearance as well as in accomplishment. He once remarked: "If I had my father's face and figure, it wouldn't make any difference what I said."

Tommy was not enrolled in school until he was ten. He promptly took his place at the foot of his class. There were family conferences between his father, maternal grandfather and uncle James Woodrow about what to do with a child who performed so poorly. We do not know what corrective measures the family attempted, but perhaps something of the boy's feelings at the time can be inferred from a remark Wilson made many years later that he knew how mortifying it is to a boy to fall behind his class in his studies.

One striking aspect of Tommy's slow development was his ignorance of the written alphabet until he was nine and his inability to read readily until he was eleven. It seems hardly likely that Dr. Wilson, who took such pains with his son's education and who revered masterly use of the English language above all other intellectual skills, would have neglected to teach the boy his letters. One wonders whether Tommy's capacity to learn was not reduced by his father's perfectionist demands. Perhaps the Doctor's scorn of fumbling first errors was so painful (or perhaps the mere expectation of such a reaction was so distressing) that the boy renounced the effort altogether. Perhaps, too, failing — *refusing* — to learn was the one way in which the boy dared to express his resentment against his father. In any case, the significant fact is that coming from a home in which reading was an important daily activity, Tommy's reading proficiency was retarded; in a home saturated in a religious atmosphere, he had difficulty learning the catechism; in a family of scholars, he was a conspicuously poor student.

Once literacy was achieved, great new possibilities for rigorous drilling of the boy suggested themselves to Dr. Wilson. Frequently, after he had spoken to his son about one subject or

another, he would ask, "Do you thoroughly understand that?" "Oh, yes," the boy would say. "Very well then, write it out and bring it to me so I can see that you do." Tommy would take great pains to produce a composition that would pass muster. Timorously, he would submit his effort to his father. If the Doctor came upon anything that seemed in the slightest degree ambiguous, he would demand what exactly was meant. Tommy would explain. "Well, you did not say it," Dr. Wilson would snap, "so suppose you try again and see if you can say what you mean this time, and if not we'll have another talk and a third go at it."

Many years later, President Wilson told his wife that time and again he had a fourth and even a fifth "go at it" before his father was satisfied. Another favorite exercise was to examine the classics sentence by sentence and try to rewrite portions of them in better style.

Dr. Wilson had a passion — an obsession — for the most exact use of language. Did the boy, perhaps in the heat of animated conversation, use a word imprecisely? He was interrupted at once and sent to the dictionary to discover his error.

After President Wilson's death, his daughter Margaret summed up her grandfather's pedagogical creed for the benefit of Wilson's official biographer: "His idea was," she said, "that if a lad was of fine tempered steel, the more he was beaten the better he was."

Other relatives, too, had graphic recollections of Dr. Wilson's severity. Helen Bones, Wilson's cousin, reported: ". . . Uncle Joseph was a cruel tease, with a caustic wit and a sharp tongue, and I remember hearing my own family tell indignantly of how Cousin Woodrow suffered under his teasing. He was proud of WW, especially after his son began to show how unusual he was, but only a man as sweet as Cousin Woodrow could have forgotten the severity of the criticism to the value of which he so often paid tribute, in after life."

Another cousin, Jessie Bones, recalled a typical instance of Dr. Wilson's "teasing." The family was assembled at a wedding breakfast. Tommy arrived at the table late. His father apologized on behalf of his son and explained that Tommy had been so greatly excited at the discovery of another hair in his mustache that morning that it had taken him longer to wash and dress. "I remember very distinctly the painful flush that came over the boy's face," Mrs. Brower said.

One can imagine the effect on a boy of such mockery. Indeed, one does not need to resort to imagination. Wilson's own recollections of his youth furnish ample indication of his early fears that he was stupid, ugly, worthless and unlovable. These feelings had rich opportunities for elaboration in his religious convictions concerning the fundamental wickedness of human nature. It is perhaps to this core feeling of inadequacy, of a fundamental worthlessness which must ever be disproved, that the unappeasable quality of his need for affection, power and achievement, and the compulsive quality of his striving for perfection, may be traced.

For one of the ways in which human beings troubled with low estimates of themselves seek to obliterate their inner pain is through high achievement and the acquisition of power. The trouble is that no matter how dazzling, their accomplishments are likely to prove only momentarily satisfying because the deep-seated low estimates persist and in short order begin to clamor anew for assuagement.

Wilson seemed enmeshed in such an unending attempt to prove to his father, to his God — to himself — that he was a capable and worthwhile human being. As a child he determined he would do something magnificent in the world. An old family servant recalls how once Tommy announced solemnly at the dinner table, "Papa, when I get to be a man, I'm going to have a lofty position." Dr. Wilson laughed good-naturedly. But to the boy this was no childish joke. He was in dead earnest. He spent his childhood and youth industriously preparing to be a great man.

It is by now a generally accepted fact among psychologists that in the process of raising their children, parents inevitably arouse a certain amount of resentment against themselves. For to induce a child to conduct himself in a civilized fashion necessarily involves requiring him to abandon many forms of pleasurable behavior. This the child resents and he experiences anger at the parent who thus thwarts him. Specialists in these matters still are not agreed as to what kinds of parental behavior produce what varieties and degrees of resentment. But it is probably not unreasonable to suggest that a boy like Wilson, upon whom very high demands

were made, had to contend with an ample load of anger, which was certainly not mitigated by his father's penchant for ridiculing him.

It is also a truism among modern psychologists that the manner in which a child handles his resentment of his parents is of crucial importance in the development of his personality. Some children feel free to express it openly, and in the fortunate event that the parent in question is able to accept the child's hostile feelings and reassure him, a potential source of future difficulty is averted. Some children, on the other hand, are afraid to express such negative feelings openly, commonly out of fear of what reprisals the parent would take if he knew. Sometimes the child is so terrified that he dares not even recognize the existence of such feelings within himself but, rather, seeks constantly to persuade himself of a surpassing devotion to his parent. This seems to have been Wilson's method of handling the anxiety engendered by his hostile feelings.

There is not a shred of evidence that he ever once openly rebelled against his father's authority. Instead, he submitted and became an extravagantly devoted son. It was a devotion which lasted throughout his life. Tommy was always obedient and respectful. He delighted in doing chores for his father. As a young man, he cheerfully helped his father with the dull task of writing the minutes of the General Assembly of the Church. Even in successful maturity, he retained a feeling of incompetence in his father's presence. He once said the most difficult speech he ever had to make was one during which he suddenly espied his father in the audience, he felt exactly like a boy again, as though he would have to answer to his father afterward for what he said.

When the Doctor grew old and ill, Wilson insisted that he live in Princeton with him, although the care of the increasingly helpless old man was burdensome. A fellow professor recalls that when father and son were together the son was a pupil. When Wilson was President of Princeton and involved in an enervating campus imbroglio, he nevertheless found time to try to lift the old Doctor's spirits by singing some of their favorite hymns to him.

Perhaps nothing more vividly illustrates how Wilson venerated his father than some of the letters that passed between them. Here is one, written when Wilson was thirty-two years old, and a rising young scholar. Its tone is typical.

My precious father,

My thoughts are full of you and dear "Dode"* all the time. Tennessee seems so far away for a chap as hungry as I am for a sight of the two men whom I love. As the Christmas recess approaches I realize, as I have so often before, the pain there is in a season of holiday and rejoicing away from you. As you know, one of the chief things about which I feel most warranted in rejoicing is that I am your son. I realize the benefit of being your son more and more as my talents and experience grow; I recognize the strength growing in me as of the nature of your strength; I become more and more conscious of the hereditary wealth I possess, that capital of principle, of literary force and skill, of capacity for firsthand thought; and I feel daily more and more bent toward creating in my own children that combined respect and tender devotion for their father that you gave your children for you. Oh, how happy I should be, if I could make them think of me as I think of you! You have given me a love that grows, that is stronger in me now that I am a man than it was when I was a boy, and which will be stronger in me when I am an old man than it is now — a love, in brief, that is rooted and grounded in reason, and not in filial instinct merely — a love resting upon abiding foundations of service, recognizing you as in a certain real sense the author of all I have to be grateful for! I bless God for my noble, strong, and saintly mother and for my incomparable father. Ask "Dode" if he does not subscribe? and tell him that I love my brother passionately.

. . . Ellie joins me in unbounded love to you both.

Your devoted son,
Woodrow

Dr. Wilson's death in 1903 did not diminish his hold on his son. Joseph Tumulty, President Wilson's private secretary, has told how one day during World War I, the President interrupted a Cabinet meeting to receive an old friend of his father. While the old man praised him, the President stood like a bashful schoolboy. Then the visitor said, "Well, well, Woodrow, what shall I say to you? . . . I shall say to you what your dear old father would have said were he here: 'Be a good boy, my son, and may God bless you and take care of you!" The President wept.

Nothing in the many descriptions Wilson gave of his relationship with his father suggests that he was aware of any feeling other than exceeding devotion to him. If ever he was aware of his hostility toward his father, he seems to have banished it from consciousness and to

* Wilson's younger brother Joseph.

have lived in fear of the possibility of ever stumbling upon the knowledge. All his life long, he shrank from reflecting about his inner motivations. The very idea of such self-examination made him uneasy. He once wrote in a letter that he had always had an all but unconquerable distaste for discussing the deep things that underlie motives and behavior. He believed the solution to personal difficulties was rigorous self-discipline. Mary Hoyt, a young relative, reported that he tended to be, as she put it, "hard-hearted" toward anyone who seemed to him lacking in self-control. He was critical, for example, of an artist acquaintance who was unable to work because of an attack of melancholia. "Cousin Mary," he said, "it is possible to control your thoughts, you know." He seemed to fear that if he let his thoughts flow freely some nameless danger would overwhelm him. He once remarked that he never dared let himself go because he did not know where he would stop.

Modern psychologists generally agree that unacceptable thoughts and feelings anxiously dispatched from awareness do not obligingly depart once and for all. Rather, they establish themselves elsewhere within the mind and continue to direct behavior, frequently in highly disruptive fashion.

Not only did Wilson grow up with a taste for achievement and power: he must exercise power *alone*. He could brook no interference. *His* will must prevail, if he wished it to. He bristled at the slightest challenge to his authority. Such a characteristic might well have represented a rebellion against the domination of his father, whose authority he had never dared openly to challenge. Throughout his life his relationships with others seemed shaped by an inner command never again to bend his will to another man's. He seems to have experienced men who were determined to make their viewpoints prevail against his own — men like Dean West at Princeton or, later, Senator Lodge — as an unbearable threat. They seem to have stirred in him ancient memories of his capitulation to his father and he resisted with ferocity. *He* must dominate, out of fear of being dominated. It was a need so strong that nothing — except, on occasion, the lure of achieving higher office — could overcome his determination to bring his opponents to heel. Not the pleas of his friends. Not even the recognition, deep within himself, that sometimes it is necessary to compromise with one's adversaries to achieve desirable goals.

The validity of the foregoing interpretation and of others that follow is necessarily a matter of opinion. No incontrovertible proof can be offered. Nor can any one incident be relied upon to sustain this or any other theory of Wilson's motivation. It is only when the man's career is viewed as a whole that a repetition of certain basically similar behavior is discernible. Let the reader consider whether these patterns of behavior become more consistently comprehensible in terms of the explanations herein offered than in terms of other explanations. That will be the best test of their usefulness.

If Dr. Wilson was a martinet, there were other facets to his personality as well. He could be full of fun. There are tales of games of tag between the dignified minister and his young son, the participants progressing noisily from the study to the garden, to the delighted consternation of the female contingent of the family. The two played chess and billiards together. They took long walks and Dr. Wilson spoke to the boy without condescension of his hopes and problems. He was free in his expression of affection. He often greeted his son with a kiss. "My Precious Son," his letters generally began. His ambition for his son was boundless. Long before it seemed likely that Wilson would enter politics, Dr. Wilson regarded him as presidential timber, but confided to an acquaintance that "the interests" would never countenance such a choice. Once, at a dinner in Princeton, when Wilson was a professor there, the old Doctor, bursting with pride, leaned over and asked a friend in a loudly audible whisper, "Are you listening to Woodrow? Isn't he brilliant?" At a moment when he felt gravely ill in Princeton, he summoned his three granddaughters to his bedside and admonished them to remember always that their father was a very great man.

Dr. Wilson communicated to his son a solid sense of belonging, both to a religious tradition and to his family. He truly nurtured his son, perhaps unwisely in some respects, but with an unflinching acceptance of his responsibilities. It is a fact of fundamental significance that Dr. Wilson's strict training of his son was conducted in the context of genuine concern for the boy and pride in him. If it is necessary in order

to understand some of Wilson's later difficulties to postulate a subterranean hostility between Wilson and his father, it is certainly also necessary in order to understand the man as a whole, to underscore the positive influence of the elder Wilson.

The Apprentice Statesman

The profession I chose was politics; the profession I entered was the law. I entered the one because I thought it would lead to the other.

Woodrow Wilson to Ellen Axson, October 30, 1883

When Tommy was a year old, the family moved from Staunton to Augusta, Georgia, where Dr. Wilson became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. He performed his duties there with distinction, and was rewarded with one of the much-coveted professorships at the Columbia Theological Seminary in Columbia, South Carolina. The family moved there in 1870. Tommy was fourteen.

In Columbia, he was enrolled in a private school where, again, he was a mediocre student. A classmate remembers him as somehow different from the other boys — aloof and extremely dignified. He was much alone. Not for him the usual boyish sports: he could not even catch a ball properly. He developed a passion for ships and spent hour after hour, day after day, drawing beautifully shaded sketches of various types of vessels. He became the imaginary admiral of an imaginary navy and composed daily reports of its activities. Another favorite exercise was daily handwriting practice, to cultivate a flowing script like that of an admired uncle.

It was a time of preoccupation with religion. In addition to attending church regularly and sitting in on some of his father's lectures at the seminary, he took part in religious meetings conducted by a young theological student. In the summer of 1873, when he was going on seventeen, he applied for, and was granted, membership in the First Presbyterian Church of Columbia.

It was a time, too, of preoccupation with his future. He had by now decided he wanted to be a statesman and set about studying the lives of great men.

Although he seemed "different" to his fellows, he was generally well liked. His distinctiveness was not of the sort that gets a boy labeled "queer" and earns him ridicule. Rather he seemed to be mysteriously marked for eminence and was accorded respect.

A few months before his seventeenth birthday, Wilson entered Davidson College, a Presbyterian institution near Charlotte, North Carolina. His chief interest there was in the debating society. His academic preparation was below average and he was accepted with conditions in several subjects. Whether it was the pressure of study, the strain of being away from home, or some other conflict about which there is no information, the fact is that at the end of the academic year he was in such poor general health that it was decided that he should return home and continue his studies there, with a view to eventually entering Princeton.

He remained at home (first in Columbia and then in Wilmington, North Carolina, where in the fall of 1874 Dr. Wilson became pastor of the First Presbyterian Church) for fifteen months. He read, discussed books and great men with the one good friend he made in Wilmington, wandered dreamily about the docks, paid a few desultory calls on local girls. Those are the essentials of what is known of his activities during this period.

In September, 1875, Wilson entered Princeton. At once, he joined the Whig Society, a debating club, and set about cultivating his oratorical skills. He combed the library for the speeches of great orators through the ages. The woods near Princeton (and, during vacations, his father's empty church) resounded to his rendition of Burke's orations and the speeches of Gladstone, Bright, Patrick Henry, Daniel Webster and Demosthenes. "What is the object of oratory?" he asked in an article published in the *Princetonian* at the end of his sophomore year. "Its object is persuasion and conviction — the control of other minds by a strange personal influence and power." Oratory, he argued, is not an end but a means — a means, indeed, which it behooved any young aspirant to statecraft to master.

He was intrigued by an article he discovered in *Gentleman's Magazine*, entitled "The Orator," which analyzed the role of oratory in political life and evaluated British statesmen in terms of their oratorical abilities. It was a

case of an eager mind meeting just the sort of stimulus most capable of stirring its imagination. He began to compare the British and American systems of government, fairly devouring books on political theory, history and politics. To some students, these were dull pursuits. But to Wilson, who read with an eye to giving more specific direction to his own vaulting ambitions, they were excitingly alive. He decided he would like to be a Senator and wrote out a number of cards identifying himself, after his name, as "Senator from Virginia."

There were a number of other young men in Wilson's class earnestly interested in political affairs. With some of them, the would-be Senator formed close friendships. With one of them, Charles Talcott, he made a solemn covenant binding them to school their powers and passions in order to establish the principles in which they believed; to seek knowledge in order to gain power; to drill themselves in all the arts of persuasion. This agreement was no mere effusion of sophomoric idealism. Wilson took it seriously and so did Talcott. Long after their graduation from college they corresponded about ways of implementing it.

Then there was the talk — the endless, earnest talk of college students about everything under the sun. Politics, religion, morality, hopes and ambitions, all were grist for the mill. Many a discussion ended with Wilson saying half jokingly, "When I meet you in the Senate, I'll argue that out with you."

There were lighter moments as well, in the company of good friends. We have glimpses of Wilson speaking about "the ladies," dancing a hornpipe, telling jokes, sometimes in Negro, Scotch or Irish dialect. His humor and gaiety were a delight to his intimates not only at Princeton, but all through his life. He was a master of the cancan. He could make ludicrous faces, which never failed to send any children present into gales of laughter. He could prance about in a feather boa, trailing a velvet curtain, uttering banalities in falsetto voice in imitation of a society lady greeting friends. He had an impersonation of "the drunken man" which became a family favorite along with a delicious rendition of a pompous Englishman. All this impishness somehow did not detract one whit from his dignity and, one suspects, therein lay the special charm of his nonsense. This lighter side of him only his family and close friends knew. To those not close to him, and particularly to his opponents, he seemed austere and humorless. Nor can it be denied that in his relations with them, in fact he generally was.

An inspection of Wilson's grades at Princeton could not lead an impartial observer to the conclusion that he was a brilliant under-graduate. In a real sense, of course, he was. With subjects which did not touch his interest, he had neither patience nor noteworthy success. But when his interest was aroused, he did not need the lure of good grades to motivate him to study, nor was his study in the nature of stolidly committing masses of facts to memory. Through his capacity to relate the contents of books to his own aspirations, all manner of information sprang to exciting life. He could master the rules of order with avidity, for they were to him a highly practical tool. He could absorb histories of political institutions, for he regarded them as the context in which men — men like himself — must function.

The political system which most appealed to him was the British and a major reason for the preference was that in the House of Commons, great leadership was a function of great oratory and debating skill. In the United States, on the other hand, the committee system in Congress tended to reduce the importance of discussion on the floor. He set out to document this hypothesis and the result was an article entitled "Cabinet Government in the United States." It was published in a then prominent journal, *International Review.* (The editor who accepted it, by the way, was a young historian by the name of Henry Cabot Lodge.) Nor were reading and writing about the advantages of the British system enough. He must put his ideas to a practical test. He organized his friends into a "Liberal Debating Club," composed a constitution modeled on the British and was installed forthwith as Prime Minister.

Princeton was a stimulating experience for Wilson. He was able to a large extent to follow his own bent, and made fruitful use of the opportunity. He also gained in self-confidence. He won honors as a debater. He made friends and reveled in the discovery that they accepted him not only as a person but as a leader too. He wrote for the *Princetonian.* His article on "Cabinet Government" was widely praised. Triumphantly he wrote his father of a great discovery: he found that he had a mind!

This happy era ended in 1879 when Wilson was graduated. His great problem was, what next? A young man of twenty-two who wishes to be, simply, a great statesman, is in a poignant dilemma. Society fairly efficiently defines the alternative ways of proceeding toward various occupational goals: a would-be physician must go to medical school; a would-be businessman seeks a job, starts an enterprise himself or, in Wilson's youth, might still strike out west. But what does a young man burning to be a world leader do? Wilson pondered this problem in the months following his graduation and decided to study law. "The profession I chose was politics; the profession I entered was the law. I entered the one because I thought it would lead to the other," he explained in a letter a few years later. In the fall of 1879, he enrolled in the law school of the University of Virginia.

Interested in the broadest problems of government, Wilson found it tedious to memorize endless cases illustrating, to him, abysmally uninteresting points of law. But the conviction that legal training would be useful later on sustained him. He described himself in a letter to his friend Talcott on December 31, 1879, as swallowing vast masses of legal technicalities "with as good a grace and as straight a face as an offended palate will allow." While, of course, he had no idea of abandoning his studies, "one may be permitted an occasional complaint, if for no other purpose than to relieve his feelings. To relieve my feelings, therefore, I wish now to record the confession that I am most terribly bored by the noble study of Law sometimes, though in the main I am thoroughly satisfied with my choice of a profession. . . . This excellent thing, the Law, gets as monotonous as that other immortal article of food, *Hash*, when served with such endless frequency."

Extracurricular activities were more satisfying. He joined one of the two leading debating societies, the Jefferson. He so distinguished himself that some of the debates in which he participated had to be moved to larger halls to accommodate the overflow audience, and some of his remarks were reported in the newspapers. He was elected President of the Jefferson Society. Promptly he revised its constitution, a project he undertook with much contagious enthusiasm and carried to a highly successful conclusion. He contributed articles to the University magazine. He became, in short, a popular and respected student leader.

These successes only intensified his larger ambitions. "Those indistinct plans of which we used to talk grow on me daily," he wrote Charles Talcott on May 20, 1880, "until a sort of calm confidence of great things to be accomplished has come over me which I am puzzled to analyse the nature of. I can't tell whether it is a mere figment of my own inordinate vanity, or a deep-rooted determination which it will be within my power to act up to."

However irksome his formal studies, Wilson was obliged to spend a great deal of time and energy on them. He was also deeply engaged in outside activities, not only debating but daily practice of elocution and composition — and a courtship — as well. This would be a heavy load for almost anyone. It was a crushing one for the tense young Wilson. In December, 1880, he collapsed. The major symptoms, apparently, were gastrointestinal, and so severe that he had to leave the University and return home.

For the next year and a half, he continued his studies alone, doggedly plugging away at his law books and in his spare time training himself for that nebulous great future in which he still had unshakable faith. A casualty of this period was his first name, Thomas. After experimenting with the various ways of signing his name, he decided "Woodrow Wilson" was the most euphonious possibility.

After eighteen months of solitary study, "Woodrow Wilson" resolved to launch his professional career. The thing to do, he decided, was to set up a law office in an expanding community. Atlanta, Georgia, was the city he finally chose.

In June, 1882, the young hopeful arrived in Atlanta, and immediately called on Edward Ireland Renick whom he had known as a fellow student at the University of Virginia. Renick, too, was about to establish a law office. They decided to join forces and the firm of Renick and Wilson was born. Elated, Wilson wrote his parents about the great development. They promptly sent their good wishes, some new shirts and a few pieces of office furniture. In October, Wilson passed his bar examination. In high spirits, Renick and Wilson awaited bids for their services. They waited in vain. Clients did not pour in. They did not even trickle in.

Wilson was burning for a chance to demonstrate his forensic brilliance. None materialized. Day after day the partners sat in their office, their time disconcertingly their own.

There was leisure aplenty to become a frequent spectator of sessions of the Georgia Senate, then still crowded with the post-Civil War mediocrities and worse who had risen to local prominence throughout the South. The oratory Wilson heard did not call to mind that of Demosthenes, Gladstone, Calhoun or Webster. The perspiring legislators, with their crude and ignorant ways, repelled him. This was not the statesmanship he dreamed of. And law was not proving to be a steppingstone to even these vulgar local political opportunities. Law, in fact, was not proving to be a way to earn the cost of his room and board, let alone any of the amenities. So far from distinguishing himself in arguing great legal principles, he was unable to hold his own even in the scrabble for the petty claims cases which might at least have been his financial salvation. He seems not to have attracted a single client — except his mother, who entrusted certain business matters to him.

". . . The potentially great firm of Renick and Wilson," he wrote Heath Dabney January 11, 1883 "[is] doing *very* little, but hoping very *much* . . ." The months dragged by. Wilson spent his time reading, mostly history and political science, interspersed with Milton, Shelley and Keats. He practiced composition every afternoon.

The contrast between the intellectual delight his studies afforded and the niggardly opportunities to engage in stimulating work, even if he were successful at obtaining the sort of cases that seemed most readily available, began to weigh on him. The practice of law seemed more and more a blind alley. Less than a year after venturing so exultantly into the world of practical affairs, he decided to return to university life. ". . . I have about made up my mind to study, at Johns Hopkins University . . ." he wrote Heath Dabney, May 11, 1883.

> In doing this I am, beyond all reasonable doubt, following the natural bent of my mind. I can never be happy unless I am enabled to lead an intellectual life. . . . But hereabouts culture is very little esteemed; not, indeed, at all because it is a drug on the market, but because there is so little of it that its good qualities are not appreciated. . . . I suffer very much in such a community for lack of intellectual companionship.
>
> But the greater matter is that the practice of the law, when conducted for purposes of gain, is antagonistic to the best interests of the intellectual life. . . . The philosophical *study* of the law — which must be a pleasure to any thoughtful man — is a very different matter from its scheming and haggling practice . . .
>
> Now, here it is that the whole secret of my new departure lies. You know my passion for original work, you know my love for composition, my keen desire to become a master of philosophical discourse, to become capable and apt in instructing as great a number of persons as possible. My plain necessity, then, is some profession which will afford me a moderate support, favourable conditions for study, and considerable leisure; what better can I be, therefore, than a professor, a lecturer upon subjects whose study most delights me?

The year in Atlanta took its toll of Wilson's political aspirations. Not that those aspirations ceased to exist. They continued unabated. But exposure to existence without the protection of either home or college atmosphere forced him to the conclusion that he must make an adjustment which would afford him an income and at least some satisfaction, even if not the most deeply desired. As an academician, after all, he could look forward to exerting influence through writing and teaching, even if he could not directly participate in governmental affairs.

The decision to set his sights upon a more attainable occupation than "statesmanship" was facilitated by a momentous event. He fell in love. Before long, he was dreaming of getting married. How could he, though, until he had made some sensible career adjustment?

The young lady was Ellen Louise Axson, who, like Wilson, was a child of the Presbyterian manse. She was, from all accounts, a rare human being. Altogether accepting of her womanly role, she also had literary and artistic interests of her own. Wilson delighted in her capacity to understand his intellectual pursuits and valued her opinions. Above all, she truly understood Wilson's temperament and catered lovingly to his need for a continuous flow of affection and approval. And how he thirsted for her reassurances! "It isn't pleasant or convenient to have strong passions," he once wrote her. ". . . I have the uncomfortable feeling that I am carrying a volcano about with me. My salvation is in being loved. . . . There surely never lived a man with whom love was

a more critical matter than it is with me!" This letter was written during their engagement. Many others, written long afterward, testify to the persistence of these feelings.

Wilson and Ellen Axson became engaged in September, 1883, two days before he arrived in Baltimore to enter Johns Hopkins. "My purpose in coming to the university," he wrote on his application form, "is to qualify myself for teaching the studies I wish to pursue, namely, history and political science, as well as to fit myself for those special studies of constitutional history upon which I have already bestowed some attention."

Wilson applied himself to his studies with furious industry. As always, he regarded the formal course work as little more than a necessary evil, and conserved his best energy for the reading and writing projects he prescribed himself. He undertook the writing of two books. One was a history of American economic thought and was never published. The other was *Congressional Government,* which attempted to evaluate American governmental institutions in terms of the day-to-day operation of our constitutional system.

He labored with a passion for perfection. "I *must* be true to myself," he wrote his fiancée. ". . . No chance of getting my name before the public shall tempt me to do what I should some day regard as beneath my reputation, as weakly done." He berated himself for the deficiencies of his writing style and set himself a standard that few mortals could meet.

In addition to all his other activities, Wilson sought out the debating society and became one of its leading lights. His oratory dazzled its members. Their warm response dazzled Wilson. He enjoyed speaking, he wrote Ellen Axson, because "it sets my mind — all my faculties — aglow." He felt possessed of confidence and self-command when he spoke and was so exhilarated that it was hard to go to sleep afterward. He told her of the "absolute joy in facing and conquering a hostile audience . . . or thawing out a cold one."

Wilson was irresistibly drawn to the debating societies of every university he attended. And he was irresistibly drawn to the task of revising each club's constitution, along the lines of the British parliamentary system. So at Johns Hopkins. At Wilson's instance, its members converted the Hopkins Literary Society into the "Hopkins House of Commons," and adopted a constitution of Wilson's composition. He promptly reported this success and the great pleasure he took in it to his fiancée, and noted: "I have a sense of power in dealing with men collectively which I do not feel always in dealing with them singly. In the former case the pride of reserve does not stand so much in my way as it does in the latter. One feels no sacrifice of pride necessary in courting the favour of an assembly of men such as he would have to make in seeking to please one man." His success stirred his ancient ambitions. He longed, he wrote his fiancée, "to do immortal work."

The course around which the intellectual life of political science graduate students revolved was Dr. Herbert B. Adams' seminar in history. To this group, Wilson read chapters of his *Congressional Government* as he completed them. Dr. Adams and the students were greatly impressed. Wilson toiled away at his manuscript from January to October, 1884. At last it was complete. In some trepidation, he sent it to Houghton, Mifflin and Co. Less than two months later, the young author had stupendous news: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. wanted to publish the book. "They have actually offered me as good terms as if I were already a well-known writer! The success is of such proportions as almost to take my breath away — it has distanced my biggest hopes," Wilson wrote Ellen Axson.

Significantly, the first elation was quickly followed by a siege of depression. He was restless. He could not even for a while rest on his laurels. In a letter to Ellen Axson, he confessed his low spirits and explained that "success does not flush or elate me, except for the moment." The acceptance of the book had pleased him, of course, "but it has sobered me a good deal too. The question is, What next? . . . I must push on: to linger would be fatal."

Congressional Government was published in January, 1885. Gamaliel Bradford, reviewing it in the *Nation*, termed it "one of the most important books, dealing with political subjects, which have ever issued from the American press." The book reviews were alive with praise for the brilliant young Hopkins student. Again, Wilson was elated but in the midst of triumph Ellen Axson sensed an ineffable sadness and gently inquired about it. Wilson wrote her a remarkably revealing reply, dated February 24, 1885:

Yes . . . there is, and has long been, in my mind a "lurking sense of disappointment and *loss*, as if I had missed from my life something upon which both my gifts and inclinations gave me a claim"; I do feel a very real regret that I have been shut out from my heart's *first* — primary — ambition and purpose, which was, to take an active, if possible a leading, part in public life, and strike out for myself, if I had the ability, a *statesman's* career. That is my heart's, — or, rather, my *mind's* — deepest secret. . . . Had I had independent means of support, even of the most modest proportions, I should doubtless have sought an entrance into politics *anyhow*, and have tried to fight my way to predominant influence even amidst the hurly-burly and helter-skelter of Congress. I have a strong instinct of leadership, an unmistakably oratorical temperament, and the keenest possible delight in affairs; and it has required very constant and stringent schooling to content me with the sober methods of the scholar and the man of letters. I have no patience for the tedious toil of what is known as "research"; I have a passion for interpreting great thoughts to the world; I should be complete if I could inspire a great movement of opinion, if I could read the experiences of the past into the practical life of the men of to-day and so communicate the thought to the minds of the great mass of the people as to impel them to great political achievements. . . . My feeling has been that such literary talents as I have are *secondary* to my equipment for other things: that my power to write was meant to be a handmaiden to my power to speak and to organize action. Of course it is quite possible that I have been all along entirely misled in this view: I am ready to accept the providential ordering of my life as conclusive on that point. Certainly I have taken the course which will, with God's favour, enable me to realize *most* of what I at first proposed to myself, and I do not in the least repine at the necessity which has shut me out from all other courses of life. It is for this reason that I have never made these confessions so fully before: I did not want even to *seem* to be discontented with my lot in life. I shall write with no less diligence of preparation, both moral and mental, and with no less effort to put all that is best of myself into my books because I have had to give up a cherished ambition to be an actor in the affairs about which only my *pen* can now be busy.

However valiant his disavowal of discontent, every sentence of this letter bespeaks the man's longing for the career of his first choice. His acceptance of his lot and determination to do his best with the opportunities open to him only underline the poignancy of his disappointment. In the quarter century following the publication of *Congressional Government*, Wilson achieved a degree of distinction in the academic world seldom equaled before or since. He earned many honors, some of which truly pleased him. But none of his academic triumphs could obliterate that undercurrent of restless dissatisfaction which was the man's fundamental mood. None could be enjoyed without a nostalgic pang for another kind of triumph which he yearned for to the depths of his soul but which, reason told him, was forever beyond his grasp. In short, for a quarter of a century, Wilson felt, in a crucial area of his existence, painfully unfulfilled.

Congressional Government established its author as a promising young scholar. His reputation was by now something more than local. He began to receive offers of teaching posts. The one he accepted was from a college for women which had just been founded — Bryn Mawr. His salary was to be fifteen hundred dollars per year. On such a stipend, a man could support a wife, even if only modestly. On June 24, 1885, Wilson and Ellen Axson were married. "Can you keep a secret?" Ellen had exclaimed to her brother. "He is the greatest man in the world and the best." Her tender admiration lasted until her death twenty-nine years later.

For any period in their marriage, one can dip into their correspondence or the reminiscences of friends and relatives who knew the household well, and emerge with evidence of Wilson's dependence on his wife's love and her unfailingly tender response. Nine years after their wedding, he could write: "It is so *dull* to be away from you. Life is so much more *commonplace* without you. That is one of the depressing and degrading things you have saved me from: a commonplace life. It is so fresh and sweet and interesting where you are." Seventeen years after their wedding, she could write him: "How do you expect me to keep my head, you dear thing, when you send me such letters as you have done recently — when you lavish upon me such delicious praise? Surely there was never such a lover before, and even after all these years it seems almost too good to be true that you are *my* lover. All I can say in return is that I love you as you deserve to be loved, — as much as you can possibly *want* to be loved."

Years after Wilson's death, Mary Hoyt, a young cousin who had lived with the Wilsons for a year and often visited afterward, wrote a memorandum for Ray Stannard Baker: ". . . I cannot express to you the loveliness of life in

that home. It was filled with so much kindness and courtesy, with so much devotion between Ellen and Cousin Woodrow, that the air always seemed to have a kind of sparkle."

The Wilsons moved to Bryn Mawr in September, 1885. Wilson dutifully set about preparing his courses, which were in modern history. But he found teaching women uninspiring, and being supervised by a female dean abhorrent. Just six months after he arrived, we find him visiting Washington to investigate the possibility of getting a place in the State Department. Nothing came of this attempt.

His self-esteem suffered another blow. Through the good offices of his friend, Robert Bridges, he was invited to address a Princeton alumni meeting in New York. In his eagerness to perform well he became nervous, solemn and execrably dull. Not this time the joy of "facing and conquering an audience!" To Wilson's mortification, some of his auditors laughed aloud and others walked out. He returned to Bryn Mawr feeling profoundly humiliated and discouraged. Here he was, trapped teaching women which, so he said, relaxed one's mental muscle; he had failed miserably as an orator — for he so magnified the importance of this incident that he tormented himself for years with this idea: his economic situation was critical, for his wife was about to have a baby and even in those days it was no simple matter for three to exist on fifteen hundred dollars a year. There seemed only one thing he could still fasten his hopes to: his writing.

He conceived a plan for a monumental work, tentatively titled *The Philosophy of Politics*, which would trace, in great detail, the origins and development of democratic government. This was to be his magnum opus, a book which would become a classic. He was prepared to devote years to preliminary research before even beginning to write. As a start, he began to collect data on the systems of government of every nation in the world. There was, he found, no adequate single volume on the subject. He undertook to write one, to be called *The State*, for D. C. Heath & Co.

For three years, in his all-too-scarce spare hours, he labored painstakingly on *The State*. His teaching duties increased, but not his pleasure in them. He tried to augment his income by giving outside lectures and writing articles. The time-consuming activities connected solely with earning a bare living took most of his energy. He grew increasingly oppressed by the feeling that on the slim margin of time left over for the pursuit of his own studies, he would never be able to make much headway. "I don't see how a literary life can be built up on foundations of undergraduate instruction," he wrote his wife on October 4, 1887. "That instruction compels you to live with the commonplaces, the A.B.C. of every subject. . . . You get weary of the plodding and yet you get habituated to it, and find all excursions aside difficult — more and more so. What *is* a fellow to do? How is he to earn bread and at the same time find leisure for thoughts detached from the earning of bread?"

The strain began to tell on his health. He confided to an old friend that he feared he would break down if he remained at Bryn Mawr. It was not merely the amount of work but the aridity of it which fatigued him. He began to cast about for some alternative, and was delighted when he was offered a post at Wesleyan University. The salary was higher than at Bryn Mawr. And the students were men!

In September, 1888, Wilson moved his family to Middletown, Connecticut, and began to teach at Wesleyan. The Wilsons occupied a comfortable old house on High Street, which Charles Dickens once described as "the most most beautiful avenue in America." The gnawing discomforts, endured throughout their stay at Bryn Mawr, of cramped living quarters and insufficient money, were now eased. Even more important, here Wilson found the students and faculty more stimulating than at Bryn Mawr. They could serve as a foil for his efforts. His spirits soared.

Reminiscences of some of his students testify to the man's genius for communicating his intellectual enthusiasm. He demanded the best of himself; he inspired the best efforts of his students. He quickly gravitated to the University's debating society, and it will not surprise the reader to learn that he decided it needed to be reorganized into a "House of Commons." The idea took hold. "Cabinets" were formed and clung tenaciously to life as equally tenacious young politicians sought to persuade "Commons" to unseat them. The "House of Commons" became an exciting outlet for the students' competitive spirit. The supremacy of

football as their favorite sport was threatened!

Wilson even took an interest in football. He was as enthusiastic a rooter as anyone on that football-loving campus. Between games, he would exhort the players to have faith in their ability to defeat even the big-college teams. During games, when the outlook seemed dark, Wilson would rush onto the field and lead cheers. Wesleyan had a hugely successful season. Wilson became one of the most popular professors on campus.

The State was published in the fall of 1889, and enhanced Wilson's growing reputation. His outside lectures were beginning to attract favorable attention. He was elected to Phi Beta Kappa and made president of the Johns Hopkins Alumni Association. At last he was, in small measure, at least, finding a way to apply his talents.

"Have I told you," he wrote his wife on March 9, 1889, "that latterly — since I have been here, a distinct *feeling* of maturity — or rather of maturing — has come over me? The *boyish* feeling that I have so long had and cherished is giving place, consciously, to another feeling — the feeling that I am no longer young (though not old quite!) and that I need no longer hesitate (as I have so long and sensitively done) to assert myself and my opinions in the presence of and against the selves and opinions of old men, 'my elders.' "

Despite these various satisfactions, the man felt larger than the opportunity. "Though this is in truth a delightful place to work, it is not a sufficiently *stimulating* place . . . ," he wrote his friend Robert Bridges. From the time he had first thought of teaching, he dreamed of the political science department of Princeton University as his destination. At this time a reorganization and expansion of the department were under way. Bridges was in a position to advance Wilson's candidacy, and Wilson gratefully accepted his help. A meeting with President Patton of Princeton was arranged. Wilson made a good impression. Eventually, an offer was made. Wilson accepted joyfully. His career at Princeton — it lasted twenty years, twelve as professor and eight as president of the university — began in September, 1890.

In a real sense, when Wilson returned to Princeton, he had "arrived." For he did not consider Prinecton a mere way station to a better university. Whatever capacity he had for achievement in academic life could be realized at Princeton. Here was an institution fully worthy of his mettle. Now was the time to give vent to every talent. He accepted Princeton as the place where he was destined to do his lifework.

A flood of pent-up energy poured forth. Wilson's performance at Princeton, from the very start, was superlative. His class lectures were celebrated. He applied all his carefully cultivated dramatic skill to the facts of American constitutional law, international law, English common law and administration. Thirty years later, some of his students could still recall his picturesque description of this or that historical event, so that it remained forever meaningful to them. Sometimes, at the end of a particularly brilliant performance — and they were *performances* — the students would impulsively burst into applause.

He took an active interest in faculty affairs. His contributions to the discussions were cogent, frequently witty and enormously stimulating. He had a way of making whatever he spoke about seem important. An aura of dignity and virtue surrounded the man, and he had the gift of communicating a sense of elevating rectitude to those who adopted his viewpoint. Many of his colleagues were attracted to him as a leader, and he quite naturally slipped into the role of their spokesman.

He was writing too, prolifically, and his books and articles spread his fame far beyond Princeton. So did his outside speeches, for which he now had many more invitations than he could accept. He broadened the scope of his talks, spoke about current affairs to men of affairs. He was coming to the attention of the nation's leaders.

Such outstanding accomplishments resulted in literally scores of offers from other institutions. Whenever a university presidency was open, it seemed, Wilson was sought to fill the post. In quick succession, he was asked to become president of the Universities of Illinois, Virginia, Alabama, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Washington and Lee. The more other universities pursued him, the more determined the trustees became to persuade him to remain at Princeton. They approved an unusual arrangement which provided that several friends of Princeton would contribute money to increase Wilson's income substantially in return for his promise not to accept a position at any other university for five years, beginning in 1898.

No scholar could dream of a more secure opportunity to pursue his studies and produce his books than that which Wilson had secured for himself. Yet he was dissatisfied. The trouble was that, try as he would, he could not efface his desire to take an active role in politics. He was keenly aware of the tendency of men of affairs to look with scorn upon ivory-tower academicians. "The genuine practical politician," he wrote in an essay, ". . . reserves his acidest contempt for the literary man who assumes to utter judgments touching public affairs and political institutions. . . . The ordinary literary man, even though he be an eminent historian, is ill enough fitted to be a mentor in affairs of government. . . ." But "the practical politician should discriminate. . . . Let him find a man with an imagination which, though it stands aloof, is yet quick to conceive the very things in the thick of which the politician struggles. To that man he should resort for instruction."

This is one of the recurrent themes of his writings. He tried to establish himself as the sort of practical thinker to whom men in positions of power might turn for guidance. But the role of scholarly guide hardly fitted his deepest aspirations. For he did not want his influence filtered into existence through a medium. He wanted the reins in his own hands. "I am so tired of a merely talking profession!" he once exclaimed to his brother-in-law, Stockton Axson. "I want to *do* something!"

Exactly what it was he wanted to *"do"* he seemed not to have decided. What attracted him, apparently, was the prospect of exercising leadership *per se*. He was then and, indeed, throughout his career, a leader in search of a cause. One feels, almost, that the various causes for which he fought so passionately in later years were in themselves almost incidental to him. A man cannot exercise power in a vacuum, after all. Wilson sometimes seemed hard put to fix on a practical goal to which to wed his ambitions for leadership. His clearly was not the variety of will to leadership which is born of an overwhelming desire to accomplish certain specific programs. Rather, he had a nebulous desire to lead, and adopted specific programs as a means of giving propulsive substance to his ambition.

This fact in no way detracts from the merit of the projects he thus utilized. If the motivation of the heroes of history could only be laid bare, one suspects it might be discovered that they drew for their great works upon energy generated by what are generally considered the baser drives of human nature. But we are getting rather far afield and ahead of our story, for in his days as professor at Princeton, Wilson had not yet latched on to any moral crusade. He was still trapped in a vise constructed on one side of his unquenchable yearning for the direct exercise of power and, on the other, his rational conviction that it was a yearning he would never be in a position to satisfy.

Stockton Axson once asked if he would be interested in becoming a Senator. "Indeed I would, but that is impossible. In this country men do not go from the academic world into politics," Wilson replied.

There seemed no alternative to plodding ahead as a professor and man of letters, trying as best he could to govern his ungovernable ambition. This effort involved him in perpetual tension. At home, his devoted tenderness to his family continued unabated. But members of the household were aware of a subterranean irritability, ever on the verge of erupting into the open. ". . . Cousin Woodrow had attacks of, I suppose, threatened nervous breaks," Mary Hoyt later recalled.

Wilson lashed himself to an increasingly taxing schedule of writing and lecturing, as though through sheer intensity of effort he could wrest fulfillment from his work. Twice, in 1895 and 1899, he broke down. His doctors prescribed rest. Both times, he went to Great Britain and, at a leisurely pace, toured the great universities, the towns where some of his ancestors lived and places hallowed through some association with his intellectual heroes. Leaves of grass from the graves of Adam Smith and Bagehot were dispatched to Mrs. Wilson with instructions for their preservation. In Wordsworth's haunts, he read Wordsworth's poems and reveled in their beauty. His was not the glazed eye of the bored tourist: he had the capacity for taking innocent joy in the great sights.

Both times he returned to Princeton in better health and in better spirits and plunged back to work with the happiest consequences to an already formidable reputation. There was the Princeton Sesquicentennial celebration in the fall of 1896, at which he delivered an address which attracted national attention. His thesis was that universities ought to train students not merely for their individual self-realization

but with a view to their serving the nation. There were his outside speeches, which he made to ever more distinguished audiences on ever more important occasions. There were his books and articles, and his popularity with Princeton students and faculty.

All through this difficult period — indeed, all his life long — Wilson sought relief from inner stress through comforting friendships. He had not as a boy felt unconditionally loved. Rather he seems to have felt that he must earn acceptance by molding his attitudes and behavior in accordance with his father's prescription, and to have been perpetually doubtful of his success in this endeavor. Throughout his life, Wilson was greatly concerned with the problem of whether he was lovable and loved, and required an inordinate amount of explicit reassurance on this score. He was aware of his great dependence on the supplies of affection which his friends provided. He wrote literally hundreds of letters thanking this friend or that who had bolstered his spirit.

To an English friend, Fred Yates, after a vacation in England in 1906: "It is always affection that heals me, and the dear friendships I made were my real tonic and restorative."

Or again, in 1914, to Mrs. Edith G. Reid:

> How sweet it is of you to write such notes as that you sent me on the fourth. They cheer me and hearten me and calm me as only the voice of a beloved friend can: and I bless you for them with all my heart. The turmoil and contest and confusing struggle of the life down here drains the sources of joy and confidence in me sadly, and a dear voice like your own, so generous, so full of affectionate reassurance, so sincere and so full of comprehension, is the very tonic I need. It makes the springs run full and fresh again. . . .

To Mary Hulbert, on August 3, 1913, he wrote that he was not made of steel and that, more than any man he ever knew, he was dependent upon his friends' sympathy and belief in him for strength to do his work as President.

Again, to Mrs. Reid, just a few months before his death: "My friends grow more and more indispensable to me. Little as I see them I think more and more about them. . . . I must see my friends or starve."

All of Wilson's close friends — the men, the women, the professors, the politicians, the socialites — shared one characteristic: they were, or at least had to seem to him to be, *uncritical* admirers of the man and of everything he did. Intellectual disagreement or the feeling that a friend disapproved of some project he had in hand aroused intolerable anxieties, the echoes of indelible boyhood impressions. For the boy Wilson had learned that if he did not earn his father's approval by instantly accepting his every opinion and behaving accordingly, he stood in danger of forfeiting his father's love. To the man Wilson, identity of opinion and love were inseparably linked. He never learned that he and a friend could disagree and still retain a mutual affection. To him, if a friend disagreed with him about a matter of importance, it signified that the friend no longer cared for him. He reacted in the way he once had feared his father would react to him in similar circumstances — he broke the relationship.

Wilson had many female friends. He reveled in their flattery and praise and doubtless, too, in the relative freedom such relationships enjoyed from the danger that disrupting differences of opinion might one day arise. There were the Misses Lucy and Mary Smith, Mrs. Nancy Toy, Mrs. Edith Gittings Reid, Mrs. Mary Allen Hulbert Peck (who, after her divorce, resumed using her first husband's name and became, again, Mary Hulbert).

His relationship with Mrs. Hulbert threatened to become a national scandal in the presidential campaigns of 1912 and 1916. For Wilson had written her, as he had written many others, both male and female, letters expressing his affection and appreciation of her friendship in fervent terms which the ignorant or malicious might misconstrue. Wilson had a way of attributing the noblest human qualities to his friends and their real personalities did not always affect the mental image he formed of them. His idealized view of Mrs. Hulbert through eyes blinded by gratitude seems to have been at some considerable variance with that of more impartial observers who considered her a flighty, sycophantic social climber. Mrs. Wilson knew of all of these friendships. Some she shared. In any case, no one who understands the role friendship played in Wilson's life, who knows his devotion to Mrs. Wilson, his religious scruples and the equally intimate tone of his correspondence with male friends, can give credence to the scandalous imputations made in connection with his letters to Mrs. Hulbert.

Wilson's capacity for idealizing friends was apparent to the more discerning among them. Mrs. Reid, for example, has written:

His appreciation of an affection given him was out of the ordinary as was his need of personal love. A person, to obtain his intimacy, had to say very definitely, "I like you," or "I love you." After that, if you were sincere, your life became his personal and unfailing concern.

To make one's friends appreciate each other is not an easy matter. His letters of introduction for one of his women friends almost always began, "You will feel her charm at a glance." Of a man he would write, "You will at once realize his fine nature, his powers of right thinking." The recipient of one of these notes often saw none of those charms and was very bored; and the idealized often found it trying to live up to unfamiliar virtues. It was especially trying when he introduced in glowing phrases two women and each thought the other too awful for words, but dared not say so . . .

With his intense interest in the personality of a friend, and his entire confidence in a quick characterization, which he never failed to make, it is curious how little he did know about any one who was at all subtle. He had a model for men and women, made out of his own traditions, which at first sight he fitted to any one he felt drawn to.

Wilson's closest friend during his Princeton professorship was John Grier Hibben. The Hibbens and the Wilsons saw each other almost daily, for years. When he learned that Hibben was to sail for Europe for an extended stay, Wilson exclaimed in a letter to his wife: "Doesn't that make you feel a little blank? It does me, very. . . . *What shall we do without them?*"

It is not surprising, given Wilson's passion to lead, either that he took a keen interest in Princeton's administrative problems or that he was quick to find fault with the administrators, chiefly President Patton. Aglow with his observations of the pedagogical methods employed at Oxford and Cambridge, Wilson rhapsodized about the possibility of reorganizing campus life so that the students would learn, not facts, primarily, but, more important, how to think. He expounded the virtues of the tutorial system. He had dreams of a great future for Princeton. Many of the faculty — not only those who disliked Patton for one personal reason or another, but those who felt Wilson could provide a dynamic leadership beyond the capacities of the elderly, conservative Patton — began to look to Wilson for direction. When Patton announced his retirement in June, 1902, the trustees unanimously elected Wilson to succeed to the presidency of Princeton. Seldom had the trustees been so single-minded. Never before had the mantle fallen to a layman.