

the Quay, S. and W. Mackay's, whose great period had been earlier, who did not run a warehouse and supply the trade, or sell sporting goods – to say nothing of Ferguson and Osborn, and of Smith's – you would understand better how the literary pulse beat in Wellington in those days.

I think Wilson was an interesting piece of our literary, and library, history: in the literary history, minor; in the library history, quite largely illustrative. I suppose there was a sort of tough, local, middle-grade Bohemianism about him. He was a middle-sized man, much tobacco-stained, with a rather gruff voice, and the boys in the shop were convinced that he absorbed vast quantities of whiskey. If untrue, it was still delightful scandal. As a very young man he had been in the Bradford woollen trade, and then in some sort of business in Paris – he was said actually to be able to speak French; and still as a quite young man he came to New Zealand and took up teaching and then journalism, working his way down from the East Coast to an editor's chair in Wellington. At the end of the nineties he was briefly a member of parliament, and in 1901 began his quarter-century as parliamentary librarian. You see that he had had quite a varied experience, none of which, before he thus assumed the senior professional position in the country, had had any connection with libraries whatever. It was a colonial experience, and a very colonial sort of appointment. It seemed to work out all right, according to the lights of the time. Anyhow, there the distinctive figure was. I don't know what proportion of the library's books came directly from England – the war years may have had some effect – but Charlie Wilson used to come into the shop quite regularly and pick out a staggering number (as it seemed to me) from our new ones, that I had just unpacked and marked with the price, and carried downstairs; and Mr Cameron would then put them in piles, with a slip of paper inserted, marked in his very neat hand, 'G.A.L.'. I don't know who carried them up again to the packing department; my colleague Archie, I suppose, whose private love was astronomy. Archie confided this in me, with some shyness: it was the first inkling I had that anyone could have a disinterested passion for anything other than books, and I regarded Archie thereafter with a mixture of astonishment and a sort of amused awe.

Now, Charlie Wilson did something else besides smoke and assuage the legislative intellectual hunger and pick the eyes out of the stock. He kept a hand in journalism, and every Saturday morning he wrote about books in the *Dominion* newspaper. He was our Sainte-Beuve or Edmund Gosse: I must not compare him to anyone in our later reaches of criticism, he carried none of the *Landfall* and precious little of the *Listener* atmosphere with him. He wrote under the name 'Liber', and he used as epigraph lines famous in their day: