

Bateson Family Papers
1829-1940
Mss.Ms.Coll.2

American Philosophical Society
2003
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Summary Information

Repository	American Philosophical Society
Title	Bateson Family Papers
Date [inclusive]	1829-1940
Call number	Mss.Ms.Coll.2
Extent	2.0 Linear feet
Location	LH-B-34-4
Language	English
Abstract	<p>One of the principle figures of turn of the century anti-Darwinian evolutionism, William Bateson (1861-1926) was a professor at Cambridge University for 23 years before leaving to become first director of the John Innes Horticultural Institute (1910-1926). Developing a unique "vibratory theory" of organismal variability during the 1890s that envisioned evolutionary change as a discontinuous process, Bateson became well known as the first English advocate of the recently rediscovered theories of Gregor Mendel.</p> <p>For a man inclined to drama and disputation in science, it was Bateson's family life that took on the airs of Greek tragedy. The two linear feet of correspondence, diaries, and photographs that comprise the Bateson Family Papers provide valuable insight into the social milieu of the Batesons and their decidedly unorthodox upper middle class academic life, as well as their responses to the tragic deaths of two of their sons.</p>
Preferred Citation	Cite as: Bateson Family Papers, American Philosophical Society.

Background note

One of the principle figures of turn of the century anti-Darwinian evolutionism, and an early and ardent advocate of Mendelian genetics, William Bateson (1861-1926) was professor at Cambridge University and the John Innes Horticultural Institute. The second of six children born to Anna Aikin and William Henry Bateson, William was raised in an unorthodox and intellectually challenging environment. Like his father, the reformist master of St. Johns College at Cambridge University, the children developed academic tendencies, and each of the Bateson children inherited their parents' habits of independent thought matched with a headstrong and disputatious nature.

As a boy, William harbored an interest in natural history quickened by an early exposure to the new theories of Charles Darwin. Although he met with little encouragement at Rugby School, where his academic performance veered from indifferent to unprofitable, William's matriculation at Saint Johns in 1879 provided a wealth of new opportunities. Under the influence of the embryologist Francis Maitland Balfour, Bateson excelled in zoology, and as a postgraduate, he spent two years in the United States studying the embryology and phylogeny of an obscure "worm," *Balanoglossus*. The choice of projects was propitious. In a painstaking analysis, Bateson identified a host of ontogenetic and anatomical affinities between *Balanoglossus* and vertebrates, instantaneously rewriting the evolutionary history of the class and gaining a measure of recognition sufficient to earn him election as a fellow at St. Johns in 1885.

After two years of scientific travel in the Russian Steppes and Egypt, Bateson returned to Cambridge in 1887 to absorb himself in the central problems of Darwinian theory: the nature of variation and the mechanism of heredity. For much of a decade, he accumulated data on variation in natural populations, and by the early 1890s, he had begun to situate himself with the ranks of anti-Darwinian evolutionists, emphasizing the discontinuities between species rather than the continuities predicted by Darwinian orthodoxy. Variation, Bateson suggested, could be expressed as a rhythmic or "vibratory" phenomenon analogous to natural phenomena such as ripples, zebra stripes, or morphological segmentation, clearly bounded by natural breaks, with the implication that the evolutionary process was radically different than the gradual incrementalism espoused by Darwin. Bateson's most thorough statement of his evolutionary theories at the time, *Materials for the Study of Evolution* (1894), was typically exhaustive and forcefully argued, and while it won few converts to either the vibratory theory or discontinuity, it established its author as one the leading anti-Darwinians of the period. Self-confident, intemperate, skeptical, and highly critical of work that he considered shoddy, Bateson was unphased by the lack of response, and continued to toil away at his underpaid position in Cambridge. Moving increasing into experimental studies of evolution, by 1899 he was offering undergraduate courses on "the practical study of evolution."

The last year of the nineteenth century was a watershed in Bateson's career. In April 1900, the Dutch biologist Hugo de Vries sent a copy of an overlooked article that he had recently rediscovered in the *Proceedings of the Natural History Society of Brunn* for 1866. Written by the Bohemian monk Gregor Mendel, the paper outlined a theory of heredity that Bateson immediately grasped could provide a means to account for the discontinuities in organismal variation. In typically pugnacious style, Bateson took up the Mendelian cause against the Galtonians associated with the journal *Biometrika* and, much later,

he continued its defense against the chromosomal theory of heredity advocated by the T. H. Morgan group at Columbia. At the annual meeting of the British Association in 1904, Bateson's ringing defense of Mendel was an important moment in turning aside the biometricians, and his books *Mendel's Principles of Heredity: A Defence* (1902) and *Mendel's Principles of Heredity* (1909) were widely read and enormously influential. At Cambridge, he attracted a core of young biologists to his laboratory and left his mark on the field as well by coining much of the terminology associated with modern Mendelian genetics, from allele and zygote to the term genetics itself.

Although his efforts were rewarded with an appointment to a new chair in biology in 1909, Bateson tired of the low pay at Cambridge and departed in 1910 to become the first director of the John Innes Horticultural Institution in Merton, Surrey. Presented with a blank slate, he built the Innes into a formidable center for the study of plant breeding and genetics, devoting his own research time to investigating exceptions to Mendel's laws. He was awarded the Darwin Medal in 1904 and the Royal Medal in 1920, was elected as president of the British Association in 1924, and was Fullerian Professor of Physiology at the Royal Institution. After a brief illness, he died at his home in Merton on February 8, 1926.

Sadly, the mix of turmoil and success in Bateson's professional life was tinged by family grief. His marriage to Caroline Beatrice Durham in 1896 was felicitous. The daughter of the senior surgeon at Guy's Hospital in London, Beatrice and her sisters were excellent intellectual matches for the Batesons (Florence Durham became a renowned geneticist in her own right), and Beatrice not only assisted William with his work, but during his days at Cambridge, she added much needed income for the family.

During the first seven years of their marriage, William and Beatrice had three sons, John, Martin, and Gregory -- the last named after Mendel -- each of whom displayed the family traits of intellectual promise and a headstrong disposition. As they grew, the boys were steeped in the study of natural history, and although they experienced some of the same distaste for the religion and conservatism of boarding school life that their father had, they excelled in the classroom. John and Martin were particularly close and in many respects, their lives ran a parallel course to tragedy. In 1916, John earned the school prize in biology at Charterhouse and in the same year, Martin earned a prize in chemistry at Rugby. Similarly, when John graduated from school in 1916, he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the artillery, while Martin followed suit in 1917, enlisting in the Royal Air Force despite his (and his father's) principled opposition to the war.

The brothers, however, had very different experiences in military service. Having joined late in the war, Martin never went further afield than Grantham Air Force Base near Yarmouth, where he was trained in photographic reconnaissance, while John was shipped to active service in the trenches in France in the spring of 1917. His regiment was engaged on numerous occasions into November of that year, when John was wounded in the hand, earning a Military Cross for heroism in battle. Following a long recuperation of seven months, he rejoined his brigade in July 1918 and took part in the final campaigns of the war. On October 14, 1918, less than a month before the armistice, John was killed in action.

The shock of John's death drove a wedge between Martin and his father that was never fully repaired, and the already sardonic Martin seems never to have regained his equilibrium. After demobilization in 1919, he entered St. John's College to pursue the family science, but while he took first class honors in 1921, he took little pleasure in science and was unfocussed in his studies. Much to the disapproval of his father, his wish seems instead to have been to embark upon a literary career, writing poetry (as he had since his

days at Rugby) or plays. It was while writing a play during the winter of 1921-22 that Martin developed a strong but unrequited attachment to a young woman, Grace Wilson. Martin's persistent advances, and his play, were equally persistently rebuffed by Wilson, and on at least one occasion, Martin threatened suicide. On what would have been his brother John's twenty-fourth birthday, April 22, 1922, Martin made good on his threat and shot himself in the head while standing in the middle of Picadilly Circus.

Scope & content

For a man inclined to drama and disputation in science, it was the family life of the geneticist William Bateson that took on the airs of Greek tragedy. Concentrated in the period 1900-1922, the two linear feet of correspondence, diaries, and photographs that comprise the Bateson Family Papers provide valuable insight into the social milieu of the Batesons and their decidedly unorthodox upper middle class academic life, as well as their responses to the tragic deaths of two of their sons.

Although the collection includes a small amount of genealogical material and a few letters from William's father, William Henry Bateson, and from his sister Mary (an historian), the heart of the collection consists of the letters from the three Bateson boys, John, Martin, and Gregory. Written from boarding school, college, and the military service, the letters are as literate and quirky as the family, filled with accounts of the boys' experiences at school, their thoughts on the war, their personal investigations in botany, zoology, and entomology, and the usual dose of parental advice and concern. Undeniably, though, it is the untimely deaths of John Bateson in the First World War and Martin to suicide that leave the most profound mark on the correspondence.

Administrative Information

Publication Information

American Philosophical Society 2003

Provenance

Acquisition Information

Deposited by Gregory Bateson, through Mary Catharine Bateson and David Lipset, September 1980.

Processing Information

Recatalogued by rsc, 2003.

Alternative Form Available

The collection has been microfilmed on three reels (Film 1425).

Related Materials

Related Material

The largest collections of the papers of William Bateson are housed in the archives of the John Innes Institute and in the University Library, Cambridge University. The Innes collections were described in *Mendel Newsletter* 25 (1985).

The APS Library has six reels of microfilm ([William Bateson papers, HS Film 26](#)) containing material selected and microfilmed by William Coleman in 1964 (now at Cambridge), including correspondence from Bateson to his wife, Beatrice, and colleagues such as Francis Galton, E. Roy Lankester, Alfred Newton, and Charles Scott Sherrington; lectures given between 1897-1904; and some genealogical and miscellaneous material. Personal letters relate Bateson's observations and reflections during his trips to the United States to lecture at universities (1907, 1921-1922), and to Siberia (1887). Other correspondence discusses such topics as cytology, eugenics, evolution, marine biology, and variation.

The [William Bateson Collection \(B B319\)](#) at the APS includes photocopies of Bateson's correspondence with Leonard Doncaster and Erwin Baur (1902-1921) on genetics and cytology.

Indexing Terms

Corporate Name(s)

- Cambridge University
- Charterhouse School, Godalming, England
- Rugby School

Genre(s)

- Photographs
- Poetry

Personal Name(s)

- Bateson , Beatrice
- Bateson, Anna Aikin, 1829-1918
- Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980
- Bateson, John, 1898-1918
- Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922
- Bateson, William Henry, 1812-1881
- Bateson, William, 1861-1926
- Durham, Florence
- Herschel, John F. W., Sir, (John Frederick William), 1792-1871

Subject(s)

- Genetics--Great Britain
- Lepidoptera--Great Britain
- Natural history--Great Britain
- Suicide
- World War, 1914-1918

Other Descriptive Information

This collection contains materials which relate to the history of genetics.

Author	Format	Date
Bateson family	Manuscripts (2 linear feet)	1829-1940

Bibliography

Bateson Family Papers

Collection Inventory

Bateson Family Papers	1829-1940	2.0 Linear feet
Bateson, Anna Aikin, 1829-1918 To Anna Aikin Batseon	1878 October 30	Box 1
Bateson, Anna Aikin, 1829-1918 To Caroline Beatrice Durham Bateson	1896-1918	3 items Box 1
Bateson, Anna Aikin, 1829-1918 Poem, "My Sister"	1860 August	Box 1
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham Accounts and receipts	1937-1940	Box 1
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham "At a conversazione"	1895 September	Box 1
Published under Beatrice Durham in <i>English Illustrated Magazine</i>		
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham Baby diary		Box 1
Birth and infancy of sons John, Martin, and Gregory Bateson		
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham To Gregory Bateson	1922 April-June	Box 1
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham To Martin Bateson	1917-1921	Box 1
Bateson, Caroline Beatrice Durham To William Bateson	1902 April 10-11	Box 1
Bateson, Edith	n.d. (April 7)	Box 1

Bateson Family Papers

Bateson, Edith To Beatrice Durham Bateson	1927 January 3		Box 1
Bateson, Edith Verses			Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 To Beatrice Durham Bateson	1910-1918	2 folders	Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 To Beatrice Durham Bateson	1910-1916 February		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 To Beatrice Durham Bateson	1916 May-1918		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 To Martin Bateson	1912-1921		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 To William Henry Bateson	1921-1922		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From Fernand Chodat	1922 April 25		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From Peggy Dimmer	1922 April 29		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From ___ Durham	1922 May 14		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From F. H. Durham	1922 May 28		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From Florence Durham	1922 May 4		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From Hermia Durham	1922 May 14		Box 1

Bateson Family Papers

Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 From Margaret Heitland	1922 May 9		Box 1
Bateson, Gregory, 1904-1980 School certificate	1918 January		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 Commission	1917 March 7		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 Condolences	1918 October		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 Imperial War Graves Commission			Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1912-1918	5 folders	Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1912-1916		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1917 February-June		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1917 July-November		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1918 January-June		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Martin Bateson	1918 August-October		Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson	1906-1918	10 folders	Box 1
Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1906-1911		Box 1

Bateson Family Papers

To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1912	Box 1
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1913-1915	Box 1
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1916	Box 1
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1917 January-April	Box 2
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1917 May-August	Box 2
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1917 September-December	Box 2
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1918 January-February	Box 2
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1918 March-July	Box 2
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To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918	1918 August-October	Box 2
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Bateson Family Papers

To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, John, 1898-1918 To Florence Durham	1917 March 21		Box 2
Bateson, John, 1898-1918 Photographs	1917 March 21		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Accounts and receipts	1921, 1922		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Actors' Benevolent Association Legacy	1922		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 British Lepidoptera	1915		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Diary	1917-1918		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Estate settlement	1922 December 6		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson	1903-1922	22 folders	Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson	1903-1911	3 folders	Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson	1913 Sept.-Oct.		Box 2
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1914 January-September		Box 2

Bateson Family Papers

To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1916 February-July	Box 2
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1916 August-December	Box 2
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1917 January-May	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1917 June-July	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1917 September-October	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1917 November-December	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1918 January-April	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1918 May-September	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1918 October-December	Box 3
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Bateson Family Papers

To Beatrice Durham Bateson and
William Bateson

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1919 January-February	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1919 March-August	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1919 September-December	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1920 May-July	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1920 August-December	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1921 February-June	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1921 September-October	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1922	Box 3
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922	1911-1919	Box 3
To Gregory Bateson		

Bateson Family Papers

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 To John Bateson	1907, n.d.	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 To British Chess Federation	1918 December 2	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 From Cambridge University. Bursar	1921 October 21	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Miscellaneous		Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Misc. verse and prose		Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Photograph	1919 Spring	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Printed material		Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Suicide letter	1922 April 22	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Suicide: Investigations by William Bateson See also Grace Wilson	1922	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Suicide: Newspaper clippings	1922 April	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Papers in his possession	1922 April 22	Box 3
Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 "Surface tension" Prize essay in chemistry, Rugby School	1917	Box 3

Bateson Family Papers

Bateson, Martin, 1899-1922 Verses		5 folders	Box 3
Bateson, Mary To Anna Aiken Bateson	1880 March 14		Box 3
Bateson, Mary Memorial Fund			Box 3
Bateson, Mary Newnham College			Box 3
Bateson, Mary Obituaries			Box 3
Bateson, Mary Women's Suffrage Deputation	1906 May 19		Box 3
Bateson, William Address to British Association for the Advancement of Science	1914		Box 4
Bateson, William Art collection	1900-1929	6 folders	Box 4
Bateson, William Art collection	1900-1906		Box 4
Bateson, William Art collection	1907-1914		Box 4
Bateson, William Art collection -- Chinese art			Box 4
Bateson, William Art collection -- Lists			Box 4
Bateson, William			Box 4

Bateson Family Papers

 Art collection -- Printed catalogues

Bateson, William	1929		Box 4
Art collection -- Sale			

Bateson, William			Box 4
Birth and baptismal certificates			

Bateson, William	1907 February 12		Box 4
From Drighton Ben and Co.			

Bateson, William	1907-1922		Box 4
To Edith Bateson			

Bateson, William	1896 April 2, June 5		Box 4
To Beatrice Durham			

Bateson, William	1922 April-May		Box 4
To Gregory Bateson			

Bateson, William	1909 May 13		Box 4
To John Bateson			

Bateson, William	1917-1922	3 folders	Box 4
To Martin Bateson			

Bateson, William	1922		Box 4
To Michael Graham			

Bateson, William			Box 4
Obituaries			

Bateson, William Henry, 1812-1881	1881 March 11, 25		Box 4
To Margaret Bateson			

Bateson, William Henry, 1812-1881	1836-1860		Box 4
To Richard Bateson			

Bateson, William Henry, 1812-1881	n.d.		Box 4
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Bateson Family Papers

To "Sir"

Bateson, William Henry, 1812-1881	1829	Box 4
Shrewsbury School fees		

Bateson family		Box 4
Genealogy		

Bateson family	1866-1873	Box 4
Photographs of Bateson girls		

Brunner	1907 November 28	Box 4
To John Bateson		

DePeyer, Esmé E. V.	1922 January 18, February	Box 4
To Martin Bateson		
	16	

DePeyer, Esmé E. V.	1922	Box 4
To William Bateson		

Durham, Arthur		Box 4
Obituaries		

Gray, R.	1917 December 17	Box 4
To John Bateson		

Graham, Michael	1922	Box 4
To William Bateson		

Re: Martin Bateson.

Herschel, John F. W., Sir, (John Frederick William), 1792-1871	1862 July 30	Box 4
To Richard Bateson		

Inglis, Murray	1918 November 2	Box 4
To Beatrice Durham Bateson		

Kennedy, A. J. R.	1917 December 17	Box 4
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Bateson Family Papers

To John Bateson

Kriser, Rudolf	1938	Box 4
To Beatrice Durham Bateson		

Lister, G.	1917 August 9	Box 4
To William Bateson		

Lockhart, E. C.	1921 October 21	Box 4
To Martin Bateson		

Lower, W.	1911 February 13	Box 4
To Beatrice Durham Bateson		

Merringham, Christina J.	1907 November 4	Box 4
To Edith Bateson		

Miscellaneous printed material		Box 4
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Newman, M. H. A.	1922 August-December	Box 4
To William Bateson		

Reynolds, B.	1922 June-November	Box 4
To and from William Bateson		

Re: Martin Bateson.

Tatham, Maj. G. E.	1918	Box 4
To Beatrice Durham Bateson and William Bateson		

Re: John Bateson.

Taylor, Delphy	1910 October 11, n.d.	Box 4
To Beatrice Durham Bateson		

W. Waters and Son	1922	Box 4
To Martin and William Bateson		

Re: Martin Bateson's motorcycle.

Bateson Family Papers

Wilson, Grace

1922

Box 4

To and from William Bateson

Re: Martin Bateson suicide and legacy.
