

### III

#### ESTELLE W. STEAD'S "W. T. STEAD: PERSONAL AND SPIRITUAL REMINISCENCES"\*

An interesting and illuminating glimpse into the character of W. T. Stead is given in a letter which he wrote when a twelve-year-old boy at school. Speaking of a revival which was in progress, he says:

There has been a great work going on in the school. . . . On the 18th of September the blessed work began. I obtained peace, so did six other boys. That night young G—— became serious; he has always been anything but serious. I talked seriously with him all that night, and he said that he wished he could come to Jesus. Next day I walked and talked with him a long while; at last he found peace in the afternoon. I was very pleased, and thought that God had made me the instrument of saving him, but afterward I heard him say that he had found peace through the instrumentality of A—— and that teacher I told you of. I felt this rather keenly, and still more when every boy in the school who had found peace could say he had led some to Jesus, while I who tried very much and prayerfully to turn some from their evil ways; how I walked long with them and talked to them, and apparently they took no notice at all, when another boy said just two or three words to them they would burst out crying and in a few minutes they would find peace. I know this caused great agony of spirit, that I could bring none to the Saviour.

This was the boy and this was the man. Always tremendously interested in the things of the spirit and an eager advocate of revivals, of movements, of causes, he was always tremendously concerned in having his finger in the pie. No wonder that Cecil Rhodes removed

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his name from the list of executors of his will, saying that Stead was too masterful to work with the other executors.

In reading his life one is impressed with the number of causes which Stead vehemently espoused. And in view of the commonly accepted idea that champions of new ideas are visionary and impractical souls, one is struck with the fact that throughout his career Stead's material prosperity went steadily upward as he leaped from one agitation to another, from one new movement to the next. When, at the age of twenty-three, the youngest editor in England, he took charge of the *Northern Echo*, he made the paper ring with his denunciations of the Turk on account of Bulgarian massacres; and he was as hotly pro-Russian as he was hotly anti-Turk at a time when Englishmen regarded Russia as their natural enemy. Did it hurt him? It made a marked man of him, so that in a few years he was offered the important post of assistant editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. And when, a while afterward, as editor of that journal, he conducted a campaign against white-slavers so vehemently that he was arrested, tried and sent to jail on a legal technicality, did that experience hurt him? He wrote editorials in his cell until he could return to his desk, and was more widely known and more widely read even than before. This is not to imply, however, that Stead's actions were prompted by ideas of self-advertising as a road to success. He rushed tempestuously into things because he was the kind of man who cannot be kept out; he succeeded because he had the ability that cannot be kept down.

That half of this biography is devoted to what the author terms spiritual reminiscences is not to be wondered at in view of the fact that a good share of Stead's life was given over to spiritual experiences. The unseen world affected him and fascinated him always. His belief in spiritualism, however, was of gradual growth. As a young man he had premonitions of coming events. For example, while editor of the *Northern*

*Echo* he once had a presentment that he would not continue long in that position, and he was therefore unwilling to renew his contract. Sure enough, like a bolt out of the clear sky came a totally unlooked for offer from the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Again, while assistant editor of that periodical he had a premonition that he would soon become editor-in-chief. He was laughed at, but within a few months John Morley, the editor, was unexpectedly elected to Parliament and Stead stepped into his place.

He was a man of thirty when he became interested in clairvoyance, and at one of the first séances he attended he was told that he would become "the St. Paul of Spiritualism." As he grew older he became an ardent spiritualist. Automatic writing, at which he became very proficient; séances; the investigation of ghost stories; photographing spirits; dealings with seers, crystal-gazers, mediums and hypnotists took up a great deal of his time. He never approached these things in the attitude of one who is willing to accept and believe passively; on the contrary, he was positive and aggressive in his determination to prove that his beliefs were indubitably founded on facts.

One of the most curious results of Stead's spiritualistic activities was "Julia's Bureau." Julia Ames was a young American woman with whom he had only a casual acquaintance in the course of her life. She died at the age of thirty. Yet when Stead took up automatic writing, the spirit of Julia seemed most anxious and best able to guide his hand. He wrote volumes at the dictation of Julia, and she became his spirit guide, counsellor and friend. In time, he established a sort of spirit clearing house, where those in quest of departed loved ones might try to have communication with them, and where spirits might have unusual facilities for getting in touch with those left behind. The bureau was conducted with a great deal of formality, with quantities of printed forms and a staff of high-salaried mediums. This was Julia's Bureau. It

was an expensive affair, costing the first year ten thousand dollars.

Stead writes that Julia had for some time urged the establishment of the Bureau, but he had hesitated, on account of the expense. At this juncture William Randolph Hearst offered him two thousand five hundred dollars a year for his services as London correspondent.

"Well," said Stead to the spirit of Julia, "let's make it doubles or quits? If it's doubles, we'll start the Bureau."

Accordingly he cabled to Hearst that he would take the position for five thousand dollars a year; his offer was accepted; and the Bureau got under way.

What all the spirit-writing, spirit-rapping, spirit-hunting that occupied so much of his time meant to Stead is revealed in a little speech, beautiful in its sincerity and pathos, which he made after the death of his eldest son.

Eighteen months ago my eldest son passed into the other world. I heard his first cry as a new-born infant. I caught his last sigh as he passed into the unseen. I had always said I would never make my final pronouncement on the truth of Spiritualism until some one near and dear in my own family passed into the great beyond. Then I should know whether Spiritualism stood the test of a great bereavement, bringing life and immortality to light. And I am here to tell you that the reality of my son's continued existence, and of his tender care for me, have annulled the bitterness of death. . . . He is here to-night beside me. I am as sure of that as I am of the fact that I am speaking to you.

As a chronicle of Stead's activities, a history of the things he did, this biography is noticeably deficient. It tells little of his family life, and little of his work in the world. After reading it, one knows very little about the position that Stead occupied in the world of journalism; and has only a vague idea of his influence as an editor and author; and one could not mention by title the books he wrote, much less give the order of their importance. *If Christ Came to Chicago*, by which he is perhaps best

known in this country, is dismissed in a brief paragraph. Also the biography lacks order and proportion. Chapters are devoted to incidents, while years are passed over in a sentence.

But as a picture of the kind of man he was, this life of Stead is excellent. It achieves the result by the simple expedient of using Stead's own words to tell his own story and draw his own picture—from letters, memoranda, editorials and books. Says Stead:

I know I shall be a great boss, bigger than anybody thinks. I know I always jump to conclusions; I never ponder; when I do I go wrong.

Again:

I went to St. Petersburg, and was received by the Emperor Alexander III at an interview which has contributed not a little to allay the fear of an armed conflict.

And again:

The Pope, if up to date, ought to publish the *Review of Reviews*, which is an attempt to render accessible to all the best thoughts to be found in the periodical literature of the world. Before founding the *Review* I went to Rome to see what chance there was of the Pope undertaking the task. Finding there was none, I did it myself.

After the Jameson Raid he regretted that Cecil Rhodes, who was his warm admirer and friend, was not sent to jail, and told him so quite frankly. And late in life he obtained an interview with the Sultan of Turkey with the express object of delivering to that potentate a lecture on his duties and responsibilities. And he delivered it, to the bewilderment of the Sultan. Speaking of this odd interview Stead says:

After all, truth is truth, and if you are dead certain that you are right, and see dangers to which your fellow-man is blind, it is surely your duty, under penalty of being responsible for your silence, to warn him of his peril.

A tempestuous, determined, stubborn man, who took very seriously his self-appointed task of setting the world, including the Czar, the Pope and the Sul-

tan, to rights. He went down to death with the *Titanic*. But a few weeks later, according to the author of his biography:

Three weeks after his passing he came to the Upper Room in the Inner Sanctuary of Julia's Bureau. In that room, where he had himself so often spoken of the life to come and conversed with those who had already passed onward, he—the beloved Chief—came and spoke to those who prayed and waited, knowing he would come. Clearly he showed his face that all might see, and as it faded into darkness—his voice rang through the room and spoke, saying: "All I told you is true. . . ."

Thus this remarkable biography comes to a stop, but not to an end.

Arthur M. Chase.