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GEORGE MOORE, W. T. STEAD, AND THE BOER WAR

by Joseph O. Baylen

George Moore's activities during the Boer War (1899-1902) have been mentioned by his more recent biographers in brief notes which appear to dismiss Moore's attitude toward the conflict as a temporary abberration conditioned by his Irish "adventures." Thus, Malcolm Brown has declared that at the outbreak of the war, Moore,

Prompted by Yeats, . . . had just learned to identify England with "vulgarity and materialism" His hatred of England suddenly flared into a violence totally out of proportion to his usual response to such issues. . . . But about the Boer he could not be silenced, and he spent his days insulting old friends who disagreed with him, making scenes in public places, and writing inflamatory letters to the newspapers. . . . 1

Even more significant, especially in the light of Moore's contribution to the propaganda of the so-called "pro-Boers" who opposed the war, is Joseph Hone's account that in early November, 1900,

[Moore] received a letter from Colonel [Maurice] Moore telling him of the ruthless orders given to British troops [in South Africa] to combat the Boers in their guerrilla warfare. He spoke to W. T. Stead of a letter which he had had from the front. But Stead could do nothing, because Moore would not give him

¹Malcolm Brown, George Moore: A Reconsideration (Seattle, 1955), p. 149. My italics.

the writer's name. Lest he might get his brother into trouble he refused to surrender the manuscript, but finally took it to Dublin and dictated the contents to a stenographer of the Freeman's Journal. The Times copied the account; two newspapers at the Cape reproduced The Times article, and their editors were sentenced to imprisonment. . . .²

However, a study of Moore's correspondence with W. T. Stead and of contemporary literature not only necessitates an alteration of Hone's version, but also demonstrates the serious consequences which resulted from Moore's intervention in the struggle between the anti-Boers and the pro-Boers.

Moore's acquaintance with Stead, the apostle of the "New Journalism," dates from the period 1883-1890, when Stead edited the *Pall Mall Gazette* and made it the most prominent sensationalist journal in London.³ Although Stead had published some of Moore's articles on French literature in 1884 and, somewhat later, Moore's enthusiastic review of Huysmans' *A Rebours*,⁴ they did not come into close contact until Stead had left the *Pall Mall Gazette* and founded the *Review of Reviews* in 1890.

When Moore, not long after the appearance of *Esther Waters* in 1894, was engaged in constructing the frame of reference for *Evelyn Innes*, he turned to Stead for assistance. Motivated by Stead's warm admiration of his work and, apparently, Moore's knowledge of Stead's close association with a lady who possessed an intimate knowledge of conventual life,⁵ Moore wrote to Stead:

 $^{^2 \}mbox{Joseph}$ Hone, The Life of George Moore (New York, 1936), p. 225. My italics.

On the life and career of W. T. Stead (1849-1912), see Frederic Whyte, Life of W. T. Stead (2 vols.; London, 1924); J. W. Robertson Scott, The Life and Death of a Newspaper . . . (London, 1952), pp. 72-259; Estelle W. Stead, My Father: Personal and Spiritual Reminiscences (London, 1913); Joseph O. Baylen, "W. T. Stead, Apologist for Imperial Russia, 1870-1880," Gazette. International Journal for Mass Communications Studies [Amsterdam], VI (1960), 281-299; Joseph O. Baylen, "Meredith and Stead: Three Unpublished Letters," Huntington Library Quarterly, XXIV (1960), 47-57; Joseph O. Baylen and Patrick G. Hogan, Jr., "W. T. Stead on the Art of Public Speaking," Quarterly Journal of Speech, XLIII (1957), 133ff; Joseph O. Baylen and Robert B. Holland, "Whitman, W. T. Stead, and the Pall Mall Gazette, 1886-87," American Literature, XXXIII (1961), 68-72.

⁴Hone, pp. 103, 119.

⁵In this direction, it is difficult to understand Malcolm Brown's assertion that Moore "sought help in his difficulty from the editor W. T. Stead, for reasons that remain mysterious. . . ." Brown, p .144.

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I am considering a story the great part of which passes in a convent of cloistered nuns.... So I should like to meet some one who had been in a convent, a professed nun would be best of all. That of course would be impossible to obtain, but one who had served her novitiate might be.... Your experience is so varied that you may know such a person as I am in quest of. If you do you will do me a service by putting me in communication with her..... 6

Stead complied with the request by introducing Mrs. Virginia Crawford to Moore.⁷ He eagerly accepted her service and did not cavil at employing a lady who, as the confessed adulterous wife in the notorious Crawford divorce case (1885-1886), had caused the ruin of Gladstone's alleged heir-apparent in the Liberal Party, Sir Charles Dilke.⁸ Indeed, with her detailed knowledge of convents, she proved an invaluable assistant who provided much of the material which Moore used in *Evelyn Innes* and *Sister Teresa* and did the literary research for his subsequent productions.⁹ It was a happy association which lasted from 1895 until Moore's death in 1933.¹⁰

Mrs. Crawford was the link which brought Stead and Moore together in 1895 for their first face to face conversation. Moore came to the *Review of Reviews* office to thank Stead personally for his help and, as Grant Richards later recalled, "they sat facing one another . . . and they talked out of the fulness of their

⁶Moore to Stead [October ?, 1894], as published in Grant Richards, *Memories of a Misspent Youth*, 1872-1896 (London, 1932), pp. 264-265. The two undated letters from Moore which Richards (who was Stead's editorial assistant on the staff of the *Review of Reviews* from 1890 to 1896) published are not among the Stead Papers.

[&]quot;Ibid., pp. 265-266.

⁸On the life and career of Mrs. Virginia Crawford (1853-1948), her role in the Crawford case and Dilke scandal, and Stead's advocacy of her cause as a "repentant Magdalen," see Francis Bywater, "Manning, Dilke and Virginia Crawford: The Unsolved Question," Tablet, CCXIII (1959), 249-250; B. B. C., "Virginia Crawford," People and Freedom, No. 108 (November-December, 1948), p. 1; Roy Jenkins, Sir Charles Dilke: A Victorian Tragedy (London, 1958), pp. 238-248, 295, 327ff; also the very interesting novel based upon the "Dilke-Crawford affair" by Betty Askwith, The Tangled Webb (London, 1960).

⁹Hone, pp. 354, 357; Bywater, p. 250.

¹⁰See V. M. Crawford, "George Moore: Letters of His Last Years," *London Mercury*, XXXV (1936), 133-139. It was a pleasant partnership even though "all the work done for Moore was subordinate to her charitable work, and Moore once wrote rebuking her for neglecting him, reminding her that he *paid* for her assistance!" Bywater, p. 250.

hearts...."11 Yet, although they profoundly impressed each other, their meeting did not result in a close and intimate friendship because "George Moore spoiled his chances of becoming one of Stead's favourites by refusing to subscribe to Stead's [strong Nonconformist idea of sexual morality. . . . "12 And so, during the next five years, their contacts were slight and they were not brought together again until after the outbreak of the Boer War.

The conflict in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 became a matter of personal concern for Stead largely as a result of a strong sense of guilt for his role in shaping the forces which led to the war. As an ardent advocate of the New Imperialism, he had popularized in the Pall Mall Gazette and the Review of Reviews the grandiose ideas and schemes of his close friend, Cecil Rhodes, and had advanced the appointment of his former Pall Mall colleague, Sir Alfred Milner, as High Commissioner in South Africa.¹³ But, as a thoroughly honest Nonconformist liberal, Stead could not support the policies of Rhodes and Milner by advocating a war against the Boers which he deemed a moral evil and the work of his bête noire, Joseph Chamberlain. In a sense, his dilemma was that of "nonconformist liberalism generally seeking, at the turn of the century, to reconcile conscience and imperialism. . . . "14 Since he could not square his ethical convictions with the imperialism of his friends, Stead turned against them.

From its beginning to its end, Stead fought the war with the physical and moral courage of a man possessed. No sacrifice was too great-not even his fortune, family, and personal safety-in the struggle which he waged against the Government and the tide of public opinion. A rare combination of missionary zeal and skill as journalist made him "the most effective of Liberal [anti-war] propagandists. . . . "15 Indeed, his articles in the Review of Reviews and his weekly War against War in South Africa, his broadsheets, his circular letters, and his pamphlets on the injustice of the war and on the alleged misconduct of British troops in South Africa

¹¹Richards, p. 266.

¹²Ibid.

¹⁸See Joseph O. Baylen, "W. T. Stead and the Boer War: The Irony of Idealism," The Canadian Historical Review, XL (1959), 304-314; W. T. Stead, The Last Will and Testament of Cecil Rhodes... (London, 1902), passim; W. T. Stead, The Best or Worst of Empires: Which? (London, 1906), pp. 108-109.

¹⁴Baylen, "W. T. Stead and the Boer War: The Irony of Idealism," p. 314.
¹⁵John S. Galbraith, "The Pamphlet Campaign on the Boer War," *Journal of Modern History*, XXIV (1952), 119 and n.

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caused him to be considered one of the most formidable opponents of the Chamberlain-Salisbury Ministry and its jingo supporters. 16 And, it was in his battle for the Boers that Stead found unexpected support from George Moore.

Stead's anti-war campaign reached its peak when, in early November, 1900, Moore communicated to him a letter which he had received from his brother, Colonel Maurice Moore, then serving with Lord Kitchener's forces in South Africa. After having informed Stead of the nature of the letter, Moore forwarded on November 4,17 a copy with the following note:

Dear Mr. Stead

I send the article. It should be signed "An Officer in Command." It is written by a personal friend-I have a brother, some cousins, and some friends in South Africa. I will tell you who the writer is if you insist but perhaps it will be well enough to say that I take the responsibility and am certain that everything in the article is true.

> Always sincerely George Moore¹⁸

The "article" was a blistering attack on Kitchener's methods in crushing Boer resistance. It told of the burning of homes and churches, wholesale looting, outrages against Boer women, and, above all, the general's order that punitive measures were to be carried out against the families and kin of all Boers engaged in guerrilla or commando warfare. 19

¹⁶See Stead's "The Assassin": or, St. George to the Rescue! (London, 1896); Joseph Chamberlain: Conspirator or Statesman (London, 1899); The Scandal of the South African Committee (London, 1900); The Candidates for Cain (London, 1900); The War in South Africa, 1899-19-?, How Not to Make Peace; Evidence as to Homestead Burning Collected and Examined by W. T. Stead (London, December, 1900); The War in South Africa, 1899-19-?, "Methods of Barbarism" (London, 1901).

Methods of Barbarism (London, 1901).

The Moore to Stead, Saturday [November 4, 1900]. Stead Papers. The date of this letter was determined on the basis of Stead's statement that Moore had received his brother's first letter "at the beginning of November," the fact that it was published by Stead as a broadsheet before November 7, and the fact that the first Saturday in November, 1900, fell upon the fourth day of the month. See Table 25 of C. R. Cheney, ed. Handbook of Dates for Students of English History (London, 1948), pp. 132-133.

In mindebted to Miss Estelle W. Stead and Mr. W. K. Stead for permission to study and publish the letters from Moore and others in this study from the Stead Papers.

¹⁹See Colonel Moore's first letter as published in Stead's The War in South Africa, 1899-19-P, How Not to Make Peace; Evidence as to Homestead Burning Collected and Examined by W. T. Stead (London, December, 1900), pp. 41-50, hereafter cited as Evidence as to Homestead Burning.

Stead immediately published the letter, under the auspices of the "Stop-the-War Committee," as a broadsheet with the titles of "Hell Let Loose" and "How We Are Waging War in South Africa" and in a more detailed pamphlet.²⁰ Nor was this all. On November 7, he dispatched the broadsheet to clergymen of all faiths with a circular letter in which he appealed to them

to read this letter from a "British Officer in the Field," and to consider whether, if things are as they are described, the time has come for prompt and vigorous action . . . [in] resisting all temptations to revert to the savagery of practices which civilization has branded as inhuman. . . . The burning of homesteads, the wholesale plunder of private property, the "denuding" of whole districts of food, the compulsion of women and girls to choose degradation or death—for all these things you and I are responsible before God and Man. 21

As a storm of abuse fell upon Stead for impugning the good name of the British army and the popular hero, Kitchener, and demands were made for him to substantiate his evidence by revealing his source of information and the identity of the "British Officer in the Field,"²² Stead prepared to bring out another pamphlet which would "examine all the evidence as to the conduct of our armies in the light of the Hague Convention's Rules of War."²³ To James Bryce, one of the more outspoken leaders of the Liberal party's anti-war faction, Stead wrote: "You may be interested to know that I have received another letter from the British Officer in the Field, which I think will advance matters somewhat."²⁴ Only the day before, Moore had again written:

Dear Mr. Stead,

I have received last night another article from South Africa—From "An Officer in the Field." I have only

 $^{^{20}}$ [W. T. Stead], The New War in South Africa and How It Is Being Carried On: Letter from an Officer in the Field (London [November, 1900]), 19pp.

 $^{^{\}rm si}{\rm Stead}$'s circular letter, British Atrocities in South Africa: An Appeal to the Christian Church, November 7, 1900. Stead Papers.

 $^{^{22}\}mathrm{Cf.}$ Colonel B. Duff, "What Is Now Being Done in South Africa": A Reply (London, November 29, 1900), 14pp.

 $^{^{28}\}mathrm{Stead}$ to James Bryce, November 26, 1900, Bryce Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford.

²⁴Ibid. My italics.

read the first few pages—I hate reading M's ms.—but I gather from what I read that the article is a tremendous indictment and coming after the first I cannot doubt that it will affect the object we have in view. Please send me a telegram when I can see you for I think that this is one of the highest importance. I should like to speak to you about one or two things.

Always sincerely yours. George Moore 25

This was, indeed, "a tremendous indictment" of the Government's prosecution of the war in South Africa and one destined to provoke even more trouble for Stead. The essence of the charges against the Government's policy was summed up in Colonel Moore's statement: "I am so firmly convinced that, apart from any sentiments of humanity, the policy which is being pursued is so certain to bring difficulty and . . . ruin on the Empire, that exposure has become a lesser evil than concealment."²⁶ Stead took him at his word and included the second letter in the pamphlet which he was hurrying to press. But Moore apparently believed that, because of its importance, the "indictment" should be publicized before its appearance in the pamphlet. It was, undoubtedly, with this in mind that he wrote to Stead on November 28:

Dear Mr. Stead.

I spoke last night to [H. W.] Massingham [London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian*] about the last communication—I read it to him and he begged me to let him have it for publication in the *Manchester Guardian*. Of course you know best and I will be guided by you. But do you think we can do better than to publish at once in the *MG*? He thinks the letter of the first importance. It proves that the Government contemplated a murderous policy in South Africa.

Always sincerely yours, George Moore²⁷

Stead's journalistic instinct impelled him to restrain Moore. There was really no need to seek any further publicity for the

²⁵Moore to Stead, November 25 [1900], Stead Papers.

²⁶See Colonel Moore's letter as published with captions in Stead, *Evidence* as to Homestead Burning, pp. 50-58.

²⁷Moore to Stead, Wednesday morning [November 28, 1901], Stead Papers.

second letter because it received more than enough with the publication of Stead's pamphlet, Evidence as to Homestead Burning..., during the first week of December. On December 4, Stead forwarded a copy to Bryce with the comment: "The evidence seems to me absolutely overwhelming, and I am extremely glad that I have been able to get it all within the covers of the pamphlet."²⁸ He now proposed to use the evidence to promote "an International Memorial to be signed in all countries on the Continent" as "a solemn protest against the reversion to barbarous practices in the conduct of war by Great Britain in South Africa..."²⁹

The publication of the pamphlet merely increased the ire and number of Stead's critics. Not even his assurances that "The British officer in the field' is not anonymous in the sense of being unknown" and that he could vouch "to his being what his pseudonym describes him—a fully commissioned officer . . . in Her Majesty's Army . . ."⁸⁰ would satisfy Stead's detractors. The letters from South Africa were denounced as "a fine mixture of falsehood and bad feeling" inspired by the fertile imagination of Stead. He was accused of withholding the name of the officer because "there ain't [sic] no such person . . . if he be not Mr. Stead himself, then he is another man of the same name. . ."³¹ But neither these attacks on his honor nor the damage which they wrought on his reputation could force Stead to disclose either the source of his information or the identity of the correspondent in South Africa.

In early January, 1901, Moore received another letter from South Africa and, shortly thereafter, informed Stead of its contents. The first notification was followed by another letter in which he declared:

Dear Mr. Stead

I should have written to you about the publication

²⁸Stead to Bryce, December 4, 1900. Bryce Papers.

²⁹Stead to Bryce, December 7, 1900. Ibid.

³⁰ Stead. Evidence as to Homestead Burning, p. 41.

Si"Mr. Stead's Reckless Charges," Blackwood's Magazine, CLXVIII (December, 1900), 920. As late as 1933, the editor of Lord Milner's papers relating to his work in South Africa was convinced that Stead had carried on "A violent campaign of infamous calumny against British troops" by spreading "lies" in the form of "a letter purporting to have been written by a British Officer in Command, " Cecil Headlam, ed. The Milner Papers: South Africa, 1897-1905 (London, 1931-33), II, 174-175, hereafter cited as The Milner Papers.

from an officer in command. I know that I ought to have done so but I fear great difficulty in writing letters. I hope you will excuse my negligence, no not negligence—weakness. I hope to see you soon.

Always sincerely yours George Moore³²

The communication which Moore now passed on to Stead was particularly explosive because, in describing Kitchener's final campaign against General DeWet's Boer *commandos*, Colonel Moore charged that Kitchener had issued secret orders to his troops to take no prisoners.³³

Convinced that Kitchener was "outheroding Herod" by "deliberately" plotting "the wholesale massacre of DeWet and his men,"34 Stead had fired off another broadsheet, remonstrated to Lord Roberts (the Commander-in-Chief in the War Office), and pressed such anti-war editors as Ernest Parke of the London Morning Leader and Arthur Pearson of the London Daily Express to publicize the letter. Lord Roberts replied that while he accepted Stead's statement that the anonymous source of information was really "an officer of good standing and unblemished repute," he rejected as absolutely false the assertion that Kitchener had issued the order in question.35 Parke refused to publish the letter on the grounds that neither he nor Stead could expect their "opponents" to believe statements issued "on the authority of an unnamed British officer. . . . "36 Similarly, Pearson asked: "Do I understand . . . that you positively assert that no portion of the letter published as from an 'Officer Commanding in South Africa' . . . reached you from any other source?"37

⁸²Moore to Stead [January ?, 1901]. Stead Papers.

^{*}See excerpts of Colonel Moore's third letter as published in Stead's "How We Are Waging War in Africa. Correspondence with the Commander-in-Chief," Review of Reviews, XXIII (February, 1901), 154-155.

²⁴Stead to the Baroness von Suttner, January 8, 1901. Suttner-Fried Collection, United Nations Library, Geneva, Switzerland.

²⁵Stead to Lord Roberts, January 8, 1901, copy, and Lord Roberts to Stead, January 17, 1901. Stead Papers. When Stead attempted to press the issue further, Roberts' staff informed him: "Lord Roberts . . . regrets that he cannot continue a discussion as to the statements made by your anonymous correspondent." Colonel Conway to Stead, January 23, 1901. *Ibid.* The correspondence with Lord Roberts was also cited in Stead's "How We Are Waging War in Africa. Correspondence with the Commander-in-Chief," pp. 154-155.

⁸⁶Ernest Parke to Stead, January 9 and January 12, 1901. Stead Papers.

³⁷Arthur Pearson to Stead, January 10, 1901, *Ibid*.

Meanwhile, Moore had acted on his own to secure the widest publicity for his brother's third letter. After the *Daily Chronicle* in London had refused to publish the communication,³⁸ he pressed it on the editor of *Freeman's Journal* in Dublin who printed the letter on January 15, with a prefatory statement to the effect that "The recipient of the letter is a well-known gentleman, who has given us proof of his bona fides, and in whom we have implicit confidence." When *The Times* reprinted the letter three days later,⁴⁰ Moore succeeded where Stead had failed: the publication of the charges in the London papers.

The publication of the letter in London not only stirred further speculation as to the identity of the "British Officer in the Field," but had some serious repercussions in South Africa. Thus, in late January, a notice appeared in the *Daily Express* which intimated that the officer mentioned by Stead was a Salvation Army officer. Stead, an ardent friend of the Salvation Army since the 1870's, quickly secured from Pearson the insertion of his denial and hotly denounced the allegation in his *Review of Reviews* as "a lie and a slanderous falsehood." But the battle continued to rage as Stead was deluged with abusive letters, most of which conveyed sentiment similar to the following:

Your anonymous "British Officer" is a false scoundrel, and you are far more to blame than he is for encouraging him to defame his fellow-countrymen. . . . I will not believe a genuine British officer would be such a dastard. . . 42

The publicity given to the charges against Kitchener in England caused great discomfort to the authorities in South Africa.⁴³ Even Stead's worst enemies conceded that he had won many friends

⁸⁸See Alfred Marks (Secretary of the Stop-the-War Committee) to Stead, January 19, 1901. Stead Papers. There was also a hint that such a letter had been offered to the *Daily Chronicle*. See *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 18, 1901.

³⁹Freeman's Journal, January 15, 1901.

⁴⁰The Times, January 18, 1901. See also the memorial of the South African Conciliation Committee in London calling the attention of Lord Roberts and the Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, to the charges against Kitchener. *Ibid.*, January 19, 1901.

⁴¹Miss E. von Rosen to Stead, January 28, 1901, and Pearson to Stead, January 31, 1901. Stead Papers; Stead, "How We Are Waging War in Africa. Correspondence with the Commander-in-Chief," p. 155.

⁴²W. Culling Gage to Stead, February 22, 1901. Stead Papers.

⁴³See Sir Alfred Milner to Princess Catherine Radziwill, February 2, 1901, copy. Milner Papers, New College, Oxford.

among the Afrikaners in South Africa and that his publications could be found "in almost every house in Cape Colony."44 Thus, not long after Moore had given his brother's third letter to Stead. he forwarded a copy to Edward Cartwright, the editor of the antiwar South African News in Cape Town, who hurried it into print. 45 Kitchener immediately denied the accusations of the "British Officer" and, in spite of Cartwright's publication of the general's denial, the editor was arraigned by the authorities for "defamatory libel." In the trial which followed during April, Cartwright pleaded innocent on the grounds that (1) he had had "Mr. Stead's assurance that his correspondent, the writer of the letter, was an officer in Her Majesty's service" and (2) he had merely printed a letter which had been published freely by some of the most respected newspapers and periodicals in England.46 Nevertheless, the unfortunate Cartwright was sentenced to a year in prison for defamatory libel. Shortly thereafter, the Government issued a list of "Prohibited Papers and Books" in a Martial Law Notice which proscribed virtually all of Stead's publications.47

In England, some among the pro-Boers and Nonconformists upbraided Stead for his responsibility in causing the imprisonment of Cartwright. Thus, the Secretary of the Wesleyan Reform Union reminded Stead that since Cartwright's conviction had resulted from his inability to prove the authenticity of "the alleged British Officer's letter," it was unfair either for Stead or the South African Conciliation Committee to withhold evidence as to "the genuineness of the letter, to say nothing and so allow Mr. Cartwright to suffer." Have you, he asked of Stead, the evidence? "If you haven't, then why persist in referring to it as if the whole letter was the gospel truth . . . ?"⁴⁸

But, true to the journalist canon pertaining to the protection of news sources, Stead continued to remain silent. He believed in George Moore and shielded him from much of the obloquy which had resulted from his use of the inflammatory material which he had obtained from Moore. In his own way, each satisfied the dictates of his conscience and justified his trust in the other. Even

⁴⁴Headlam, The Milner Papers, II, p. 175.

⁴⁵South African News, February 6, 1901.

⁴⁸The Imprisonment of Mr. Cartwright (London, 1901), pp. 4, 7-8.

⁴⁷Frederic Mackarness, Martial Law in the Cape Colony during 1901 (London, 1901), p. 21.

⁴⁸A. Bates to Stead, May 23, 1901. Stead Papers.

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though their brief collaboration ended amicably, there were no further intimate contacts between the two men. Each went his own way; Stead to die on the *Titanic* in 1912 and Moore to greater things in his art.