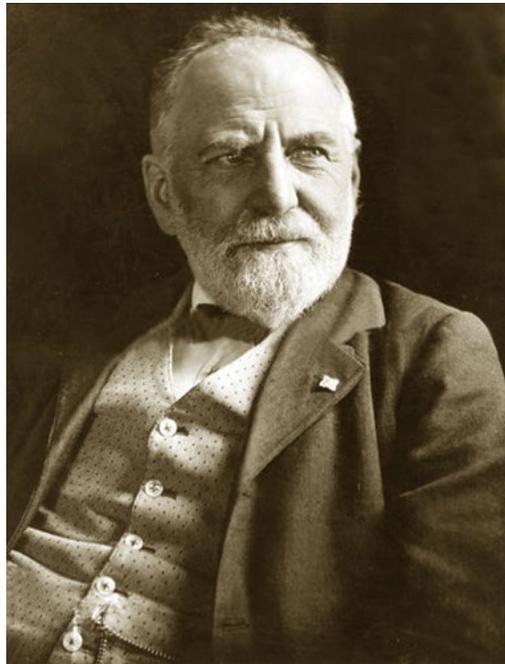
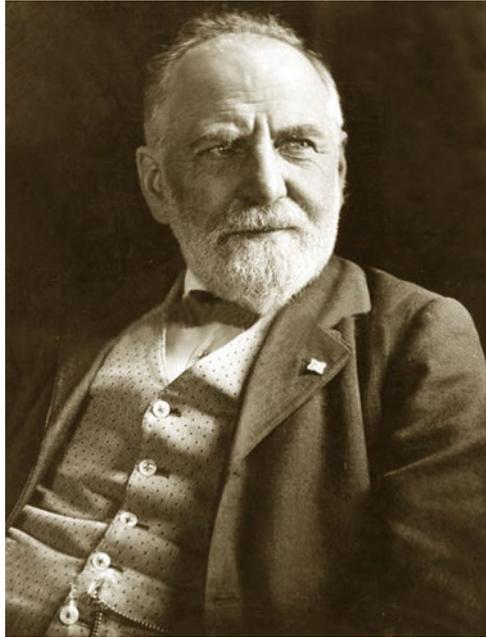


A QUIET SEA
RMS TITANIC



WILLIAM STEAD
REFORMER

TITANIC: WILLIAM THOMAS STEAD REFORMER



William Stead
Credit: Prabook.com

William Stead was born in 1849 in Embleton, England. His father was a poor but well-liked minister. His mother, the well-educated daughter of a farmer, was a social activist. (She petitioned to ensure civil rights for women imprisoned under the 1864-1869 Contagious Diseases Acts, which addressed venereal disease in the military. Her activism, and that of others, led to repeal of the acts in 1886 and greatly influenced Stead, who later fought for women's emancipation.) Home-schooled, Stead became well-versed in the Holy Scripture and Latin. In 1862, after a brief formal education, he was apprenticed as a clerk to a merchant's counting house in Newcastle upon Tyne.

WIGAN ELECTION.
A PUBLIC
MEETING
WILL BE HELD ON
THURSDAY, JAN. 6th, 1881,
IN THE
PUBLIC HALL, KING STREET,
TO PROMOTE THE UNCONDITIONAL REPEAL
OF THE
CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS
RELATING TO WOMEN.
CHAIR TO BE TAKEN AT 8 O'CLOCK.
THE MEETING WILL BE ADDRESSED BY
J. BIRBECK NEVINS, Esq., M.D.
OF LIVERPOOL;
T. CARSON, Esq., M.R.C.S.I.
OF LIVERPOOL;
WILLIAM T. SWAN, Esq.
OF LONDON, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE NORTHERN COUNTIES LEAGUE FOR THE
ABOLITION OF STATE REGULATION OF VICE.
EDMUND JONES,
PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL WORKMEN'S LEAGUE FOR REPEAL OF THE
CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS.
ELECTORS! No question upon which either Mr.
LANCASTER or Mr. POWELL will have to record his
Vote, if returned to Parliament, is of greater importance
than whether the one-sided, unjust, and unconstitutional
CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS, 1866-9, should continue
to disgrace our Statute Book, or be unconditionally repealed.
Every Voter, Liberal or Conservative, is earnestly invited.
WALSLEY PRINTED, 2, ALLEGRA, WIGAN.

Anti-Contagious Act Election Poster 1881
Credit: Flicker

By 1870, Stead was a respected investigative journalist and was contributing articles to the liberal newspaper "Northern Echo." His work was lauded, and he became editor the following year. He married Emma Wilson in

1873, and the couple had six children. By 1880, he moved to London, where he worked for the "Pall Mall Gazette" and turned his pen toward the barbarity of Turkey in the massacre of Bulgarians.

Stead engaged in numerous actions against injustice toward women and children. In 1870s Britain, the age of consent for a young girl was 13. Kidnapping was rife, as was the sale of daughters by economically desperate parents, and the luring of impoverished girls into brothels. In 1885, to illustrate the ease of buying a young girl, Stead arranged for three women to pose as prostitutes in brothels. A former brothel owner heard of a destitute mother looking to hire out her daughter and arranged for the girl, Eliza Armstrong, to be taken to a high-end brothel where she was lightly drugged before the arranged purchase. Disguised as a customer, Stead entered her room and revived her from her drugged state, whereupon she screamed. Following the pre-arranged script, Stead fled. The girl was removed from the brothel by a Salvation Army charity worker and taken to France for safekeeping. Stead then wrote "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon," to expose the crime of sexual exploitation of children. His article resulted in changes in the unenforced Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885, which raised the age of consent from 13 to 16.

Because Stead had not secured the consent of the girl's father for her purchase, he was convicted on this technicality and sent to prison for 3 months. Stead was denounced in the press as trading in pornography, but many reformers, including a Cardinal, stood up for him and praised his actions. The Eliza Armstrong case inspired the novels "Pygmalion" (Eliza Doolittle, street urchin) and "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (sexual predation and violence). Once released from prison, the undaunted Stead resumed his writing and transformed the "Pall Mall Gazette" into a force for social and political change. He established the well-regarded "Review of Reviews" in 1890. Still, his reputation suffered, and his interest in mysticism and anti-war beliefs made him unpopular. Nevertheless, he continued to write against war and tyranny.

STEAD'S CONTEMPORARIES

More politically and socially acceptable in his crusade to stamp out smut and vice was Anthony Comstock (1844-1915). Comstock was a special agent of The New York State Suppression of Vice and had the authority to inspect and confiscate items sent through the mail. His anti-vice crusade conflated obscenity with contraception, and as a result, mailing birth control and family planning information through the US Postal Service became illegal. His pursuit of stamping out what he considered obscene material from those he judged to be smut dealers resulted in as many as 15 suicides, including that of the well-known birth control advocate and abortionist Madam Restell.



Anthony Comstock (1844 -1915)
Credit: Wiki Commons

Comstock pursued Freethinkers such as Ezra Heywood, sisters Victoria and Tennie Woodhull, Ida Craddock and others who provided birth control information and “cleansing” syringes to married women who became pregnant after suffering marital rape or didn’t want to bear any more children. A number of activists were imprisoned during his unforgiving campaign. His political power rising, Congress passed the Comstock Act in 1873. This defined contraceptives, birth control information and abortifacient drugs as obscene and illegal. Penalties for violating the act could be as much as 5 years in prison and a \$2,000 fine. In 1912, Comstock prevented the distribution of Margaret Sanger’s birth control pamphlet, “Family Limitations.” Learning of her impending arrest by Comstock, she fled to England. Undeterred, Comstock obtained a copy from her husband, William, and arrested him. While attending the 1915 International Purity Conference in San Francisco, Comstock became ill with pneumonia and died at home in Summit, NJ. One obituary reported that in his possession was pornographic material confiscated throughout his anti-vice career. The Comstock Laws were enforced for more than 90 years, until nullified by the 1965 Griswold vs Connecticut Supreme Court decision.

A contemporary who shared Stead’s progressive ideas and spiritual beliefs was Ida Celanire Craddock (1857-1902). In the latter half of the 19th century, advances in science, philosophy and progressive thought called into question long-standing beliefs around women’s individual rights. Questioning these beliefs was perceived as a threat to social stability.



Ida C. Craddock
Credit: Wiki Commons

Ida Craddock, raised in an upper middle-class home by her religious, widowed mother, devoured knowledge from a young age. She spoke five languages and sought to enter the University of Pennsylvania. She took the grueling 4-day written and oral entrance exams and passed with high marks, but her admission was thwarted by an Episcopalian bishop on the university’s board. To support herself, she taught stenography at a charity school for orphans. Eschewing her religious upbringing, she delved into spiritualism and freethinking and the Church of Yoga and Theosophy (knowing God through spiritual ecstasy); her studies of sexual roots were rare at the time. Concerned about the brutality of marital rape and what she considered sexual slavery in marriage, Craddock published pamphlets and counseled husbands and wives, encouraging them to consider the presence of a spiritual God during intimate moments. However, she was reserved in her support of homosexuality. She rejected numerous suitors, although she mourned the death of a “spirit husband.” Her mother thought her insane and attempted to have her committed.

In 1893, Craddock learned of Anthony Comstock’s condemnation of the performance of Little Egypt, a belly dancer at the Chicago Exposition. The controversy piqued her interest, and she attended the performance, writing in support of Little Egypt. Her sexologist activities and endorsement of Little Egypt caught Comstock’s attention, and he wanted Craddock arrested and imprisoned. After a failed plea bargain by attorney Clarence Darrow, her books were burned and she fled to Washington, DC but was expelled from the city.

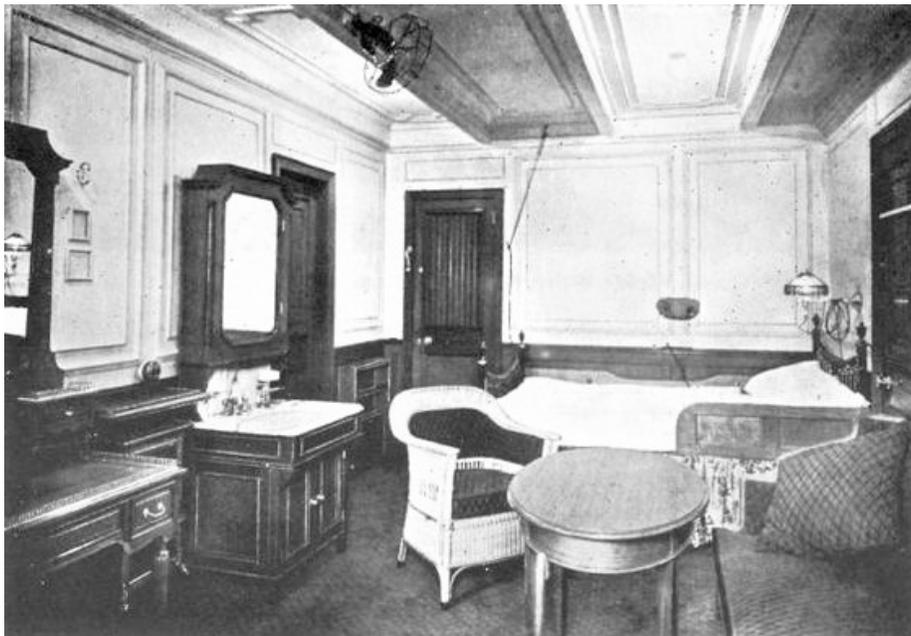


Little Egypt
Credit: Wikipedia

In need of sanctuary, Craddock sent her writings to British reformer William Stead in 1895 and secured passage to London. Stead employed Craddock for 2 years, ensuring that her writings and papers were preserved. Craddock remained passionate about continuing her work in America and moved to New York in 1902. She was again arrested for “debauching the minds of the young.” Comstock, whom she openly considered a pervert, confiscated her pamphlets in the mail and had her sent to a workhouse for 3 months. Facing 5 years in prison, she was temporarily released to her home to await sentencing on federal charges. Rather than be imprisoned, Craddock committed suicide by inhaling illuminating gas and cutting her wrist. A note she left to her mother stated, “I maintain my right to die as I have lived, a free woman.”

ON TITANIC

Because of his continuing antiwar efforts, which included publication of the weekly paper, “War against War,” Stead was considered a candidate for the 1912 Nobel Peace Prize. President William Howard Taft invited him to speak at the International Conference on World Peace and International Arbitration at Carnegie Hall in New York City on April 21, 1912. Stead accepted and boarded Titanic in Southampton. His cabin was on C-Deck, Steward Andrew Cunningham later testified at the post sinking hearings that Stead was in cabin C-89.



Cabin on Titanic similar to Stead's
Credit: Pinterest

Personable, gregarious and a great conversationalist, Stead entertained his dinner companions with tales of his adventures. He probably dined in the clubby atmosphere of the a la carte restaurant, exchanging pleasantries and ideas with other First-Class passengers.



A la Carte Restaurant
Credit: Wiki Commons

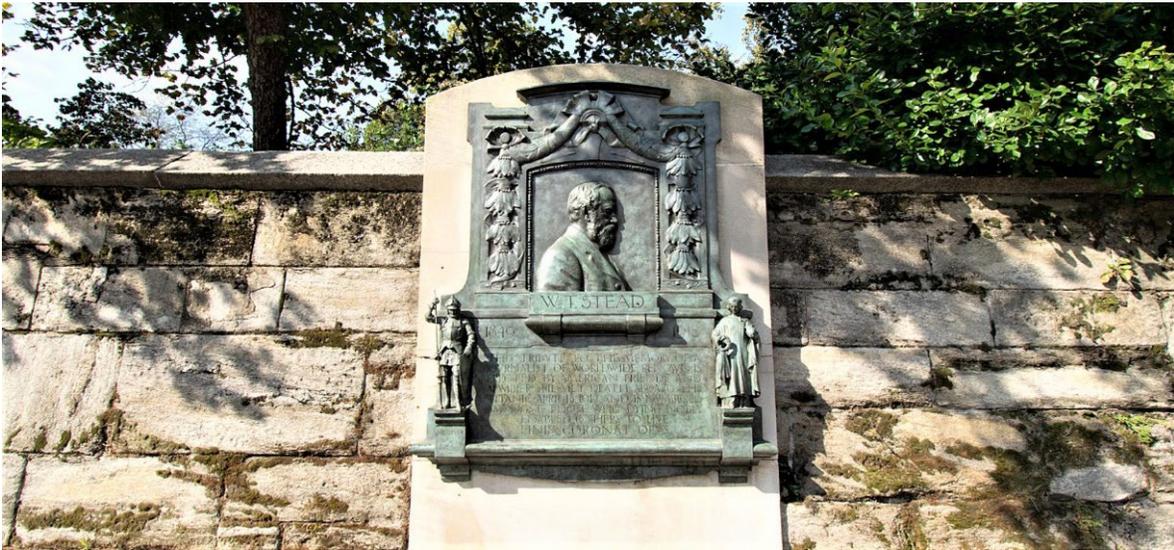
Not long after Titanic's collision with the iceberg, passengers gathered in small groups trying to determine what had happened. Stead was told by artist and painter Frank Millet that the problem was icebergs. Unimpressed, Stead decided the disturbance was of little concern and returned to his cabin to read. Eventually stirred by the growing activity, he left his cabin and went to the First-Class smoking room to continue his book. At 1am, nearly an hour and a half after the collision, Fireman George Kemish saw him still seated and reading.



First-Class smoking room (Olympic)
Credit: Flickr

Reconsidering, Stead went to the boat deck, handing out life jackets and helping women and children into the boats. Once the boats were gone, he was seen standing alone, some said in prayer, or possibly contemplating the afterlife, in which he fervently believed. Surviving passenger Philip Mock, who was in boat No. 11, said he last saw Stead with John Jacob Astor, holding onto some debris in the icy water until both men succumbed to the cold and slipped away. However, when boat No. 11 was launched, it was nearly swamped from condenser water discharging out the ship's side. This caused panic among the passengers, a number of whom had to stand while the overcrowded boat was rowed away from Titanic. Given boat No. 11's difficulties, the sketchy track, position and distance from the ship, the accuracy of Mr. Mock's statement is debatable. Other survivors reported Astor standing quietly on deck with Major Archibald Butt, military aid to President Taft. Astor's body, partially crushed by the falling forward funnel and blackened from soot, was recovered; Stead's was not.

Several memorials were established in honor of Stead and his work for social justice and antiwar efforts. Although his pronouncements regarding "womanhood" were not universally accepted by feminists, and his correspondence could be paternalistic, his generous funding, sincerity and powerful writing were admired, as were his steadfast beliefs in the emancipation of women.



Memorial to W.T. Stead in Central Park, NYC
Credit: Central Park Conservancy

EPILOGUE

Stead was a prolific writer, publishing numerous books and articles about crime codes, politics, war, spiritualism, mysticism, clairvoyance and the afterlife. He also had an interest in passenger steamers and wrote two fictional articles about the safety of large transatlantic liners focusing on the safe evacuation of passengers and crew from a ship in distress, and the ability of large liners to detect the presence of icebergs. In his 1886 piece, "How the Mail Steamer Went Down in Mid-Atlantic, by a Survivor," he commented on the great loss of life in a postscript: "*This is exactly what might take place and will take place if liners are sent to sea short of boats.*" In an 1892 article, "From the Old World to the New," he wrote about the White Star Liner Majestic with a clairvoyant on board who tells the captain that ice is near and that another ship will hit an iceberg. The prediction is heeded, and Majestic not only misses the ice but rescues the passengers and crew of the other ship.

Sources: The Man Who Hated Women by Amy Sohn; A Night to Remember by Walter Lord; GG Archives; Dead Anarchists; Wiki Tree; Killing the Buddha; Michigan Historical Review; Wikipedia; Encyclopedia Titanica; Central Park Conservancy; WT Stead Resource Site; Ida Craddock: Sexual Mystic; The Embryo Project; 19th Century Interdisciplinary Studies; Commonweal; The New Republic (article by Michelle Goldberg); Heaven's Bride by Leigh Schmidt