

The English Editor and the “Mormon Scare” of 1911

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In 1911 the Latter-day Saints in Great Britain found themselves, to an unprecedented degree, the focus of often intense public and official attention. Extravagant allegations were made against the Church and the missionaries in the national press, and questions were asked on the floor of the House of Commons. Winston Churchill, the Home Secretary, conducted an official inquiry into the activities of the Church. Although he concluded that the accusations were of no substance and that no action by the government was required, the matter did not end there; the popular press continued to publish fanciful accounts of Mormon elders kidnapping English girls.¹

Much of the ferment in 1911 was stirred up by professional anti-Mormon lecturers such as Hans Peter Freece, a disaffected member of the Church from Utah who toured the British Isles warning large audiences that Mormon missionaries were stealing English girls and taking them to Utah for forced polygamous marriages. A man such as Freece, who could present himself as an authority, was the perfect ally for the small, unrepresentative band of clergy who wanted Britain rid of the Latter-day Saints;

1. The chief Church officer in Britain during the 1911 press campaign was Rudger Clawson, the president of the European Mission. A very good analysis of the press debate can be found in Davis S. Hoopes and Roy H. Hoopes, *The Making of a Mormon Apostle: The Story of Rudger Clawson* (Lanham, Md.: Madison Books, 1990), 253–67. Malcolm R. Thorp also discusses the role of the British press during the same period in “‘The Mormon Peril’: The Crusade against the Saints in Britain, 1910–1914,” *Journal of Mormon History* 2 (1975): 69–88.

this band included Bishop Welldon of the Church of England and the Catholic priest Bernard Vaughan. Their cause was readily espoused by a section of the popular press that saw salacious stories as a money spinner. Thus the London *Daily Express* sponsored and promoted a large anti-Mormon rally in London at which Freece, Welldon, and Vaughan all spoke.²

A Three-Pronged Attack in the Press

The “ridiculous travesty of a religion which goes by the name of Mormonism”³ was attacked on three fronts. First, it was alleged that the missionaries actively pursued a polygamous lifestyle. Second, the missionaries were accused of “employing vicious propaganda whereby English girls are lured to Utah.”⁴ Third, the Church was said to be gradually seizing political power in the United States as the first step toward eventual world domination.

Typical of the sensationalistic press treatment is a full-page cartoon that appeared in the woman’s magazine *Mrs. Bull* in April 1911. Entitled “The Spider and the Fly,” it depicts a sinister black-suited missionary in a web marked “Utah” trying to lure an innocent English maiden to take a step closer (fig. 1). Some anti-Mormon sources alleged that the Church held real estate greater in extent than the combined land area of France, Spain, and Portugal and that it was richer than “either the [American] Steel Trust or [Rockefeller’s] Standard Oil.”⁵ Such journalism was intended to strike a note of indignation in the hearts of modest Englishmen.

If the press highlighted what they saw as the dangers, they also promoted what they saw as the only answer: “The total expulsion of the Mormon agents of polygamy.”⁶ A cartoon on the front page of *People*, a popular London Sunday tabloid, depicted a Mormon missionary being dipped head first into a horse trough; the caption read, “Keep him under.”⁷

2. The British view of Mormonism may have been jaundiced by a long line of sensational anti-Mormon literature reaching back to Arthur Conan Doyle’s first work of fiction, *A Study in Scarlet* (London: Ward, Lock, 1888). Other fictional works published in Germany and France may have given credence to the sensationalist view of Mormonism that Freece, Welldon, and Vaughan were trading in. For a discussion of anti-Mormonism in nineteenth-century France, see Massimo Introvigne, “Old Wine in New Bottles: The Story of Fundamentalist Anti-Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 35, no. 3 (1995–96): 45–73.

3. *Daily Express* (London), April 29, 1911.

4. *Daily Express*, April 24, 1911.

5. W. T. Stead, “The Mormons and the Anti-Mormons,” *Review of Reviews* 43 (March 1911): 300.

6. *Daily Express*, April 29, 1911.

7. “Keep Him Under,” *People* (London), April 30, 1911, 1.



FIG. 1. "The Spider and the Fly," by Frank Holland. Typical of the sensationalistic treatment Mormons received from the British press in 1911, this cartoon appeared in a popular British women's magazine. The cartoon depicts one of the foremost accusations made in the anti-Mormon

press, that Mormon missionaries were luring innocent English girls to Utah to become polygamous wives. *Mrs. Bull*, April 15, 1911, 845. By permission of the British Library (shelf mark 272).

However, in the midst of such journalistic hysteria, some editors maintained a sense of balance and fair play. One magazine went to great lengths to disprove the allegations that English girls were in dire peril. This magazine searched records of steamship companies and found, for example, that on March 17, 1910, the steamship *Dominion* carried twenty-five passengers, with no unattached girl under the age of twenty-five. After looking at similar cases, the authors concluded, “We find whole families under the leadership of the parents embracing Mormonism. . . . English girls are safe.”⁸ Men of the caliber of G. K. Chesterton called for religious toleration and pointed out that the Church had discontinued polygamy in 1890.⁹ And the most famous and controversial editor and journalist in London defended the Mormons with the most vigor and conviction. His name was William T. Stead (fig. 2).

The Powerful Editor Who Defended the Mormons

During the 1880s, as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Stead had established new trends in journalism. By 1911 he was founder and editor of *The Review of Reviews*. In an age when the newspaper and printed magazine publishers were media kings, Stead was the equivalent of the television news mogul of the late twentieth century.

Stead was a man of great personal energy who was surprisingly eclectic in his social circle. His friends included feminists Annie Beasant and Olive Schreiner on the one hand and millionaire imperialist Cecil Rhodes on the other. Always flamboyant and inclined to dramatic effect, Stead has been called the founder of modern British journalism. It is therefore somewhat ironic that he should side with the Mormons against the popular press in 1911.

Although he pioneered sensational journalistic techniques, his objective had never been prurient titillation. Stead was first and foremost a moral and religious campaigner. In 1883 he caused a sensation by portraying, in particularly florid terms, the desperate plight of London’s poor. Two years later, he created a storm with an investigative stunt breathtakingly daring for Victorian Britain: exposing the extent of child prostitution in London. Such was the outcry raised by his *Gazette* articles in summer 1885 that Parliament subsequently passed a law to increase the protection of young girls. As the nineteenth century rolled into the twentieth, Stead once more courted controversy by speaking out against British involvement in the South African Boer War.

8. *Mainly about People* (London), February 11 and April 18, 1911.

9. *Illustrated London News*, April 29, 1911.

Clearly, W. T. Stead was a man unafraid to write what he thought was right. He took an early interest in the 1911 anti-Mormon campaign and, deciding to establish the facts before he offered an opinion, invited two Mormon missionaries to lunch at his house in February 1911. They were Elder W. P. Monson from Preston, Idaho, and Elder E. F. Tout of Ogden, Utah. He also invited Hans Peter Freece and his wife. Freece flatly refused Stead's hospitality on the grounds that he could not share a meal with Mormon elders. After some negotiation, a meeting was set up in Stead's office in London. The meeting opened with prayer, which was rather unusual for a newspaper office; Stead commented on the need "for guidance into the way of truth, for the maintenance of charity, and the avoidance of passion or prejudice."¹⁰ At the close of a long meeting, Stead was left "perfectly clear" that the allegations made by Freece were false.

Stead was a spiritualist by personal conviction, and there is no evidence that he approached Mormon doctrine with any degree of commitment. He was, however, incensed by the tactics of "unscrupulous journalists" as they intensified their attacks on the Mormons in spring and summer 1911. He stated that polygamy had not been practiced for twenty years, that missionaries in Britain did not preach it, and that there was not a shred of evidence to suggest that young British womanhood was in peril: "No English



FIG. 2. William T. Stead, 1889. The "founder of modern British journalism," William T. Stead was the most powerful editor in England at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although he pioneered sensational journalistic techniques, he was first and foremost a moral and religious campaigner. He used his considerable influence as a publisher to fight for causes he believed in, such as the plight of child prostitutes in London. In 1911 he defended the Mormons in England when they were vilified by the majority of the British press—and even by some prominent members of the British clergy. From a photograph by the London Stereoscopic Co., in Frederick Whyte, *The Life of W. T. Stead* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1925), 1:2.

10. Stead, "Mormons and the Anti-Mormons," 297.

girl has yet been proved to have contracted a plural marriage as a result of their [the missionaries'] teaching."¹¹

Stead went one step further and turned his attention to "the parsons and priests and bishops who have been befooled by the *Daily Express* and *Daily Mail*." He suggested that these men "ought to be thoroughly ashamed of themselves." Of Bishop Welldon, who had urged anti-Mormon legislation, Stead wrote, "It is almost inconceivable that a man of his experience and knowledge of the world should have so far forgotten the elementary principle of religious toleration."¹² Stead also wrote a personal letter to the editor of the *Daily Express* complaining, "It is rather discreditable to our pulpit and our press that I have been left almost alone to raise a protest in the name of religious liberty against Mormon baiting."¹³

Stead's Last Campaign

Circumstances conspired against Stead to ensure that this great campaigner's last campaign was that of defending the Mormons. Within a matter of months, he was invited to the United States, where he was popular on the lecture circuit, to share a platform with President William Howard Taft and William Jennings Bryan on the subject of world peace. Stead accepted the invitation and booked passage to New York on the luxury liner SS *Titanic* in April 1912. Stead perished in the tragic sinking of the "unsinkable" vessel, which seems a perversely appropriate exit for one of the great exponents of dramatic reporting. Although the storm of anti-Mormon bigotry and misunderstanding had subsided by this time, many members of the Church mourned the loss of an influential friend in the icy waters of the north Atlantic.

No Church member grieved more than Rudger Clawson, president of the European Mission. Writing to the First Presidency in April 1912, Elder Clawson eulogized Stead for doing "much to turn public sentiment in our favor." As a token of the Saints' appreciation, Elder Clawson suggested that temple ordinances be performed on behalf of the man. Thirteen months later, Elder Clawson, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, stood proxy for William T. Stead in the Salt Lake Temple. It was a fitting way for an Apostle to express his gratitude to a courageous friend of the British Latter-day Saints and their missionaries. "Those who lift up their voices and wield

11. W. T. Stead, "The Anti-Mormon Crusade," *Review of Reviews* 43 (May 1911): 438–39.

12. Stead, "The Anti-Mormon Crusade," 438–39.

13. Stead, "The Anti-Mormon Crusade," 439–40.

their pens in defense of the Latter-day Saints will in no wise lose their reward," Elder Clawson observed.¹⁴

The Impact of Stead's Letter to the *Daily Express*

William T. Stead's letter to the editor of the *Daily Express*, published on April 28, 1911 (reprinted below in its entirety), was a landmark document in its favorable portrayal of the Church in Britain. Three days before Stead's letter was first printed, Rudger Clawson, president of the European Mission, had written to the First Presidency expressing his frustration and disappointment with the Saints' inability to place their case before the British people. "We have been doing and are doing all we can to get the truth before the people but have measurably failed," he lamented, "because they do not want it; that is, the press does not want it." Elder Clawson credited Stead's letter with doing much to change that situation and helping to "turn public sentiment in our favor." Regarding a poorly attended anti-Mormon rally, Elder Clawson informed the First Presidency, "There is no doubt that Mr. Stead's letter to the *Express*, as well as other influences . . . had the effect of neutralizing the Holborn Hall Meeting, which utterly failed in its unholy purpose."¹⁵

In June 1911, Elder Clawson wrote to Stead, expressing appreciation for his "courage" and "outspoken frankness" on behalf of the Latter-day Saints. Stead's intercession was appreciated because such candid and fair reporting was rare: "It is not often that men of prominence and influence speak or write favorably of us," reflected Elder Clawson, "and yet we only ask to be represented as we are in truth."¹⁶

14. "European Mission Report Made by Elder Rudger Clawson of the Council of the Twelve, 1910–1913," typescript, 1913, 82, Clawson Papers, Box 8, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

15. "European Mission Report," 79, 82.

Holborn Hall was a stately meeting hall in London. According to the London *Daily Express*, the meeting had been called "to protest against the vicious Mormon propaganda now being carried on in this country under the cloak of religion" and "to urge on the British Government the imperative necessity for immediate action to prevent any continuance of the enticing away of English girls to Utah by Mormon emissaries." European Mission President Rudger Clawson claimed the meeting was "a flat failure, as but few were in attendance," whereas anti-Mormon writer Winifred Graham described the meeting as "rousing" and recalled that "the hall was packed." "Protest against the Mormons," London *Daily Express*, April 28, 1911, 1; Rudger Clawson, *William T. Stead and His Defense of the "Mormons"* (Liverpool: n.p., n.d.), 4; Malcolm R. Thorp, "Winifred Graham and the Mormon Image in England," *Journal of Mormon History* 6 (1980): 109–10.

16. "European Mission Report," 82.

William T. Stead's Letter to the Editor of the London Daily Express

To the Editor of the "Express."

Sir,—Will you kindly permit me the privilege of recording in your columns an emphatic protest against the mischievous and wicked nonsense that is being written and spoken in furtherance of what is known as the Anti-Mormon Crusade in this country?

What is described as "a great non-partisan anti-Mormon meeting" is advertised for to-night in Holborn Hall. If the objects of that meeting were merely to expose, to refute, and to demolish by arguments addressed to reason or appeals to emotion what its promoters regard as the Mormon heresy, there would be no call for public protest. But the avowed object of the anti-Mormon crusaders is not polemics; it is persecution.

The Dean of Manchester, Dr. Welldon,¹⁷ who presides over to-night's meeting, has declared: "I think the Mormon propaganda ought to be put down in England. If the law is not strong enough to put it down, it ought to be reinforced." Another crusader, the Rev. Father Bernard Vaughan,¹⁸ not content with appealing for persecution by statute, has invoked lynch law. From his pulpit he has declared that "the Mormons should be taken by the scruff of the neck, rushed across our island, and dropped into the sea."

I protest against this undisguised appeal to the hateful spirit of religious persecution as an outrage upon the fundamental principle of religious liberty,

17. James F. C. Welldon, Right Reverend Bishop and Dean of Manchester, was a renowned classical scholar who heard reports of recent polygamous marriages when he visited Utah in 1905. Shortly after the meeting at Holborn Hall, Welldon, a candidate for the Bishopric of Southwark, was passed over by the Prime Minister for the appointment. Stead wrote, "The Dean is a good man and a staunch friend of peace. But the part which he took last month in heading the anti-Mormon crusade justifies the Prime Minister in passing him over." Thorp, "The Mormon Peril," 76; Stead, "Anti-Mormon Crusade," 438; "Protest Against the Mormons," 1.

18. Vaughan was a prominent Catholic preacher. A bold social critic, he dedicated one of his books to his "BROTHERS AND SISTERS WHO LIKE ANNAS, CAIAPHAS, PILATE, AND HEROD ARE VAINLY STRIVING TO RID YOURSELVES AND YOUR COUNTRY OF JESUS CHRIST." Bernard Vaughan, *Society, Sin and the Savior* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908). Stead criticized Vaughan severely, writing that it would "do [him] good" to "stand in sackcloth and ashes at Charing Cross for a whole day." Charing Cross was the site of the most famous pillory in London. Stead, "Anti-Mormon Crusade," 439.

an outrage which is not the less detestable because it is masked by the hypocritical and mendacious pretence of a desire to protect English girls from being lured into polygamous harems.

It is one of the most familiar devices of intolerant religionists to invent malicious falsehoods to serve as a cloak for persecuting those who dissent from the faith of the majority. Without going back to Imperial Rome, where the vilest calumnies were used to inflame the populace against the Christians, we need not go far afield to find how anti-Semitic rancour finds in the revival of the old accusation, the blood sacrifice, the most convenient pretext for atrocities at which humanity shudders.

Father Vaughan might profitably recall how often the lurid narratives of "The Confessional Unmasked"¹⁹ and "The Revelations of Maria Monk"²⁰ have been used to justify Orange bigots²¹ always in violent assaults upon their Catholic neighbors. Nothing would be easier than to follow up this anti-Mormon crusade by a far more popular and dangerous agitation against the Roman Catholics, whose conventual institutions, so rapidly multiplying in our midst, have often aroused the passions and prejudices of the Protestant mob.

19. C. B. [David Bryce], *The Confessional Unmasked: Showing the Depravity of the Priesthood; and Immorality of the Confessional, being the Questions Put to Females in Confession* (London: Thomas Johnston, 1851) was a piece of anti-Catholic propaganda that discussed confessional techniques purportedly used by supposedly prurient Roman Catholic priests. The Protestant Evangelical Mission Electoral Union, which hoped to secure repeal of the Catholic Emancipation Act of 1828, promoted the publication by printing 25,000 copies and sending one to every member of Parliament in 1865. Walter L. Arnstein, *Protestant versus Catholic in Mid-Victorian England: Mr. Newdegate and the Nuns* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982), 88–90.

20. Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures of the Hotel Dieu Nunnery of Montreal* (New York: Howe and Bates), was first printed in 1836. The book claimed to relate the experiences of Maria Monk, who allegedly converted to Catholicism, joined a convent, and became the sexual slave of corrupt priests. According to the book, the babies produced by these scandalous liaisons were strangled. Monk supposedly escaped to the United States, where her story might be told. The fictitious account became a bestseller, was widely believed, and ignited anti-Catholic sentiment in Europe and America. Ray A. Billington, "Maria Monk and Her Influence," *Catholic Historical Review* 22 (October 1936): 283–85; Nancy Lusignan Schultz, "Introduction," in *Veil of Fear: Nineteenth-Century Convent Tales* (West Lafayette, In.: Purdue University Press, 1999), vii–xxxiii.

21. The Orange Confederation was a secret society formed in 1688 whose members attached themselves to the standard of William, Prince of Orange. The Orangemen employed secret signs and passwords and sought to elevate Protestantism and suppress Catholic influence in the British Isles. Ogle Robert Gowan, *Orangeism: Its Origin and History* (Toronto: Lovell and Gibson, 1859), 45, 54–56.

The attack upon the Mormons is almost entirely based upon the lie that their propaganda in this country is a propaganda in favour of polygamy, and that the chief object of the Mormon missionaries is to allure innocent and unsuspecting English girls into polygamous marriages.

I have called this a lie because it is a demonstrably false statement which is repeated again and again after it has been proved to be false. Not one of the anti-Mormon crusaders has ever been able to produce any evidence that at any time, in any place within the King's dominions, has any Mormon apostle, elder, or missionary ever appealed, publicly or privately, to any one of the King's subjects, male or female, to enter into polygamous relations with any one here or in Utah.

It is on the contrary admitted by the persecutors themselves that the Mormon emissaries constantly and even passionately repudiate as a baseless slander the accusation that they are propagandists of polygamy. No one has ventured to assert that even one of the Mormon missionaries in our midst is a polygamist.

Their enemies complain that they ought to be polygamists according to the scripture of the Latter Day Saints, just as the Orangemen always maintain that according to the doctrine of Rome every Catholic ought to desire to relight the fires of Smithfield.²²

But the State has nothing to do with construing the texts from the Book of Mormon or the bulls of persecuting Popes. If the Mormons are better than their creed, we ought surely rather to rejoice than to invoke Parliament and lynch law to hound them out of the country.

Even if the Mormons, like the Mahometans and many millions of the King's loyal subjects, believed in polygamy, that is no reason for depriving American citizens who share that belief of the right to enjoy the liberties of this free country.

But it is asserted that the Mormons lure young English girls to Utah for immoral purposes. For this assertion there is not even the shadow of a semblance of proof. If any one, Mormon or Gentile, were guilty of such a crime, let the offender be punished with the utmost rigour of the law after his crime has been proved to the satisfaction of a judge and jury. But after all that has been said in Press and pulpit for months past, the anti-Mormon

22. At Smithfield, England, heretics were burned at the stake by Romanists. William Swinderby, a Christian martyr who was convicted of heresy, was executed there in 1401. In 1494, a widow in her eighties was burned at the stake there for possessing writings of "John Wickiffe" [Wycliff]. Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater, or Martyrs Mirror* (Scottsdale, Pa.: Mennonite, 1972), 342, 351.

crusaders have utterly failed to bring forward even one solitary case of an English girl who has been lured into polygamous relations here or in Utah by any Mormon emissary.

The whole story is as monstrous a fiction as the lies of Titus Oates.²³ The falsehood that thousands of English girls are being shipped to Utah every year is sheer, unmitigated rot. Last year about 550 persons left England for Utah,²⁴ sixty of whom were under eight years of age. Of the remainder, many were married couples, and among the single emigrants there were as many men as women.

The whole so-called crusade is an outbreak of sectarian savagery worked up by journalists, who in their zest for sensation appear to be quite indifferent to the fact that the only permanent result of their exploit will be to advertise and to spread the Mormon faith among the masses, who love fair play and who hate religious persecution none the less because it is based upon a lie.

W. T. STEAD

Bank Buildings, Kingsway, London, W.C.

23. Titus Oates, D.D. (1649–1705) was an unscrupulous scoundrel who plotted, conspired, blackmailed, perjured, and lied to his advantage. In 1679 he wrote *A True Narrative of the Horrid Plot and Conspiracy of the Popish Party against the Life of His Sacred Majesty, the Government and the Protestant Religion* (London: Printed for Thomas Parkhurst and Thomas Cockerill, 1679). Widely hailed at the time for his breathtaking expose which led to the deaths of innocent Catholics, Oates was subsequently discredited and imprisoned, only to be released and rewarded when William of Orange came to power. Jane Lane, *Titus Oates* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1949).

24. Stead obtained his information from the two Latter-day Saint missionaries, W. P. Monson and E. F. Tout, who met with him in his office in February 1911. Stead, "Mormons and the Anti-Mormons," 297.

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