CHAPTER 2
PROFILE – DAVID GEORGE STEAD

'I thought he was a mountain of a man.'
Allen Strom

Two people dominated the activities of the Society for its first sixty years – David Stead and his third wife, Thistle Harris. David George Stead, who was to become the husband of Thistle Harris in 1951, was one of Australia's most talented pioneer naturalists and conservationists, a self-educated marine biologist and naturalist who, it is claimed by some, was largely responsible for the ideals and philosophy behind our environment movement today.[1] He was born on 6 March 1877, sixth child of English-born Samuel Leonard Stead and his wife Christina McLaren, who had come to Australia from Scotland as a baby. Samuel, a builder and carpenter, had purchased land in Walker Street, not far from the harbour in St Leonards (now North Sydney), where he built a modest two-storey weatherboard home. There Christina produced seven children by the time she was thirty-two. One daughter, May, died in infancy, leaving three boys and three girls: Sydney, Samuel, Christina, Jessie, David and Florence.[2]

David's mother was nonconformist in religion and strict, with many taboos; no dancing, smoking, card playing, alcoholic drinks, theatre and so on. She was a member of the Plymouth Brethren and the younger Stead children, David and Florence, sometimes accompanied their mother to meetings. Samuel, on the other hand, had 'habits' about which the women spoke in lowered voices: he took snuff and he liked a glass of port. Furthermore, he was a freethinker, as atheists were then called, a member of the Order of Odd Fellows (of which he became Grandmaster) and belonged to the Dickens Lodge, where members recited and acted from the famous Dickens tales.[3] But it was a happy family, a musical family, whose members would gather around the piano and sing the old favourites.

After a local public school education, David was apprenticed at age twelve to the Sydney rubber-stamp maker Karl Faulk, where he learned the art of lettering that was his pride and which he was to use to good effect in his later position as a junior in the Fisheries Department. He went to Sydney Technical College to study zoology and during the course boiled down and mounted a cat and a dog, which travelled with him in glass cases into all his future homes. But in the August of 1893, when David was only sixteen, his mother died, making him promise to keep her rules of life and this he did. He became a puritan like his mother, never indulged in alcohol, or the theatre, or dancing; but he was an atheist like his father and inherited his good looks and lively nature. His fair hair and blue eyes were to attract attention from admirers well into his manhood.

David was a passionate young man and his passions found expression in his enthusiasm for natural history. He joined the New South Wales Naturalists' Society, a group of committed amateurs and in 1898, at twenty-one, became a member of the

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[1] *Meridian*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Oct. 1989, p. 101
[2] Hazel Rowley, *Christina Stead, A Biography*, p. 3
[3] Christina Stead, *A Waker and Dreamer*, p. 484, p. 482

professional scientific body, the Linnean Society of New South Wales. By 1900 he had several short articles published by the prestigious British Linnean Society.[4] Later, in 1910, when elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society in London, he was said to be the youngest person ever elected to that favoured position. In 1901, following his writings on international affairs, he was made a member of International Conciliation, one of the first world peace bodies, based in New York. [5]

Florence Stead, David's younger sister, was working at David Jones, the Sydney department store, as a seamstress and introduced David to her fellow worker, Ellen Butters. David and Ellen were married on 17 August 1901, but it was a difficult time for Ellen, who came from a very devout family. The twenty-four-year-old groom refused to take part in a religious service and the bride's father refused to welcome the married couple into the family home.

By 1902 David's expertise in the area of marine studies led to his being appointed a scientific assistant under Harold Dannevig, Director, in the NSW Fisheries Commission, employment being from May 1902, at the annual salary of £200. His home in Rockdale boasted a menagerie in the back garden, where he kept venomous black snakes and a diamond python snake. Two months after his appointment to the Commission, a daughter was born to Ellen, on 17 July 1902 (twelve days before Thistle Harris was born only a few suburbs away); she was named Christina Ellen Stead. Grandfather Butters refused to speak to his daughter or look at his grandchild.[6] Three years after her marriage Ellen died, her family claimed of a broken heart, although her death certificate records a burst appendix followed by septic absorption and heart failure eighteen days later. She was twenty-eight when she died in Prince Alfred Hospital, Camperdown, on 9 December 1904. [7]

The girl-child Christina was mothered by her father, who became a dominating figure in her life, with far-reaching effects on her personality. He told her stories peopled with the sea monsters and land animals he loved so much. His youngest sister, Florence, went to live with Christina and her father immediately after the death of Ellen, keeping house and looking after Christina and her own daughter, Gwen, who was born in July 1903. Christina wrote later in life, ‘these were very gay years with the brother and sister in the house together; but David was very young, he had to remarry’.[8]

David Stead met Ada Gibbins through her father, Frederick Gibbins, a man of some means, with business interests in oyster farming and timber. Ada was a dark, pretty young woman, but of fragile health; she had attended a private finishing school in the Blue Mountains where she learned lady-like accomplishments and, at age twenty-seven, when she met David Stead, was living at home with her parents and one unmarried brother, wondering about her prospects. It seems, from the beginning, to have been a marriage more of convenience than of love.[9] Christina would always claim that her stepmother was married off by her father, Frederick Gibbins, against

[4] Hazel Rowley, p. 4
[5] D. G. Stead papers, ML MSS 5413. Notes by Gilbert Stead
[6] Hazel Rowley, p. 5
[7] Chris Williams, p. 6
[8] C. Stead, *A Waker and Dreamer*, p. 488
[9] Hazel Rowley, p. 13

her will.[10] The wedding was held on New Year's Day, 1907. David Stead agreed to a religious service, but no church, so the Anglican rites were performed in the drawing room of the Gibbins home, 'Dappeto'. Frederick Gibbins offered the couple a big house, rent free, at "Lydham Hall" in Bexley and there David and Ada Stead lived for the next ten years, producing a family of four boys and two girls. The boys were named after scientists: David Darwin (born 1907), Frederick Huxley (born 1910), Samuel Kelvin (born 1915) and Gilbert Jordan (born 1917); Catherine Ada (Kate or Kit) was born in 1908 and Doris Weeta in 1912.

Christina wrote in later life, 'When the father remarried, I was past four and soon I was looking after a younger child and then younger and then I became the cradle rocker and message runner and the one who sang the sleep and told tales'.[11] She was to write also in another context, 'My stepmother did not like me, very natural, as I was the kind of child only a mother could love and then probably with doubts: her treatment of me was dubious'.[12]

In January 1917 Frederick Gibbins died and to the family's dismay the houses "Dappeto" and "Lydham Hall" had to be sold to pay off his debts. David Stead found a house at Watson's Bay, a two-storey weatherboard building at 14 Pacific Street, very much in need of renovation, but close to the harbour and a delight for the children. He named the house "Boongarre", after an Aboriginal chief who had lived in the area. But life was not always sunny; there was insufficient income to support a family of seven children and maintain the house in reasonable condition. Ada, bitter about the wretchedness of her situation, rarely even spoke to her husband. Christina wrote dramatically about this period in the family life in her book *The Man Who Loved Children*. Sam, the father, was based on her father, David, and Henny was his second wife, step-mother to Sam's daughter, Louie. 'Louie had actually once or twice had moments when she could listen to Henny's scoldings and (although she trembled and cried bitterly) could recognise that they came from some illness, her neuralgias, or cold hands and feet, or the accumulation of bills, or from Sam's noisy joys with the children, and perennial humanitarian orations'.[13]

In 1941 Thistle Harris was to receive a parcel from New York from Christina Stead. It contained a copy of Christina's book *The Man Who Loved Children* and contained the following inscription:

To Dear Thistle —
A Strindberg Family Robinson —
in some respects might be considered a private letter to Thistle
from
Christina Stead
New York August 1941[14]

In April 1942 Christina wrote to Thistle saying, among other things, 'Yes, I feel that the characters in TMWLC are very very real ... I am always surprised at my memory for detail . . . Sam did really boil a fish for oil ... and Henny really did play cards out

[10] ibid
[11] C. Stead, *Ocean of Story*
[12] Chris Williams, p. 17
[13] C. Stead, *The Man Who Loved Children*, p. 35
[14] Selected Letters

of desperation and so on, so on: it did not happen exactly all on one day but what I did is a very real representation of life as it was then. As to the details: I am very happy to hear you say that you recognise them. I did not invent, naturally …' [15]

Henny, the dispirited wife, says to her husband, Sam: 'I've had the house stinking like a corpse cellar with your formalin that you're proud of and had to put up with your vile animals and idiotic collections and your blood-and-bone in the garden and everlasting talk, talk, talk, talk, talk', she screamed in a hoarse voice, 'boring me, filling my ears with talk, jaw, jaw, till I thought the only way was to kill myself to escape you and your world of big bluffs and big sticks, saving the whole rotten world with your talk'.[16]

In her old age, Thistle Harris would say that she saw *The Man Who Loved Children* as 'substantially true', but she also thought the novel 'tremendously cruel'.[17]

In spite of possible shortcomings as both a husband and a father, David's scientific work surged ahead. He was a prolific writer; in 1904, using the pen-name "Physalia", he wrote for a New South Wales newspaper *The St George Call* a series of fifty weekly articles under the title *Nature Notes*. His published articles, papers and reports - most of them issued by the New South Wales Government and various natural history and scientific societies in Australia and beyond, comprehensively covered the wide field of fisheries, fishes, crustaceans and allied matters. His best-known books and papers are *Fishes of Australia* (1906); *The Edible Fishes of New South Wales* (1908) - said by Gilbert P. Whitley (*Fisheries Newsletter*, September 1957) to be 'still most readable and authoritative to this day'; *Crustaceans, Ancient, Modern and Mythical* (1905); additions to the *Fish Fauna of New South Wales* (1907); *Eggs and Breeding Habits of Fishes* (1910); *Fisheries of New South Wales (1910); The Future of Commercial Marine Fishing in New South Wales (1911); Whales and Whaling in Australian Seas* (1927); *The Tree Book* (1933); *Giants and Pigmies of the Deep* (1933); *The Rabbit in Australia (*1935); *The Fisheries of British Malaya* (1923); *Marine and Fresh Water Fisheries of Australia (*1924). He left behind a completed manuscript *Sharks and Rays of Australian Seas*, published posthumously by Angus and Robertson in 1963.

Stead was always concerned to translate biological detail into language that non-experts could understand. His best known published works *Fishes of Australia* (1906) and *The Edible Fishes of New South Wales* (1908), were also acclaimed for their detailed photographic plates and drawings. The former Curator of Fishes at the Australian Museum, John Paxton, said Stead's contribution as a fisheries biologist was significant. 'His *Fishes of Australia* is a popularisation. He, throughout his career, I think, attempted to popularise science, to educate the general public on those things that he was interested in, and certainly in his *Fishes of Australia* this is a book that wasn't written as much for the scientific community as for the general public.' Yet Paxton agrees that the photographic plates in his *Fishes of Australia* are of a quality that scientists could appreciate. 'He did a number of drawings himself and his drawings are quite good, but with his photographs he took the time to preserve the fish, to have all the fin rays standing up and, from a scientific point of view, you can,

[15] Selected Letters
[16] *The Man Who Loved Children*, p. 143
[17] Conversation between Hazel Rowley and Thistle Stead, 15 January 15 1987

from his plates, count the number of scale rows the fish has, count the number of fin spines and rays … today we use colour, which was not available to him at that time. So his illustrations are excellent.' [18]

In 1914, as Special Fisheries Commissioner, Stead travelled overseas to investigate British, European and American Fisheries for the New South Wales Government, returning to Australia in 1915. His task in England was also to buy three modern steam trawlers in Hull. 'The trawlers sailed out across the world and for five lively years we had nothing but trawling and fishing talk.'[19] Stead was to be General Manager of the State Trawling Industry from 1915 to 1920 and this setting up of Australia's first state trawling industry was probably his most radical achievement. It was a visionary socialistic scheme to harness cheap food for the masses and, not only did he have to campaign to sell the idea, he was responsible for setting up the organisational machinery to make the industry viable. A pamphlet published in 1915 shows his enthusiasm:

> 'Cheap food for the people. What state fish costs. State trawled fish is as choice as it is cheap. Inshore and estuarine fish is also obtained direct from the fisherman and retailed at prices from one-third to one-half of those ruling in the establishments of grasping middle men'.[20]

However, for several years during his post as manager of the State Trawling Industry, he had been the target of defamatory attacks by the conservative Opposition in Parliament. He was accused of 'fishing out' the waters, of costly mismanagement. In 1916, the first of a series of damning government reports was produced calling Stead's administrative competence into question. By mid-1918 allegations that tons of fish had been condemned by health inspectors and dumped at sea were widespread; the previous year's loss in the state trawling industry was put at twenty-four thousand pounds. [21]

A Royal Commission into the State Trawling Industry, conducted by Mr G. Mason Allard, was set up in April 1919 and the pressure on the government continued. In his report of January 1920, the Commissioner expressed his appreciation of Mr Stead: 'The amount of labour, the scientific knowledge, the power of acquiring technical and practical knowledge, the enthusiasm and love of the work which [he] has brought to bear upon the industry from its inception, even in most disheartening circumstances, and he deserves considerable credit for his efforts'. The Commissioner went on to say that Stead was first and foremost a scientific man and 'has not throughout exhibited the possession of the business sense.'[22] Mr Allard recommended that Stead's 'undoubted attainments and scientific knowledge concerning fish and fish culture should be more effectively used in connection with the work of the Fisheries Department throughout the country than has been done in the past, for in some measure these qualifications have been wasted of recent years ... I suggest that there should be a Board of Advice to the Minister ... Mr Stead to be consultant to the board;

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[18] *Meridian*, ibid, p. 107-108
[19] C. Stead, *A Waker and Dreamer*, p. 490
[20] *Meridian*, ibid. p. 108
[21] *Sydney Morning Herald* 26.9.18 and *Daily Telegraph* 26.9.18
[22] Fourth Sectional Report of the Royal Commission to inquire into the Public Service of New South Wales upon the State Trawling Industry, New South Wales. Parliamentary Papers, 1st Session, 1920, Vol. 1, p. 48

the board to meet once a week; and the members and consultant to be suitably remunerated'.[23] Stead was subsequently relieved of his post as general manager of state trawling early in 1920.

In 1956 a book, *Naturecraft in Australia*, was produced by the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia, edited and arranged by Thistle Y. Harris. An appendix outlined briefly the charter of the Society, pointing out that it existed for the purpose of encouraging the protection and general conservation of Australian fauna and flora. 'The general policy of the Society through the years has been an educational one; for its officers believe - and always have believed - that a conservation-minded public is the best safeguard the bushland can have. It aims, therefore, at educating the people to understand the desirability of a conservation policy, through a knowledge of fauna and flora and its environment ... In addition, it opens the gate to an understanding of the relationships between the plants and animals living in the bush, and of the factors necessary to their continued existence.'

The protection of all marsupials was part of the Society's early work; the saving of the koala, in particular, was a long fight. Skins labelled 'wombat' were being exported to the United States. When David Stead discovered this, he wrote to the United States President Herbert C. Hoover. In response, Hoover agreed to ban all skins, however labelled and the koala trade, robbed of its most important market, soon ceased. This was a major victory.

Today the work of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Australia continues under the capable leadership of National President Patrick Medway. In more recent times the Society has played a leading role in the preservation of a long list of national parks and in the creation of many World Heritage Areas. The conservation movement today owes a debt to founders like David Stead and the following tribute, expressed at the time of his death, was one of many praising his idealism and enthusiasm:

> 'It was a privilege to have been associated with him in his wonderful record of work for the conservation of our Flora and Fauna. The status of the W.L.P.S. and its reputation today are a monument to him as, for very many years, he was the power and his the initiative that inspired its work. The World - and Australia in particular - is the better for one David G. Stead having passed through it'.[24]

Allen Strom, who was Secretary of the Wild Life Preservation Society immediately after Stead in the 1940s, said Stead was crucial in getting Governments to take the conservation movement seriously in the early years of this century:

> 'I thought he was a mountain of a man as it were, in other words, he dominated the scene. He demonstrated in those times that I first met him that he was dedicated to the cause of what they now call 'Nature Conservation', that was called Wild Life Preservation in those days and I was quite impressed. The point was, he'd been fundamental in the establishment of the organisation back in 1909 and by the time I got there, of course it was a number of years later, over thirty years later, and the organisation was well established, it was well known and of course it was effective in the community, as effective as

[23] ibid. p. 49
[24] *Australian Wild Life*, Vol. 3, No. 3, March 1958, p. 5

> you might imagine any organisation at that time would be. After all, let us not forget that there was very little in the way of nature conservation from the point of view of conviction of administration by the '40s. In other words, the whole thing was just beginning and I think that all that was due entirely to the perseverance of this man and the way in which he could influence other people to be in it as well'.[25]

But Stead's lack of an academic education was to him a bitter disappointment all his life. As a young man active in the Naturalists' Society and the Linnean Society, he found himself brushed aside by the academics, not prepared to listen to a young man with no academic qualifications whatsoever. 'He was conscious that he was a nobody as far as the academics were concerned and it acted as a frustration to him all his life and I think it affected his whole personality'. So said Thistle Harris in an interview in 1987.

Among his friends in the Naturalists' Society of New South Wales, David Stead did not feel inferior, because few of them were academics, although possessing profound knowledge in their own fields. The unwritten code of behaviour among the Naturalists was, if you have knowledge, pass it on and share it around. Many of the members were David's personal friends - people he met in trams, on buses, on the beach; in talking with them he aroused their interest.

David Stead was a great lover of Australia; in his library there were Henry Lawson and Banjo Paterson. *On Our Selection* was there, but Henry Handel Richardson, for example, was far too literary for him, Christina Stead recalls.[26] There were no novels in the library - he didn't approve of novels - but there were of course books on science, history and psychology.

In 1919 David Stead told his daughter Christina that he had fallen in love with a schoolgirl her own age. Christina, who often went on the Naturalists' excursions and knew Thistle Harris, was greatly shocked and it seems that David himself decided the romance should not develop beyond a friendship of kindred interests.

Apparently still in the employ of the Public Service, David Stead was offered a two-year posting as Fisheries Commissioner and Director of Food Supplies in British Malaya. He left Sydney on 31 December 1921, bearing with him a letter from the Lord Mayor; its contents strike a euphemistic note after the calumny and criticism of the previous years:

> 'The bearer of this document, Mr David G. Stead, is one of the leading public officers of the State of New South Wales and is about to commence a travel on official service to British Malaya, his services having been made available to the British Government there by the Government of New South Wales for the purpose of reporting upon Malayan Fisheries.

[25] *Meridian*, ibid, p. 106

[26] C. Stead interview with Rodney Wetherell in Australian Literary Studies, Vol. 9, No. 4, October 1980, p. 446

> ‘Mr Stead is held in high esteem in this country both for his services to the State in various official capacities for close on twenty years and for his efforts to preserve the Australian fauna and flora.
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> ‘He holds a somewhat unique position in Australia. In this connection his efforts have been recognised by the principal world authorities both because of his published works and his activity in deep-sea fishery development’.[27]

The letter goes on to list his involvement in the various professional and amateur societies to which he belonged.

Stead was a rebel in Malaya. He was shocked at living conditions there and made his views known in the local press. He believed in equality. When in Singapore and invited to sit on the platform by the Governor of the Federated Malay States he refused because there were to be there no native representatives, only British people.[28] His physical health suffered too, and he was lonely and homesick. Unlike his white associates he never allowed himself the relief of alcohol. He wrote to the family often continuing to write in the nonsense language he had always employed for the children's entertainment. A letter dated 27 May 1922 is written in this vein:

> ‘I expect you arr trieing too B a fairlie goode boie if you aint you betr start now so you will no the way wen I kum home. Luv to evryboddie and all be goode. Thoes who duz thare dutie ar luvly wuns they will get some frootie and some kurren bunz. From DadPad the Boald’.[29]

There is no direct evidence that David Stead and Thistle corresponded when he was in Malaya, but Christina Stead, in *The Man Who Loved Children*, writes of Sam Pollit's correspondence with the young naturalist Gillian Roebuck. Christina was David's confidante on most of his personal affairs so it is not unreasonable to conjecture that she knew of his contact by letter with the young naturalist, Thistle. Gillian concludes her letter to Sam, ‘Yes, I am serious about Wild Life: it gives me a wonderful feeling for nature and has expanded my interests: I really love nature now, thanks to your teaching: I mean real love. It was just something to do before’.[30] Sam returns home from Malaya and the family move house after the death of Henny's father. ‘Spring was coming on and Sam was very restless. For weeks he would love Gillian Roebuck; then he would go to see Saul Pilgrim's sister, Mrs Virginia Prescott, a widow ... Sam did not love her, but when his feeling for the nature-spelled girl, Gillian, became too strong, he went and talked to Virginia. He was unable to see Gillian because they both felt they were too conspicuous in either Baltimore or Washington and Sam despised hole-in-the-corner meetings: it was not worthy of them’.[31]

Before he left for Malaya in 1921, David Stead had commenced a weekly children’s feature article which appeared as ‘The Great Outdoors’ in the Sunday Times, using the pen-name ‘Dinnawan.’ He continued writing from abroad until the last article appeared in April 1923.

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[27] ML Stead Papers MSS 5715 Box 1/25. Letter dated December 12, 1921
[28] C. Stead, *A Waker and Dreamer*, p. 491
[29] Chris Williams, p. 26
[30] *The Man Who Loved Children*, p. 237
[31] *The Man Who Loved Children*, p. 356

> ‘I am Dinnawan the emu, and though I must confess that I am especially fond of the great grassy plains and the glorious rolling downs, I am really not so very particular about the kind of country so long as there are some nice open spaces here and there. But wherever I am and for all my life, I've been filled always with the desire to know, about everything that I've seen, just like you, Everyboy. Folks do call me inquisitive, but then, I've heard them say that about you, too. Well, Everyboy, here we meet again and I hope you've brought a pair of well-oiled legs with you this morning, for we're going on a long bushwalk ... I've brought for company Dirra-diree the wagtail and Googoo-gaga the merry jester, Old Jack. Dirra-diree will spy out the land for us and, when he is tired, he can rest on my head for a while’.[32]

As something of a compulsive communicator, David Stead also used radio to educate children. He spoke of his travels in Malaya and Scandinavian countries in geography broadcasts. He also gave lectures about his travels and animal life, in public meeting halls. His son, Gilbert, remembers lectures with magic lantern slides lit by an oil lamp, as a visual aid. [33]

In the New South Wales Government Gazette for February 1922, there appeared this notice:

> ‘His Excellency the Governor, with the advice of the Executive Council, has been pleased to approve of -
> Mr David George Stead, formerly Manager, State Trawling Industry, being granted leave of absence without pay from 1st September, 1921, to 17th January, 1922, both days inclusive, and from the latter date his services being dispensed with, in terms of section 65 of the Public Service Act, 1902.’

So when Stead returned to Sydney at the end of 1923, there was no job for him. His son, Gilbert, said ‘they just wanted to get him and they got him while he was away’.[34] The decision was made in 1923 that the trawlers from State Trawling be sold and in 1924 this was effected by a non-Labor Government. Gilbert Stead added: ‘If you read the material that was written, particularly in the press, violently opposing the New South Wales fishing industry and demanding that it be closed down because it was uneconomic, that has to be seen in its true light in the circumstances where, shortly afterwards, a private company called Red Funnel Trawlers set up and they functioned right through those two decades until the Second World War, and profitably too’.[35]

The most unfair outcome of Stead's dismissal was the refusal to grant him his superannuation.

In July and August 1924, David Stead was in Honolulu, as part of a New South Wales Government delegation attending the Pan-Pacific Food Preservation Conference. In 1925 he was employed again for a short time, having been appointed Commissioner of a Rabbit Inquiry whose objective was to investigate methods of controlling and exterminating the rabbits that were the scourge of the New South Wales countryside.

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[32] *Meridia*n, p. 103
[33] *Meridian*, p. 103
[34] ibid. p. 109
[35] ibid. p. 110

He wrote a five-volume report on the rabbit menace, but from 1927 was out of work again.

Out of work, but tireless in his fight for nature conservation, in 1927 Stead was President of the Naturalists' Society of New South Wales, President of the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia and President of the Aquarium Society of New South Wales, as well as an active member of various other organisations such as the Australian Forest League, the Gould League, Geographical Society of New South Wales and the Royal Zoological Society of New South Wales. But although he was certainly a socialist, he did not join the socialist organisations - he was never a member of the Communist Party, for instance, or the International Workers of the World (I.W.W). Son Gilbert remembers that the first activity of any kind in which he joined his father was a march from Sydney's Eddy Avenue down into the Domain on the 20th anniversary of the 1916 no-conscription vote 'and it was a very big demonstration for a peace demonstration'.[36]

Stead's greatest strength was a belief in himself. Christina Stead, although acknowledging that the character, Sam Pollit, in *The Man Who Loved Children*, was based on her father, wrote a less exaggerated portrait of him for the journal *Overland*, published in 1972, fifteen years after her father died. In this short story, '*A Waker and Dream*er', she wrote:

> 'David's appearance of whiteness, fairness and all that goes with it, dazzled himself. He believed in himself so strongly that, sure of his innocence, pure intentions, he felt he was a favoured son of Fate (which to him was progress, and therefore good), that he was Good, and he could not do anything but good. Those who opposed him, a simple reasoning, were evil. This was not his mother's work, but his own nature. He would sing certain songs, especially when something went wrong in the Department, or his work in the Naturalist Societies, some defeat, jibe, unkind joke; he would sing, 'Dare to be a Daniel, Dare to stand alone, Dare to have a purpose true, and Dare to make it known'.[37]

Stead's uncompromising political style was a product of the social radicalism of the late 19th century and his political interests continued to reflect the major concerns of the left during his life, right up until his death in the 1950s. Christina said: 'My father was a socialist, a state socialist ... He didn't know anything about Fabius or Fabianism. He was just an instinctive socialist who believed in state socialism, as it suited him. But he was not a theoretical man at all'.[38]

Allen Strom said Stead was one of the first to identify conservation as a political issue. 'I think he understood, back in the early part of the 1900s, that the only way in which you could ensure the management of wild life conservation, or nature conservation, was to ensure that you had legislation that provided for the correct administration. And he began to fight for this soon after the Wild Life Preservation Society was established in 1909 and the record shows that he was very nearly there when the First World War commenced and then at the end of the war the Government brought down the Birds and Animals Protection Act - this was about 1918 - but of

[36] ibid. P. 103
[37] ibid. P. 102
[38] R. Wetherell, Australian Literary Studies, Vol. 9, No. 4, p. 443, 436

course it was much less than he had hoped - he had hoped of course that there would have been some sort of service to go with the administration'.[39]

In 1929, David became an adviser and director of a new company, The Australian Whaling Company Limited. The prospectus, issued on 25 July stated on page 25:

> 'We have the high authority of Mr. David G. Stead, the well known International Fisheries Expert and one of the greatest authorities on whales and the whaling industry, in stating that an equally good field - and one that has been proved - lies in the waters of Eastern Australia.'

The *Sydney Morning Herald* reported on 11 August 1930, that 'The Australian Whaling Company Ltd whose headquarters are in Sydney, hopes to be ready to commence fishing in May next year and is establishing a factory on the north-west coast of Western Australia'. The Company also had plans to operate a shore station on the south coast of New South Wales, to purchase five whaling gunboats or chasers, and a vessel of about 12,000 to 14,000 tons oil capacity as a whaling factory ship. It was an ambitious project, and one which would have given David Stead a good measure of financial security. But by October 1932 the *Sydney Morning Herald* was reporting on the past year of inactivity forced upon whaling companies by the sudden collapse of the market at the end of 1931. In 1931 The Australian Whaling Company was not listed in the *Digest Year Book of Public Companies*, although the three New South Wales directors (of a total of five) were still included in the list of Directors in the back of the book. In the 1932 *Digest*, there is no mention of the Company or its Directors, and no further information on the venture could be found.

When David Stead died in 1957 it was the end of an era. The Society was his dream and his achievement. On his death, past-President Roy Bennet wrote in *Australian Wild Life*, 'A man of such decided ideas and such dogged determination as David Stead did not always find his friends and associates falling in willingly behind him. Yet with it all, those of us who worked with him recognise that burning zeal and sincerity of purpose that ultimately drew us with him; that unflinching idealism that built this Society into a factor of real significance in the community. In a sense, the Wild Life Preservation Society of Australia IS David G. Stead. In it he lives on, inspiring and advising, encouraging and assisting those whose ideals are compatible with his own. . . . Vale David G. Stead.'

[39] *Meridian*, p. 106