News from July 1911: Schreiner on Will Schreiner and the Races Congress

Olive Schreiner was invited to speak at the first ‘Universal Races Congress’, which met in London in July 1911. She was unable to attend because of health reasons. However, as her letter to her brother Will of 3 July below indicates, she sent to him a short address (of which there is now no known copy) to be read out at the Congress meetings (she also sent a telegram of support as well, as the Congress proceedings show).

What this letter doesn’t say is that Will Schreiner was himself due to speak at the Congress, as defence council for the Zulu leader Dinuzulu in 1908, elected leader of the black delegation which protested against the South Africa Union Act in 1909, and a Senator representing black views in the Union parliament from 1910. However, for reasons which are now not known, Will failed to speak, to his sister’s bitter upset. The reason for her upset was that this allowed the proponents of the ‘black peril’ moral panic then sweeping the settler states of southern Africa to present their views unopposed, and that if she had known Will would not speak she would have written directly on the ‘black peril’ issue.

Letter Reference
Olive Schreiner BC16/Box4/Fold4/1911/36
Archive
University of Cape Town, Manuscripts & Archives, Cape Town
Epistolary Type
Letter
Letter Date
3 July 1911
Address From
De Aar, Northern Cape
Address To
William Philip (‘Will’, ‘WP’) Schreiner
Other Versions

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1: Dear old Man
2:
3: Just a line to wish you all a good voyage & a good time. Stay as long
4: as you can. I am enclosing a little note to be read at the Races
5: Congress. Please post it to Secretary Spiller. ^I’ve lost his address.^
6: I meant to write a real letter but can’t. You have a nice company on
7: board. When I think you are really going to see England & London –
8: my London, a big lump comes in my throat.
9:
10: Good bye dearest old man
11: Olive
12: