

Extract from *Kirkcudbrightshire Advertiser*, 26th April 1912

THE TITANIC DISASTER

NARRATIVES BY ITS SURVIVORS

NATIONS IN MOURNING

On the arrival of the *Carpathia* at New York definite details became known of the terrible tragedy of the sinking of the *Titanic*. The number of lives lost is officially stated as 1635, and as saved, 705.

Numerous narratives by survivors have reached this country during the past week, and perhaps the most thrilling is that of a London gentleman (Mr Beesley) who, according to a Press Association special message, gave the following account of his experiences. He said - I had been in my berth about ten minutes when at about a quarter past ten o'clock I felt a slight jar. Then soon afterwards there was a second shock, but it was not sufficiently large to cause any anxiety to anyone. The engines, however, stopped immediately afterwards. I went up on deck in my dressing-gown, and found only a few people there, who had come up in the same way to inquire why we had stopped, but there was no sort of anxiety in the mind of anyone. We saw through the smoking-room window that a game of cards was going on, and I went in to ask if they knew anything. They had noticed the jar a little more, and, looking through the window, had seen a huge iceberg go by close to the side of the boat. The game of cards was resumed, and without any thought of disaster I retired to my cabin to read until we started again.

THE CAPTAIN'S ORDERS

A little later, hearing people going upstairs, I went out again, and found that everybody wanted to know why the engines had stopped. Going up on deck I saw that there was an unmistakable list downwards from the stern to the bows. Again I went down to my cabin, where I put on some warmer clothing. As I dressed I heard the order shouted, "All the passengers on deck with lifebelts on." We walked up slowly with the lifebelts tied on over our clothing, but even then we presumed that this was a wise precaution the captain was taking, and that we should return in a short time to go to bed. There was a total absence of panic or expression of alarm. The ship was absolutely still, but in a few moments we saw the covers being lifted from the boats and the crews allotted to them standing by and uncurling the ropes which were to lower them. Presently we heard the order, "All men stand back away from the boats. All ladies retire to the next deck below." The men all stood away and waited in absolute silence, some leaning against the end railings of the deck, others pacing slowly up and down.

WOMEN REFUSE TO GO

The boats were then swung out and lowered, where all the women were collected. They got in quietly, with the exception of some who refused to leave their husbands. In some cases they were torn from their husbands and pushed into the boats, but in many instances they were allowed to remain since there was no one to insist that they should go. Presently the boats near me were lowered down the 90 feet which separated them from the water. An officer in uniform came up as one boat went down and shouted out, "When you're afloat row round to the companion ladder and stand by with other boats for orders." "Aye aye, sir," came up the reply, but I don't think any boat was able to obey the order, for when they were afloat and had their oars at work the condition of the rapidly settling liner was much more apparent.

EVERYONE COMPLETELY SELF-CONTROLLED

In common prudence the sailors say that they could do nothing but row from the sinking ship and so save, at any rate, some lives. They no doubt anticipated that the suction from such an enormous vessel would be more than usually dangerous to the crowded boat., which was [illegible] filled with women. All this time there was no panic or rush to the boats; and there were no scenes of women sobbing hysterically. Everyone seemed to realise so slowly thate there was imminent danger, that when it was realised that we might all be presently in the sea with nothing but our lifebelts to support us until we were picked up by passing steamers, it was extraordinary how calm everyone [illegible] completely self-controlled we were [illegible] one by one the boats filled with women and children were lowered and rowed away into the night. Presently, word went round among us that men were put into boats on the starboard side. I was on the port side. Most of the men walked across the deck to see if this were true. I remained where I was, and shortly afterwards I heard the call, "Any more ladies?" Looking over the side of the ship I saw boat No. 13 swinging level with the deck. It was half-full of women. Again the call was repeated, "Any more ladies?" I saw none coming. Then one of the crew looked up, and said, "Any more ladies on your deck, sir?" "No," I replied. "Then you'd better jump," said he. I dropped and fell into the bottom of the boat as they cried, "Lower away." As the boat began to descend two ladies were pushed hurriedly through the crowd on the deck, and a baby, ten months old, was passed down after them. We drifted away easily, and when our oars were got out we headed directly away from the ship.

AN IDEAL NIGHT

There was a certain amount of shouting from one end of the boat to the other, and the discussion as to which way we should go was finally decided by our electing as captain the stoker who was steering and by all agreeing to obey his orders. He set to work at once to get in touch with the other boats, calling upon them and getting as close to them as seemed wise, so that when search boats came in the morning to look for us there would be more chance that all would be rescued. It was now one o'clock in the morning. The starlit night was beautiful, but as there was no moon it was not very light. The sea was as calm as a pond. There was just a gentle leave as the boat dipped up and down in the swell. It was an ideal night except for the bitter cold. In the distance the Titanic looked enormous. Her length and her great bulk were outlined in black against the starry sky. Every porthole and saloon were blazing with light. It was impossible to think that anything could be wrong with such a leviathan were it not for the ominous tilt downward in the bows where the water was by now up to the lowest row of portholes.

THE TITANIC DISAPPEARS

About two o'clock we observed her settling very rapidly, with her bows and the bridge completely under water. She slowly tilted straight on end with the stern vertically upwards. As she did so the lights in the cabins and the saloon, which had not flickered for a moment since we left died out, flashed once more, and then went out altogether. As the same time the machinery roared down through the vessel with a groaning rattle that could have been heard for miles. It was the weirdest sound, surely, that could have been heard in the middle of the ocean. This was not yet quite the end. To our amazement she remained in that upright position for a time, which I estimate as five minutes. It was certainly for some minutes that we watched at least 150 feet of the Titanic towering up above the level of the sea, looming black against the sky. Then with a quiet, slanting dive she disappeared beneath the waters.

HUMAN CRIES

Our eyes looked for the last time on the gigantic vessel in which we set out from Southampton. Then there fell on our ears the most appalling noise that human being ever heard - the cries of hundreds of our fellow-being struggling in the icy water, crying for help with a cry that we knew could not be answered. We longed to return to pick up some of those

who were swimming, but this would have meant the swamping of our boat and the loss of all of us.

A MARVELLOUS ESCAPE

Colonel Gracie, of the United States Army, who jumped from the topmost deck of the Titanic when she sank and was sucked down with her, tells a most extraordinary story. He was the sole survivor after the wave that swept that swept the liner just before the final plunge. Colonel Gracie, on reaching the surface again, swam until he found a cork and canvas raft, and then helped to rescue others. He gives the exact time of the sinking of the Titanic as 2.22 a.m., which was the hour at which his watch was stopped by his leap into the sea. After sinking with the ship, he said - It appeared to me as if I was propelled by some great force through the water. This might have been occasioned by explosions under the water, and I remembered fearful stories of people being boiled to death. Again and again I prayed for deliverance, although I was sure that the end had come. I had the greatest difficulty in holding my breath until I came to the surface. I knew that once I inhaled the water would suffocate me. When I got under the water I struck out with all my strength for the surface. I got the air again after a time, which seemed to me to be unending. There was nothing in sight save the ocean, dotted with ice and strewn with large masses of wreckage. Dying men and women all about me were groaning and crying piteously.

THE MOST PATHETIC SCENE

The second officer and a passenger, who were swimming near me, told me that just before my head appeared above the water one of the Titanic's funnels separated and fell apart near me, scattering the bodies in the water. I saw wreckage everywhere, and all that came within reach I clung to. By moving from one piece of wreckage to another, I reached the raft, which soon became so full that it seemed as if she would sink if more came on board her. There were 30 of us standing knee-deep in water and afraid to move lest we should be overbalanced. The crew, for self-preservation, had therefore to refuse to permit any others to climb on board. This was the most pathetic and horrible scene of all. The piteous cries of those around us ring in my ears, and I will remember them to my dying day. "Hold on to what you have, old boy," we shouted to each man who tried to get on board. "One more of you would sink us all." Many of those whom we refused answered as they went to their death, "Good Luck. God bless you." We prayed through all the weary night, and there never was a moment when our prayers did not rise above the waves.

"NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE"

Survivors all state that as the boats were hurrying away from the wreck the marine band did its best to cheer up the waning hopes of the passengers left behind. One lady declared an impressive scene took place on the stern of the liner, where the passengers were marched to be put into the boats. The Titanic's bandmaster had marched his bandsmen to that part of the ship, and, finding that there were insufficient boats to save all the people, assembled there, he called upon them to get their instruments. This they did, and as the lady in question was being rowed away in one of the boats she and her companions could hear them playing "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

By a remarkable coincidence it was the late Mr W. T. Stead who first brought to light the fact that the hymn which consoled the dying moments of the Titanic's crew and passengers (of whom he himself was one) was the favourite hymn of the late King Edward VII., who wrote that in his judgment "There is none more touching, nor one that goes more truly to the heart."

AMERICAN INQUIRY

The United States Senatorial Committee opened an inquiry last Friday in New York, and the Kirkcudbrightshire Advertiser 1912-04-26 (2)

principal witness of the day was Mr Bruce Ismay, the chairman of the White Star Line, who was subjected to a searching cross-examination. He stoutly denied the insinuation that he left the Titanic in the first lifeboat.

The sitting was resumed on Saturday when the chief witnesses were the wireless operator of the Carpathia and the assistant telegraphic clerk on the Titanic. From the statements made by the latter it is clear that the officers of the ill-fated vessel were warned from various steamers of the character and extent of the icefield. After a conference in the evening, Senator Smith decided to permit all but twelve of the crew and the four rescued officers to depart, but not to allow Mr Bruce Ismay to leave for England, in spite of the latter's desire to return immediately.

On the resumption of the inquiry in Washington on Monday Mr Franklin, the vice-president of the White Star Company, was closely examined. Asked to explain the sources of the false messages which were issued early after the catastrophe, Mr Franklin said the company's knowledge of these was gained from the New York press. Next day the third officer stated in evidence that immediately prior to the collision the liner was travelling at a faster rate than at any previous stage of the voyage.

Mr Ismay made a request on Wednesday to return to New York, but this was refused. During the day Mr Hichens, quartermaster of the Titanic, arrived in custody from New York. He intended to return to England on board the Celtic, but as he is regarded as an important witness he was intercepted. A sensational report was received to the effect that a passenger on board a vessel named the Mount Temple saw the Titanic after the collision. He said he was also a spectator of the scenes that followed, and intimated his willingness to give evidence. This report is being investigated.

THE BRITISH INQUIRY

It was announced in the House of Commons on Monday night that Lord Mersey had been appointed Wrecks Commissioner to inquire into the Titanic disaster.

A NEW ROUTE DECIDED ON

It is announced that all the British and Continental steamship lines have agreed to send their vessels for the future between three and four degrees further south in crossing the Atlantic, the new track being the most southerly ever yet used.

The agreement has been reached following the suggestion of the United States Government for a new track free from ice and fog.

LEGAL ASPECT OF A DISASTER AT SEA

According to the *Law Journal*, at common law the contract of the carrier of passengers is to provide a vessel free from defects that can be guarded against by care and skill, and to take due precaution to carry the passengers safely. It follows that, for injury to or the death of a passenger through negligence of the owners or their servants, the owners are liable at common law, but they have one privilege the carrier by land does not possess. They can limit their liability under the Merchant Shipping Act when the occurrence is without their fault or privity. They are only liable for the loss of life or personal injury caused to persons carried in ship, together with loss of property to the aggregate amount not exceeding £15 for each ton of the ship's tonnage. Of this, £8 is available for the loss of life, personal injuries, and loss of property. The surplus constitutes a fund of appropriated exclusively to claims for the loss of life or personal injuries. As regards the crew, the Workmen's Compensation Act applies in the case of a ship registered in the United Kingdom, and the Act expressly provides that any sum payable shall be paid in full.

SYMPATHY SHOWN AT A FOOTBALL MATCH

Remarkable scenes were witnessed at the Villa Park, Birmingham, on Saturday, where Aston Villa were playing Newcastle United. Before play commenced the band too up its position on the centre of the field and plead the Dead March in "Saul." Immediately everyone in the huge stands rose in their places, and there was scarcely a man who did not uncover his head in honour of the Titanic's dead. Again at the interval, while a collection was being made for the sufferers, the band played the hymn, "God be with you till we meet again," the crowd again rising *en masse*.

ORDERS FOR LIFEBOATS

The effect of criticism as to the inadequacy of boats carried by big liners had led to an extraordinary boom in building lifeboats. In Liverpool during the past two or three days orders have poured into boatbuilders from all the leading steamship companies in Liverpool, and day and night shifts are arranged in order to cope with the demand.

An order has been received in Belfast by Messrs Harland & Wolff from the White Star Line for 16 new lifeboats, with a total capacity of 1040, for the Olympic. When the new boats are delivered the liner will have 36 boats, able to accomodate 2218 persons.

OLYMPIC'S STOKERS REFUSE TO SAIL

The Olympic's sailing from Southampton for New York was delayed on Wednesday by a remarkable incident. Over 280 members of the crew, stokers and greasers, left the ship, alleging that some of the collapsible boats that had been placed on the ship were not seaworthy. They declined to sail unless regulation lifeboats were provided. The Olympic has meantime anchored at Spithead to recruit the stokehold crew.

THE RELIEF FUNDS

Up till Wednesday night the Lord Mayor of London's fund alone had reached a total of £138,000. In the box outside the Mansion House over £330 was deposited by passers-by. When the heavy task of collection has to some extent ceased the Lord Mayor proposes to call together an influential committee to advise him as to the application and distribution of the fund. As present no information has been received as to the number of widows, orphans, and dependent relatives of the passengers and crew who will come upon the fund.

LOST AT SEA

Rest, weary souls, from troubles free,
Rest in the calm and tranquil sea.
To thee the best and glorious part.
To us the sad and sorrowing heart.

Hearts in the homeland, warm and kind,
Hearts of the dear ones left behind.
Mourning for thee whose souls have sped,
Thee who to this sad world are dead.

Dead to the cares and storms of earth,
Dead to alternate grief and mirth,
Under the tired waves sweetly sleep,
Rocked in the vast and mighty deep.

Sleep on, braves brave souls, the while we mourn,
Sleep on, though our grieved hearts are torn,
The waves have sang thy requim,
A saddened world replies "Amen."

Kirkcudbright, D. F.

THE TITANIC'S BAND

Down by the head and sinking; the boats are lowered away;
Tearful and sad are the last farewells, for many behind must stay.
"Room for the women and children," 'tis man's proud right to die;
So bravely they place their loved ones in and kiss them a fond good-bye.

In the hush of these awful moments, in the face of their certain doom,
The blackness of night around them beneath them a watery tomb;
Within them a light was shining, so they feared not the hungry sea
For the band, forming up on a sloping deck, played "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

"Nearer, my God, to Thee." They played o'er their ocean grave.
"E'en though it be a Cross"; and the strains float over the wave
Away to the distant boats, scattered wide in the icy sea,
And a heart-wrung prayer wings its way to the sky - "Nearer, my God, to Thee."

Their's was no song of Empire, no vaunt of their country's power,
But the simple notes of a sweet old hymnto cheer them in death's dark hour.
Calming the ones who had left them, inspiring those who stayed -
Down the ages the tune shall ring that the band of the liner played.

Britain, the pride of the nations, first on the roll of fame,
Every thy sons brings laurels to add to thy glorious name.
But surely no greater heroes the paths of glory trod
Than those who e'en at the gates of death turned their fellows' thoughts to God.

Fathoms deep in the ocean those gallant lads may lie,
Far from their home and kindred, but their fame shall never die.
"Greater love hath no man than this," the truth of the words we see,
For many that night by the band were led nearer, my God, to Thee.

D. J. Davidson

LINES ON THE LOSS OF THE TITANIC

The darkness has silently fallen,
And the last rays of sunlight are gone,
And if the Ice King had dispelled them
With his breath from the chill Polar zone.

Gloom broods o'er the face of the ocean,
Unruffled by zephyr or breeze
Save there where a great stately liner
Is cleaving the darkling seas.

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But here, gloom and sorrow forgotten,
Each face tells of gladness and mirth;
They ween themselves safe on the ocean
As in their fair homes on the earth.

For soft gleam the lights o'er the waters,
And low sounds the music, and sweet,
And eyes to bright eyes fondly gazing
Find life's joy and rapture complete.

Ah, little they know that above them
The Angel of Death on the gloom
Hath spread his broad wings, and in sadness
Prepares them a watery tomb.

For, swift as the lightning in summer,
Comes a crash, cries of terror and woe,
As back the ship reels, torn asunder,
All crushed on that treacherous floe.

But eyes, wild with fear, soon grow calmer,
And trembling the scattered groups stand,
Till a new note of dread cleaves the silence -
"Man the boats" comes the thrilling command.

And the ears which hear scarce can believe it
That the ship which, so stately and free,
Sailed out there, the pride of the nation,
Must be left to the merciless sea.

But the hearts on the doomed ship are British,
Of a long line of heroes the sons,
Facing death on the deep just as bravely
As their sires charged the Russian guns.

Soon the boats are all silently lowered,
and each hero strives, valiant and kind,
[illegible] shame did he seek his own safety
[illegible] a woman or child's left behind.

And in that dread hour not a craven,
For all are resigned to the will
Of Him who did order the tempest
Till the waves all obeyed and were still.

And when the last boat is departed,
And in crept the pitiless sea.
They sank to their graves in the ocean,
Their last requiem - "Nearer to Thee"

Woe, woe, for a nation in mourning!
For orphans and widows bereft.
All sad for the loss of their loved ones,
But their glorious memories are left.

And Britain shall e'er hold them sacred,
And inscribe for each hero his name
In its place in the heart of the nation,
In the annals of deathless fame.

W.T.

Contact: www.titanicfiles.org/impressum_english.htm

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