

## FRENCHMEN'S ACCOUNT

### *The Times*

Saturday 20 April 1912

#### PASSENGERS' FAITH IN THE SHIP

We were quietly playing auction bridge with a Mr. Smith from Philadelphia, when we heard a violent noise similar to that produced by the screw racing. We were startled and looked at one another under the impression that a serious accident had happened. We did not, however, think for a catastrophe, but through the portholes we saw ice rubbing against the ship's sides. We rushed on deck and saw that the Titanic had a tremendous list. There was everywhere a momentary panic, but it speedily subsided. To the inquiries of a lady one of the ship's officers caustically replied, "Don't be afraid, we are only cutting a whale in two." Confidence was quickly restored, all being convinced that the Titanic could not founder. Captain Smith nevertheless appeared nervous; he came down on deck chewing a toothpick. "Let everyone," he said "put on a lifebelt, it is more prudent." He then ordered the boats to be got out. The band continued to play popular airs in order to reassure the passengers. Nobody wanted to go in the boats, everyone saying "What's the use'?" and firmly believing there was no risk in remaining on board. In these circumstances some of the boats went away with very few passengers; we saw boats with only about 15 persons in them. Disregarding the advice of the officers many of the passengers continued to cling to the ship. When our boat had rowed about half a mile from the vessel the spectacle was quite fairylike. The Titanic, which was illuminated from stem to stern, was perfectly stationary, like some fantastic piece of stage scenery. The night was clear and the sea perfectly smooth, but it was intensely cold. Presently the gigantic ship began to sink by the bows, and then those who had remained on board realised to the full the horror of their situation. Suddenly the lights went out, and an immense clamour filled the air. Little by little the Titanic settled down, and for three hours cries were heard. At moments the cries were lulled, and we thought it was all over, but the next instant they were renewed in still keener accents. As for us we did nothing but row, row, row to escape from the obsession of the heartrendering cries. One by one the voices were stilled. Strange to say, the Titanic sank without noise and, contrary to expectations, the suction was very feeble. There was a great backwash and that was all. In the final spasm the stern of the leviathan stood in the air and then the vessel finally disappeared - completely lost. In our little boat we were frozen with cold, having left the ship without overcoats or rugs. We shouted from time to time to attract the attention of the other boats, but obtained no reply. With the same object a German baron [Alfred Nourney] who was with us fired off all the cartridges in his revolver. This agonizing suspense lasted for many hours, until at last the Carpathia appeared. We shouted "Hurrah" and all the boats scattered on the sea made towards her. For us it was like coming back to life. A particularly painful episode occurred on board the Titanic after all the boats had left. Some of the passengers who had remained on the ship, realizing too late that she was lost, tried to

launch a collapsible boat which they had great difficulty in getting into shape. Nevertheless they succeeded in lowering it. The frail boat was soon half full of water and the occupants one after the other either were drowned or perished with cold, the bodies of those who died being thrown out. Of the original 50 only 15 were picked up by the Carpathia, on board which we joined them. We cannot praise too highly the conduct of the officers and men of the Carpathia. All her passengers gave up their cabins to the rescued women and the sick, and we were received with every possible kindness. Similarly we bear sorrowful tribute to the brave dead of the Titanic. Colonel Astor and the others were admirable in their heroism and the crew fulfilled with sublime self-sacrifice all the dictates of humanity. Much useless sacrifice of life would have been avoided but for the blind faith in the unsinkableness of the ship and it all the places in the boats had been taken in time. What have we saved from the wreck? Omont has a hair-brush, Marechal a book "Sherlock Holmes" and Chevré nothing. We all three send to our families resurrection greetings, and it is with immense joy that we cry from this side of the Atlantic 'A bientôt.'

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