

BULLOCK SHAN

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THOMAS ANDREWS,
SHIPBUILDER

Shan Bullock
Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder

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Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder

**TO THE MEN WITH WHOM THOMAS
ANDREWS WORKED WHO KNEW
AND LOVED HIM I DEDICATE
THIS BRIEF STORY OF HIS LIFE**

INTRODUCTION

Mr. Shan Bullock, who needs no introduction to those who read Irish books, has done no better work than in this tribute to one of the noblest Irishmen Ulster has produced in modern times. I refer not only to the literary merits of *Thomas Andrews, Shipbuilder*, which speak for themselves, but rather to the true insight with which he has fulfilled the precise purpose held in view by those who asked him to write this little memorial volume. What that purpose was must be known in order that the story itself, and the manner of the telling, may be fully appreciated.

The book was written at the request of a few Irishmen, myself among them, who work together in a movement which seeks to develop agriculture, and generally to improve the condition of our rural communities. We are deeply interested in the great achievements of Ulster industry, because we hold strongly that the prosperity of our country depends largely upon the mutual understanding and the co-ordination of effort between the two great economic interests into which the Irish, in common with most civilised peoples, are divided. For this consummation Ireland needs, in our opinion, industrial leaders with a broader conception of the life of the country as a whole. For such leaders we naturally look, more especially those of us whose eyes are turning towards the westering sun, to the younger men. Among these none seemed to us so ideally fitted to give practical

expression to our hopes as Thomas Andrews. Thus it was the sense of the great loss the country had sustained which set us thinking how the life of the shipbuilder who had died so nobly could be given its due place in the history of our times – how the lesson of that life could be handed down to the builders of ships and of other things in the Ireland of our dreams.

The project having so originated, the proper treatment of the subject had to be determined. Unquestionably Thomas Andrews was a hero. The wise Bishop Berkeley has said: “Every man, by consulting his own heart, may easily know whether he is or is not a patriot, but it is not easy for the bystander.” A man cannot thus know whether he is or is not a hero. Both he and the bystander must wait for the occasion to arise, and the opportunities for exhibiting heroism are as rare and perilous as those for exhibiting patriotism are common and safe. To Thomas Andrews the supreme test came – came in circumstances demanding almost superhuman fortitude and self-control. Here was not the wild excitement of battle to sustain him; death had to be faced calmly in order that others – to whom he must not even bid farewell – might live. And so in his last hour we see this brave, strong, capable and lovable man displaying, not only heroism, but every quality which had exalted him in the regard of his fellows and endeared him to all who had worked and lived with him. This is the verdict of his countrymen now that the facts of that terrible disaster are fully known.

Yet it was far from our purpose to have the tragedy of the

Titanic written with Thomas Andrews as the hero. We deemed it better to place the bare facts before some writer of repute, not one of his personal friends, and ask him to tell in simple language the plain tale of his life so far as it could be gleaned from printed and written records, from his family, friends, and employers; above all, from those fellow-workers – his “pals” as he liked to call them – to whom this book is most fittingly dedicated. The story thus pieced together would be chiefly concerned with his work, for his work was his life.

To Thomas Andrews the hero, then, we did not propose to raise a monument. To his memory a fine memorial hall is to be built and endowed in his native Comber by the inhabitants of the town and district and his friends, while he will be associated in memorials elsewhere with those who died nobly in the wreck.¹ These tributes will serve to remind us how he died, but will not tell us how he lived. It is the purpose of this short memoir to give a fairly complete record of his life – his parentage, his home, his education, his pleasures, his tastes and his thoughts, so far as they are known, upon things which count in the lives of peoples. The family, and all from whom information was sought, responded most cordially to our wishes. There remained the difficulty of finding a writer who could tell the story of Thomas Andrews the man, as we wished it to be told.

¹ In Belfast a memorial to Thomas Andrews and the other Belfast men who died in the wreck has been generously subscribed to by the citizens, and by the Queen’s Island workers. He is also included amongst those to whom a similar memorial is to be erected in Southampton. The Reform Club in Belfast is honouring his memory with a tablet.

For such a task it was decided that, if he could be induced to undertake it, the right man was Shan Bullock. He is an Ulsterman, a writer of tales of Ulster life, distinguished among other Irish books by their sincerity and unequalled understanding of the Ulster character. While other Irish writers of imagination and genius have used Irish life to express their own temperament, Shan Bullock has devoted his great literary ability almost entirely to the patient, living and sincere study of what Ulster really is in itself as a community of men and women. It is true that his stories are of rural and agricultural communities, while the scene is now laid chiefly in a great centre of manufacturing industry. But in Mr. Bullock's studies it is always the human factor that predominates. One feels while reading one of his tales that he loves to look upon a man, especially an Ulster man. Here was the ideal historian of the life of Thomas Andrews.

It fell to me to approach Mr. Bullock. I induced him to go and see the family, having arranged with them to bring him into touch with the authorities at the Island Works, who were to show him round and introduce him to many who knew our friend. He promised me that he would look over all the material out of which the story could be pieced together, and that if he found that it "gripped" him and became a labour of love he would undertake it. The story did, as the reader will see, grip him, and grip him hard, and in telling it Mr. Bullock has rendered the greatest of all his services to lovers of truth told about Ireland by Irish writers.

It will now, I think, be clear why Thomas Andrews has,

notwithstanding his noble end, been represented as the plain, hard-working Ulster boy, growing into the exemplary and finally the heroic Ulster man that we knew. We see him ever doing what his hand found to do, and doing it with his might. Our author, rightly as I think, makes no attempt to present him as a public man; for this captain of industry in the making was wholly absorbed in his duties to the great Firm he served. None the less I am convinced that the public side of the man would not long have remained undeveloped – who knows but that this very year would have called him forth? – because he had to my personal knowledge the right public spirit. Concentration upon the work in hand prevented his active participation in public affairs, but his mastery over complicated mechanical problems – his power to use materials – and to organise bodies of men in their use, would not, I believe, have failed him if he had come to deal with the mechanics of the nation.

These may be fruitless speculations now, and Mr. Bullock wisely leaves us to draw our own conclusions as to the eminence to which Thomas Andrews might have attained had his life been spared. Abundant proof of the immense influence he might have exercised is furnished in the eloquently sincere grief which pervades the letters of condolence that poured into the home of the parents at Comber when it was known that they had lost their distinguished son. They came – over seven hundred of them – from all sorts and conditions of men, ranging from a duke to a pauper in a workhouse. In one of these letters, too intimate to

publish, a near relative pays to the dead shipbuilder a pathetically simple tribute with which I may well leave to the reader Mr Bullock's tale of a noble life and heroic death. "There is not," ran this fine epitaph, "a better boy in heaven."

HORACE PLUNKETT.

THOMAS ANDREWS

SHIPBUILDER

I

For six generations the Andrews family has been prominent in the life of Comber: that historic and prospering village, near Strangford Lough, on the road from Belfast to Downpatrick: and in almost every generation some one or other of the family has attained distinction. During the eventful times of 1779-82, John Andrews raised and commanded a company of Volunteers, in which his youngest son, James, served as Lieutenant. Later, another John Andrews was High Sheriff of Down in 1857; and he also it was who founded the firm of John Andrews & Co., which to-day gives employment to some six hundred of the villagers. The present head of the family, William Drennan Andrews, LL.D., was a Judge of the High Court, Ireland, from 1882, and has been a Privy Councillor since 1897. His brother, Thomas Andrews, is a man whose outstanding merits and sterling character have won him an honoured place among Ulstermen. One of the famous Recess Committee of 1895, he is President of the Ulster Liberal Unionist Association, Chairman of the Belfast and County Down Railway Company, a Privy Councillor,

a Deputy Lieutenant of Down, High Sheriff of the same county, and Chairman of its County Council. Two more brothers, James and John, were Justices of the Peace. In 1870 Thomas Andrews married Eliza Pirrie, a descendant of the Scotch Hamiltons, Lord Pirrie's sister, and herself a woman of the noblest type.

To these, and of such excellent stock, was born, on February 7th, 1873, a son, named after his father, and described in the family record as Thomas Andrews of Dunallan. His eldest brother, John Miller, born in 1871, and his youngest brother, William, born in 1886, are now Managing Directors of John Andrews & Co., Ltd., under the Chairmanship of their father. A third brother, James, born in 1877, adopted the profession of his distinguished uncle, and is now a barrister-at-law. His only sister, Eliza Montgomery, married in 1906, Lawrence Arthur, the third son of Jesse Hind, Esq., J.P., of Edwalton, Notts, and a solicitor of the Supreme Court.

Tom was, we are told, "a healthy, energetic, bonny child, and grew into a handsome, plucky and lovable boy." His home training was of the wisest, and of a kind, one thinks, not commonly given to Ulster boys in those more austere times of his youth. "No one," writes his brother John, "knew better than Tom how much he owed to that healthy home life in which we were brought up. We were never otherwise treated than with more than kindness and devotion, and we learned the difference between right and wrong rather by example than by precept." To Tom, his father, then and always, was as an elder brother,

full of understanding and sympathy; nor did his mother, even to the end, seem to him other than a sister whose life was as his own. He and his elder brother, John, were inseparable comrades, there among the fields of Comber and in their beautiful home, with its old lawn and gardens, its avenue winding past banks of rhododendrons, the farm behind, outside the great mill humming busily, and in front the gleam of Strangford Lough. Both father and mother being advocates of temperance, encouraged their lads to abstain from tobacco and strong drink; and to this end their good mother offered to give a tempting prize to such of her sons as could on their twenty-first birthday say they had so abstained. Tom, and each of his brothers, not only claimed his prize but continued throughout life to act upon the principles it signalled. Doubtless at times, being human boys, they fell into mischief: but only once, their father states, was bodily punishment given to either, and then, as fate willed it, he boxed the ear of the wrong boy!

Quite early, young Tom, like many another lad, developed a fondness for boats, and because of his manifest skill in the making of these he gained among his friends the nickname of "Admiral." In other respects also the man who was to be showed himself in the boy. He had a beautiful way with children. He loved animals of every kind and had over them such influence that they would follow him and come to his call. Still at Ardara, in shelter of the hedge, you may see his nine hives of bees, among which he used to spend many happy hours, and to which in later

times he devoted much of his hard-won leisure: once, his mother will tell you, spending a whole winter's day – and a hunting day too! – carrying his half-famished workers to and fro between hive and kitchen in his cap. For horses he had a passion, and particularly for the Shetland pony given to him one birthday. The fiercest brute yielded to his quiet mastery; he never used whip or spur; and in time he was known as one of the straightest and most fearless riders to hounds in County Down.

Until the age of eleven he was educated privately by a tutor, but in September, 1884, he became a student at the Royal Academical Institution, Belfast – the same institution through which, some years previously, his father and his uncle, then Mr. Pirrie, had passed. There he showed no special aptitudes, being fonder apparently of games than of study, and not yet having developed those powers of industry for which, soon, he became notable. In the Institution, however, was no more popular boy, both with masters and schoolfellows. He excelled at cricket, one is glad to know, and at all manly sports. Even then, we are told, generosity and a fine sympathy were prominent traits in his character. “He was always happy,” writes a playmate, “even-tempered, and showed a developing power of impressing everyone with his honesty and simplicity of purpose.” Wherever he went Tom carried his own sunshine. All were fond of him. One can see him returning with his brother from school, big, strong, well-favored, and perhaps with some premonition of what the future had in store, lingering sometimes near the station

doorway to watch the great ships rising above the Island Yard close by and to listen for a minute to the hammers beating some great vessel into shape: and whilst he stands there, grave and thoughtful for a minute, one may write here the judgment of his parents upon him, “He never caused us a moment’s anxiety in his life.”

II

When he was sixteen, on the 1st May, 1889, Tom left school, and as a premium apprentice entered the shipyard of Messrs. Harland & Wolff. In one important respect the date of his entry may be accounted fortunate, for about that time, chiefly through the enterprise of the White Star Company in the matter of constructing a fleet of giant ships for the Atlantic service, great developments were imminent, if not already begun, in the shipping world. To a boy of sixteen, however, the change from the comforts of home and the comparative freedom of school-life to the stern discipline of the yards must have been exacting. It was work now, and plenty of it, summer and winter, day in day out, the hardest he could do at the hardest could be given him. He was to be tested to the full. With characteristic wisdom, Mr. Pirrie had decided that no favour whatever was to be shown the boy on the score of relationship. By his own efforts and abilities he must make his way, profiting by no more than the inspiration of his uncle's example: and if he failed, well, that too was a way many another had gone before him.

But Tom was not of the breed that fails. He took to his work instantly and with enthusiasm. Distance from home necessitated his living through the workaday week in Belfast. Every morning he rose at ten minutes to five and was at work in the Yard punctually by six o'clock. His first three months were spent

in the Joiner's shop, the next month with the Cabinet makers, the two following months working in ships. There followed two months in the Main store; then five with the Shipwrights, two in the Moulding loft, two with the Painters, eight with the iron Shipwrights, six with the Fitters, three with the Pattern-makers, eight with the Smiths. A long spell of eighteen months in the Drawing office completed his term of five years as an apprentice.

Throughout that long ordeal Tom inspired everyone who saw him, workmen, foremen, managers, and those in higher authority, as much by the force of his personal character as by his qualities of industry. Without doubt here was one destined to success. He was thorough to the smallest detail. He mastered everything with the ease of one in love with his task. We have a picture of him drawn by a comrade, in his moleskin trousers and linen jacket, and instinctively regarded by his fellow-apprentices as their leader, friend and adviser in all matters of shipyard lore and tradition. "He was some steps ahead of me in his progress through the Yard," the account goes on, "so I saw him only at the breakfast and luncheon hours, but I can remember how encouraging his cheery optimism and unfailing friendship were to one who found the path at times far from easy and the demands on one's patience almost more than could be endured." Many a workman, too, with whom he wrought at that time will tell you to-day, and with a regret at his untimely loss as pathetic as it is sincere, how faithful he was, how upstanding, generous. He would work at full pressure in order to gain time to assist an old

workman "in pulling up his job." He would share his lunch with a mate, toil half the night in relief of a fellow-apprentice who had been overcome by sickness, or would plunge gallantly into a flooded hold to stop a leakage. "It seemed his delight," writes a foreman, "to make those around him happy. His was ever the friendly greeting and the warm handshake and kind disposition." Such testimony is worth pages of outside eulogy, and testimony of its kind, from all sorts and conditions, exists in abundance.

The long day's work over at the Island, many a young man would have preferred, and naturally perhaps, to spend his evenings pleasantly: not so Tom Andrews. Knowing the necessity, if real success were to be attained, of perfecting himself on the technical as much as on the practical side of his profession, and perhaps having a desire also to make good what he considered wasted opportunities at school, he pursued, during the five years of his apprenticeship, and afterwards too, a rigid course of night studies: in this way gaining an excellent knowledge of Machine and Freehand drawing, of Applied mechanics, and the theory of Naval architecture. So assiduously did he study that seldom was he in bed before eleven o'clock; he read no novels, wasted no time over newspapers; and hardly could be persuaded by his friends to give them his company for an occasional evening. His weekly game of cricket or hockey, with a day's hunting now and then or an afternoon's yachting on the Lough, gave him all the relaxation he could permit himself; and by 1894, when his term of apprenticeship ended, the thrill

of hitting a ball over the boundary (and Tom was a mighty hitter who felt the thrill often) was experienced with less and still less frequency, whilst sometimes now, and more frequently as time went on, the joy of spending Sunday with his dear folk at Comber had to be foregone. Even when the Presidency of the Northern Cricket Union was pressed upon him, such were the stern claims of duty that the pleasure of accepting it had ruthlessly to be sacrificed.

What grit, what zest and sense of duty, the boy – for he was no more – must have had, so to labour and yet to thrive gloriously! Perfect health, his sound physique, his sunny nature, and strict adherence to the principles of temperance encouraged by his mother, helped him to attain fine manhood. During the period of his apprenticeship he was up to time on every morning of the five years except one – and of his doings on that fateful morning a story is told which, better perhaps than any other, throws light upon his character.

It was a good custom of the firm to award a gold watch to every pupil who ended his term without being late once. That morning Tom's clock had failed to ring its alarm at the usual time, so despite every endeavour the boy could not reach the gates before ten minutes past six. He might, by losing the whole day and making some excuse, have escaped penalty: instead, he waited outside the gates until eight o'clock and went in to work at the breakfast hour.

One other story relating to this period is told by his mother.

It too reveals distinctive points of character.

On an occasion Tom, with several fellow-pupils, went on a walking tour during the Easter holidays over the Ards peninsula. Crossing Strangford Lough at Portaferry, they visited St. John's Point, the most easterly part of Ireland; then, finding the tide favourable, crossed the sands from Ballykinler to Dundrum – Tom carrying the youngest of the party on his back through a deep intervening stretch of water – and thence, by way of Newcastle, proceeded across the mountains to Rostrevor.

In their hotel at Rostrevor the boys, during an excess of high spirits, broke the rail of a bedstead; whereupon Tom, assuming responsibility, told the landlady that he would bear the expense of repairing the break. She answered that in her hotel they did not keep patched beds, consequently would be troubling him for the cost of a new one.

“If so, the old one belongs to me,” said Tom.

“Provided you'll be taking it away,” countered the dame.

The boy argued no further, but finding presently, through a friendly chambermaid, an old charwoman who said her sick husband would rejoice in the luxury of the bedstead, he offered to mend it and give it to her.

“Ah, but wouldn't it be more than my place is worth, child dear,” she answered, “for the like of me to be taking it from the hotel.”

“Never mind that,” said Tom. “Give me your address, borrow a screw driver, and I'll see to it.”

So he and his companions, having roughly repaired the rail, took the bedstead to pieces, and, applauded by the visitors, carried it to the street. A good-natured tram conductor allowed them to load their burden on an end of his car. Soon they reached the woman's home, bore in the bedstead, set it up in the humble room, raised the old man and his straw mattress upon it from the floor, made him comfortable, and dowered with all the blessings the old couple could invoke upon them, went away happy.

III

So much impressed was the firm with Tom's industry and capacity that, soon after the time of his entering the Drawing Office in November, 1892, he was entrusted with the discharge of responsible duties. It is on record that in February, 1893, he was given the supervision of construction work on the *Mystic*; that in November of the same year he represented the firm, to its entire satisfaction and his own credit, on the trials of the White Star Liner *Gothic*; whilst, immediately following the end of his apprenticeship in May, 1894, he helped the Shipyard Manager to examine the *Coptic*, went to Liverpool and reported on the damage done to the *Lycia*, and in November discussed with the General Manager and Shipyard Manager the Notes in connection with the renovation of the *Germanic*— that famous Liner, still capable after twenty-five years on the Atlantic Service of making record passages, but now crippled through being overladen with ice at New York.

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