

The Ma
Adventure in Life!

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The Most Beautiful Adventure in Life!

By

REV. WILFRED G. HURLEY, C.S.P.



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The Most Beautiful Adventure In Life!

To put it mildly, it always irritates me.

People always asking me: "What was his name?"

For what does it matter?

When a man does something, or says something, out of the ordinary, why not let the deed or the word stand by itself? Why must it be filed away labeled with the man's name? Names, today, mean nothing anyway.

And furthermore, in this case I have a pretty strong conviction that this man would much rather his name would not be used. If anyone could be helped by anything he said or did, so be it. For he never considered himself the heroic type. Moreover this was a personal affair, between his God and himself. And in these matters he was definitely reserved, shy, and very humble. Hence I am sure he would not wish his name

even mentioned. So why not have it his way.

Because, from all accounts, he was really a splendid chap. He was "a man of the world" in the better sense of the word. Cultured. Quiet-speaking. Refined. Honest. Upright without being blatant about it. A true cosmopolitan. Talented beyond belief. A charming sincerity.

In the natural course of events, there were a few who did not like him. These few seemed to have really nothing against him, except that they were blindly jealous of his abilities and his phenomenal success. But even they admitted that he would never lend his talents to anything that was not obviously clean and decent. And with him it was not a matter of expediency; it was a matter of principle. His private life seemed above reproach. As far as I know he never did anyone a bad turn, though to avoid doing so, oftentimes he had to go far out of his way.

He had been born of poor parents and was proud of it, and of them. His road in life had not been easy, for he

had come up the hard way. But come up he did, by the sheer force of his genius, and, do not forget, genius is nine-tenths hard work. He had amassed a fortune, though he was still young. But with fame, fortune, and with the world, so to speak, at his feet, he had to go forth to his death.

He was in show-business. A writer, producer and director. A man truly outstanding and famous in his chosen field. Ironically, the night he was drowned in the darkness and cold of the North Atlantic, his name was flashing all up and down the length of that warm, vibrant street of a million lights,—Broadway. The Broadway which in those days really was something. Not the cheap, tawdry, tinselly street it is today.

But he had to die. He who was so much in love with life. Happy. Gay. Full of the joy of living. And with fame, fortune, and youth all his. It seemed such a pity and a shame to all who knew him, or knew of him.

But what did he think about it? After all, he was the one who died.

He went down in the sinking of the Titanic. A tragedy of the sea which is now maritime history. The maiden voyage of this magnificent ship. Strangely enough it was the first ship to be advertised with the word "unsinkable." It was also the last. I do not think the phrase has been used since. It was the first of the luxury liners.

In the building of the Titanic, English shipworkers had outdone themselves. As I recall, on the day it sailed, all England was merry in the celebration of a holiday for the occasion. Flags flying in the breeze in every city and hamlet. There was the inevitable speech-making. That gloriously martial air, "Britannia Rules the Waves," was the mighty theme-song of the day for the nation. A nation proud and happy in its achievement.

And well it might be. It certainly was an unforgettable and a magnificent sight as the great ship majestically sailed through the gathering dusk out into a sunset sea.

It was beautiful and it was thrilling. A giant streamer of flags and banners

was strung from the curving bow to the top of the towering mainmast, and from there down to the fantail of the stern. The decks were a mass of brilliant illumination, and lights were flashing from every porthole. In the luxurious ballroom the ship's orchestra was playing, and out over the waters there floated the music of the dance. The elite of the world were aboard. The celebrated, the famous, the leaders in society, government, culture and wealth were on the passenger list for this first sailing. Laughing, talking, calling to one another in that orderly confusion of a ship's departure. All was gaiety, happiness, joy and excitement. Surely here was life at its very best.

Yet, though no eye beheld him, at the prow of the proud Titanic, there silently stood with folded wings, the angel of death. Attentive, watchful, calmly waiting.

For already out of the frozen fastness of the North, to challenge the pride and ingenuity of men, stealthily floats an iceberg. Beautiful and shining in the reflected rays of the sun, but in the darkness of this night, a sullen,

treacherous, vicious agent of destruction. And the next morning a stunned and dazed world could scarcely believe what it read as it scanned the black headlines of horror and death: "The Titanic Sunk," and then: "1600 People Drowned."

He was one of them. He could have saved himself, so they said, but he had manfully stepped back to give his place in one of the too-few lifeboats to someone else. Probably a woman or a child. The age-old law of the sea: "Women and children first!"

It was a scene which for sheer drama chills the heart in the stark terror of its tragedy. The ship fatally wounded begins to die the death of ships at sea. Slowly the bow sinks beneath the implacable waters now greedy and impatient for the kill. Slowly the stern rears up and up into the quiet air of the midnight hour. Then for a few minutes the Titanic stands still. Motionless. Hopelessly condemned. Poised for the inevitable end. A few moments away, its complete destruction. A tired, exhausted ship, dying ignominiously,

when it had scarcely known what it was to live.

On its great decks, now steeply sloping, the human souls condemned to die with it, were gathered in heart-rending expectancy. As the ship would go down, they must go with it. There could be no reprieve. Some were kneeling in anguished prayer. Some were standing at the railings gazing transfixed into the dark waters angrily waiting. Here an aged couple standing close to each other in unselfish love and tenderness. There a mother holding tightly to her a scared, whimpering child. Some sobbing audibly. Others screaming hysterically. A vast panorama of sixteen hundred souls, each with its thoughts, conscience, fears, and courage. But all face to face with the inescapable truth that inexorable, imminent death is waiting for all.

In the darkness above, on the bridge, the Captain and some officers with bowed heads stand staring helplessly at the useless controls. For already the mighty machinery below has been flooded by the conquering sea.

It is the end! The ship's band in a supreme moment of self-sacrifice, in the best traditions of British sea-faring men, has gathered together and in the starlit gloom softly plays: "Nearer My God to Thee." And as the solemn strain of the hymn steals out into the night, it mingles and intermingles with the pleading prayers and the despairing cries of this doomed humanity.

Suddenly the great ship shudders. Then in a slow movement, higher and higher the stern rises into the air until the ship is almost straight up and down. And then, slowly at first, then faster and faster, as a thing accursed, it glides forward down and down into the icy depths, carrying its human cargo to where death awaits.

It is only a matter of a few minutes.

In a gigantic frenzy of triumph, the waters, fiercely frothing and foaming, whirl above the sunken ship. Then, their work of destruction complete, the waves slowly quiet down to roll on as before.

On the vast empty expanse of the ocean, gently tossing up and down, the

few, tiny, pitiful lifeboats. The survivors, waiting for rescue still many miles away, sit silently with bowed heads. Too horror-stricken and numbed by the relentless fury of the sudden death and destruction they have witnessed, for either prayers or tears. While far above in the heavens, silently looking down, the distant, unperturbed and impersonal stars.

Many are the tales told of those last few moments of the Titanic. Tales of inspiring heroism, and tales of incredible cowardice. For in times of stress and brutal fear, man's soul must reveal itself in its true light.

But we are concerned with only one man who went to his death that night. A man who had everything that makes a man want to live. A man who was famous and wealthy. A man who loved life. Remember? Yet he had to die. What did he think about it, as he stood on the brink of eternity?

A friend of his, a close friend, who had known him for years, spoke to him in those last few moments of his life. He was standing at the rail of the ship

as her crowded lifeboat was lowered down only a few feet away. She saw him standing there, his lips moving. Thinking perhaps he might be giving her some last message for his loved ones, she called to him: "I can't hear what you are saying."

He moved his head slightly with a start, then recognizing who she was, he gently smiled as he replied: "I was not speaking, I was just saying a few prayers."

Her heart went out to him, as he stood there so close to inevitable death. Life was so sweet. Life was so good. He had so much for which to live. It seemed such a shame that he should have to die. Her lips framed the words, and before she realized what she was saying, she had haltingly said: "It is horrible that you have to die."

But then . . . even in that dim light, she could see in his face, in his eyes, and in his smile, his unmistakable pity for her. Pity that she should even have such thoughts. An amazed pity. Then he smiled again.

"Horrible to die," he repeated her

words slowly, almost as though he could not comprehend their meaning. Almost imperceptibly he shook his head, and then with that sincerity in his voice, and that joyful happiness which was so characteristic of his captivating personality, he quietly replied: "No! No! No!"

There was a moment's hushed pause as he gazed up into the starlit night. Then he softly continued, more as though he were speaking to himself—or to his God: "Death . . . is the most beautiful adventure in life."

And so he went to his rendezvous with death. A song in his heart. A smile on his lips. Going forth on a beautiful adventure, out into the vast unknown.

Now here was no inspired hero throwing his life away in an uplifting surge of an overwhelming sense of duty. A soul aflame with love of flag and country. But just an ordinary man. Face to face with the uncertainty of death in a few short minutes. The relentless forces of nature held him in an inexorable grasp. His life was over,

and well he knew it. He did not have a chance. It was useless to even think of doing anything about it. Nothing could be done.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, all that remained of life for him were a few short minutes, and he must pass through the portals of death into eternity.

Whether we like it or not, it does make us stop and think.

We go through life pretty careless, carefree, and indifferent. Not that we do not think, at least now and then, of the inevitable end of our lives. Unless we are outright morons we do think of it, and think of it time and time again. Perhaps we are speeding along in a machine, and we just escape a terrible accident by a few inches. Or perhaps we attend the funeral of some friend and see the remains laid away forever. Or we are inquiring concerning the whereabouts of some childhood companions and learn that they have been dead for many months or years. Or perhaps we are reading of some celebrity who has passed on, perhaps cut off in the prime of life. But the thought does

come to our minds, and come again and again, and the words form unbidden on our lips: "Some day . . . I too . . . must die."

But immediately we try to put the thought aside. We tell ourselves such a thought is morbid and unhealthy. We deliberately try to forget, and maybe angrily seek to justify our attitude as we demand of ourselves: "Why should we distress ourselves by thinking of this hateful, ugly, disagreeable end of our life which we call death?"

And why should we?

Perhaps because we are wrong in our conception of death.

Perhaps death is not so hateful, so disagreeable, so ugly, as we think it is. Perhaps that famous, wealthy, young man on the deck of the sinking Titanic was exactly right when he said: "Death . . . is the most beautiful adventure in life." It may be even more than that. It may be a wonderful, glorious, thrilling adventure with a beauty beyond all human conception.

Certainly the Saints of God, men and women who have lived holy lives here

in this world, thought of it in this manner. And they were pretty much right on everything else. They could have been right about this. They lived as close as possible to God, Who is the Source of all Truth. And when the hour of their death drew near, there was certainly no fear, no dread, no horror of dying. Rather it was that they were joyful, filled with happiness, looking forward to it with ecstasy. Their hearts thrilled with the glory and the wonder of their entrance into eternity.

The things of this life for which we work and slave, and spend our lives in striving to gain, they counted as well lost in their gaining of the eternal things in the life to come. They saw the world and all it contained in its true light. In the light of eternity. To them, life was too short for anything to really matter.

In their minds, enlightened by God's holy wisdom, two facts were always remembered.

Two facts as plain, honest, and obvious to these Saints, as they should be to us.

And what are these facts?

The first fact is that death is absolutely certain for each and every one of us. None shall escape. Death is only a question of time. Death is not a possibility. It is not something that we may or may not have to face. It is a certainty. Definite. Undeniable. Indisputable.

And whether we like it or not, we have got to go through with it. The only question is, when will it be? And that is in the hands of God. It may be today. At the most it will be in a few short years. And as it is with all mankind, so it will be with you. The moment will come and you will be standing on the threshold of eternal life. Alone you must "launch out into the deep." Through the portals of death your soul must go on its way, in its loneliness, far out beyond the limits of the vast universe. On and on to its eternal destiny. And death is the portal through which it must pass.

To you, as to all human beings, God has given the priceless treasure of life. But some day that life must end.

Certainly no one questions this most obvious of truths. Every hour, every minute, every second in its passing is just so much less time for you to live. Whether awake or asleep, whether happy or unhappy, whether in sickness or in health, whether living a good life, or spending your time in the dives of vice and sin, it matters not. Steadily, relentlessly, time is passing by, and with it are passing the days of your life. Even the few minutes you are **spending** in reading these words mean just so much time gone forever. Even as you think of their meaning, death is drawing nearer and nearer. So also this day. No matter how, or where, this day has been passed, it will never return. Another day may come, but this day, whether for good or evil, is entering forever now in the eternity of the past. When this day is ended it is gone forever more.

You may strive as frantically as you will to bring it back, but even in your striving you realize the folly of it all. Down in your heart you know you are simply wasting more time in even wishing to bring it back. You may curse and swear and rave against it. You

may hate the very thought. But across the face of every clock might well be written these words: "I never turn back." And with every click of its mechanism, it is ticking your life away.

For with the passing of every hour you are steadily acquiring those little characteristics which cause people to refer to you, to speak of you as "old." Those little tell-tale marks and signs which time stamps upon all in its passing. That physical development and then that decay which age inevitably brings in its train. Your friends may not tell you this, but you know it only too well.

Thus, even in the longest life, which in its final analysis is, after all, so short and brief, age and time can mean only one thing. That death is constantly drawing closer and closer. You may try to play the part of a fool, as an ostrich which covers its head in the sand when it sees danger approaching, but like the ostrich you are fooling no one except yourself. For every beat of your heart means simply one less beat before it stops forever. For every beat, in its

very rhythm, is crying out to you in the tumult of the day, and the silence of the night, the solemn summons of death: "Come. Come. Come."

It should not be too hard to remember this fact. Surely everything in life reminds you of it. The coming and the going of the seasons. Spring with its newness of life, and then Summer with its fullness. And how true a symbol of the declining years of your life is the coming of Autumn as Nature prepares for Winter. The russet and gold colors everywhere. The barren fields. The landscape becoming sombre, bleak and bare. The harvest gathered. The leaves falling, one by one, until none are left, leaving only the memory of their beauty. The air is chill and cold. The sun distant, dim and cheerless. Truly the melancholy days.

And then lovely Winter comes with its soft covering of snow, as all things are laid to rest in quiet and silence beneath the beautiful white mantle. All nature is hushed, and sleeps in patience waiting the coming of its resurrection.

Thus each year is mankind taught anew by the symbolic teaching of Nature. Life comes, life develops, and life departs.

But surely on all sides you find this teaching of life and death. All around you is life beginning. You see it coming to its fullness. And then you see the inevitable decay and decline until death finally extinguishes the spark of life. In all plant life, as in the beauty of the flowers; in the life of the animal kingdom with some beloved little pet; it is always the same. It is a truth that even a little child soon grasps. Perhaps a lesson you yourself learned early in life, and learned it in heart-break and tears. And as the years have brought you wisdom, it is a truth which has become so deeply implanted in your consciousness as to become almost instinctive. Death is certain!

With the certainty of life itself.

That is the first fact.

The second fact the saints remembered is closely allied to this first.

Death always comes unexpectedly!

A fact also definite, obvious, and indisputable. Did not Christ Himself emphasize this, when He sternly warned: "Watch ye, therefore, because you know not what hour your Lord will come."

It is only a question of time when you must come to the end of your days on earth. In the passing of time that day must come, the dawn of which shall mark your last day in time. But why do people never suspect that this last day may be much nearer than they think? It is the common failing of all mankind. All know that at the end of their span of life, death is waiting. But why must all imagine that their span of life has many more years to go? The common fallacy has brought forth that saying so much in vogue today, "It is later than you think!"

But is not this your own idea of death . . . as far as yourself is concerned? That you have many more years to live. And what is the basis for thinking you are immune from death for the time being? Perhaps, it is later than YOU think.

For death always seems to strike when least expected. You know how true that is. Men and women cut down without a moment's warning. Just one instance. The toll of death from automobile accidents today is appalling. Your turn may easily be next. You may be the most careful person in the world, but every time you cross the street, you are at the mercy of every careless, thoughtless or reckless driver who happens to be coming along. And this is only one of a myriad of dangers which daily threaten.

The heart has only to stop its patient beating and life for you is finished. And a thousand and one causes may stop its beat. Some hidden physical defect. Some stealthy growth in some hidden recess which may easily escape detection of the most skilled observation of medical men. But why comment on the obvious?

Death is sudden, always unexpected.

Even men and women laid low by slow wasting diseases will glibly talk of some trip they are planning, or of some future date and event for which

they are waiting, when all around them know they will be in their graves before the week is ended. Whether these sick are drugged by the disease, or by the medicine they have taken, or whether it is simply habitual self-delusion, it seldom happens differently. Although no one else is deluded, we insist so often on deluding ourselves.

Two facts. Death is certain. Death is sudden.

Then the only sane, common-sense and reasonable thing to do is to be prepared for death—always. And do not tell yourself that you are different from the ordinary run of mankind, in that you are prepared and ready. For it is not true. If the angel of death should appear to you this hour and warn you that this is your last day on earth, your whitened face, the quick beating of your heart, your nervous trembling, would belie your self-assurance completely. The truth is, that you are not prepared, and that you are not preparing. And therein lies the danger.

For perhaps you are living in serious sin. Perhaps your life has been such,

or is such, that should death suddenly strike, you would not have a fighting chance to enter the Kingdom of God. You may have the intention of returning to God, some day. But stop and think how this looks in God's sight. You are calmly telling God that you will turn to Him in the future, but you are going to take your own good time about doing so. And you are telling this to Him, Who is your eternal Creator, Redeemer, and God. Surely a sin of irreverence and presumption that almost borders on blasphemy. Perhaps your intentions are good, but has it not been well said: "Hell is paved with good intentions." For "Tomorrow," says the sinner; and again "Tomorrow," until finally tomorrow never comes.

And this is the frightening folly of a soul endangering its eternal life. Expecting Almighty God to put up with its drivel and conceit. The insane folly of a sin-maddened fool in taking chances with eternity.

For with the things of the world, there is always an opportunity to right things again. There is always the hope

for a better day. Whether it be poverty, sickness, or misfortune. And even though the evil persist all through life, it can be borne and sustained in the hope of eternity, with its joys and happiness. For life is only a matter of time,—a few short years.

But with the loss of the eternal life in the everlasting Kingdom of God, there is no hope, no better day, but only the endless eternal night of the lost. With the bitter torment of the soul that knows it is lost through its own fault. A fault of sin persisted in, despite God's infinite patience, love and mercy. A diabolical presumption that God's goodness could be indefinitely abused and ridiculed, mocked and derided, until later on, in his own good time, the sinner would condescendingly deign to accept it.

You cannot—you must not—take a chance with eternity!

It Is Later Than You Think!

Or it may be that your transgressions and sins have not been so evil as to have cut off God's friendship completely from your soul. Yet you are living a

careless, indifferent, stupid life, immersed in a forgetfulness of trivial venial sins. It is so easy for this to happen in this day and these times. Living only for the present. Grubbing for money. Reading trashy literature. Keeping up with the latest murder mystery. Assiduously following the latest movies and the daily comic strips. Totally involved in the lower things of life.

Meanwhile seldom thinking of God. Any prayer or worship of God of the most perfunctory sort, with heart and mind far away. Nothing really evil, perhaps, but on the other hand, nothing worthwhile, either. Just an utterly materialistic, earthly, thoughtless existence, absorbing all your mind and energy. While quietly, relentlessly, rapidly the hours, days, months and even years slip past, never to return again.

Now, then, in all honesty, suppose you knew that this year, or this month would be your last here on earth. Would you be content to go along as you have been going? Would you be content in living this life of careless-

ness, in neglect of God and of the things of God?

And yet, can you say that this is not your last year, or month, on earth? In common-sense, reason, and intelligence, would it not be the wisest way to act as though it were? Certainly you cannot lose. For any treasure laid up in Heaven is secure against all loss. And a life lived with God, and for God, can only bring the happiest of results now, and more so as the days pass by. And in your heart you know this is so.

Certainly, as you look back down the years for the most joyful and carefree days in your life, do you not inevitably end up with recalling the happiness and joy of your youth? Days passed in innocence with the sense of God's love and care all about you.

If it is different now, whose fault is it? It is your fault alone! God never left you! Remember that always! It is you who left God. It is you who lost Him, through your stupid carelessness, pride, and sin. And if you would find God again, then all you have to do is simply to go back to where you left

Him. And may it be pointed out, that with the years passing by, it becomes more and more imperative that you do this. And do it promptly, without delay.

From now on, make every day, every hour, count. Live a life worthy of your priceless birthright as a living child of the Living God. Live in holiness, goodness, decency and righteousness. No more of this carelessness, pride, sloth and indifference. But rather a life spent in prayer, Holy Communion, spiritual reading, and all those other things of God which tend to prepare you for death, and for the eternal life to which death brings you.

Remember, you are no longer as young as you used to be!

It is later than you think!

Or it may be that you who read these lines are not of the Catholic Faith. Then in all honesty and fairness, why let those far-fetched and silly objections keep you from the true Church of God. Deprive you of those divine Sacraments of Christ. Those divinely instituted aids and helps which Christ Himself gave

mankind to enable us to live lives worthy of our eternal destiny. You seek the happiness of Christ's own? Then put aside those inane prejudices and foolish fears and return to the Faith of your Fathers. Would you not rather follow God's Will in this regard? Going forth into eternity with the Sign of the Cross upon your brow. With the love of God in your heart. With the peace of God in your soul.

Remember! It is later than you think!

Men and women of today pride themselves on their ability to take things as they are. With a hatred of sham, pretence, and evasion.

You want a presentation of the truth given straight - forwardly, honestly, plainly and bluntly. And right to the point! No wasted words!

Then here it is, your own way.

You asked for it! Let's see if you can take it!

You are going to die! You can be pretty certain that death will hit you suddenly and unexpectedly. Time is relentlessly passing by.

So, . . . what kind of a death is yours going to be?

Will death find you stupefied with terror? Find you hopelessly unprepared? Your soul alone with its sins, facing the wrath of the Infinitely Pure and Holy God. Smashing all your plans, all your hopes, all your schemes. Blinding. Baffling. Flinging your corrupting body back into the dust from which it came, and flinging your soul into an eternity that you know nothing about, and care nothing about, except to fear and dread it. For to you it is, and always must be, an eternity of endless night. A night without God, without hope, without end. Rejected by God forever more.

But why go on?

There is no adventure in a death like that.

But to live with Christ, that you may die with Christ!

Then, to you, the message of death comes, not thundered in wrath, but whispered in welcome. A death calm with no fear. A death glorious and sweet. A death solemn but not be-

wildering. A death which brings to you only peace and happiness.

With joy and love you go forth to meet your beloved God face to face. Your Almighty, Infinite Father, Whose own you are. Your Eternal Father Who loves you with a love which has the length, and breadth, and depth of eternity itself.

And as you go forth, there is only a song and gladness in your heart. For to you death comes only as the dawning of a glorious day. An endless day of joy and peace. An eternal day of love, contentment, and infinite happiness, for with such a death you have not come to the end of life. Rather it is, with such a death, you have come to the beginning of life.

The fullness of Life! The greatness of Life! The glory of Life!

The ordained fulfillment of Life's immortal destiny!

And, in all truth and certainty, with such a death, you too can say, as it was said that star-lit night in the North Atlantic, on the decks of the sinking Titanic: "Death . . . is the most beautiful adventure in Life."

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