

THE TITANIC AND THE LITERARY COMMENTATOR

BY E. B. FRENCH

The moral which Mr. H. G. Wells drew from the disaster could have been guessed by any careful reader of the *New Machiavelli*. His comment on it was merely incidental and appeared in one of his articles in the *Daily Mail* on "The Labour Unrest." It typifies perfectly to his mind the muddle of the present social situation and illustrates the incompetence of the upper class in modern society.

It was one of those accidents which happen with a precision of time and circumstance that outdoes art; not an incident in it all that was not supremely typical. It was the penetrating comment of chance upon our entire social system. Beneath a surface of magnificent efficiency was—slapdash. The ship was not even equipped to save its third-class passengers; they had placed themselves on board with an infinite confidence in the care that was to be taken of them, and most of their women and children went down with the cry of those who find themselves cheated out of life.

His remarks on Mr. Ismay's luckless notoriety are singularly just—

In the unfolding record of behaviour it is the stewardesses and bandsmen and engineers—persons of the trade-union class—who shine as brightly as any. And by the supreme artistry of Chance it fell to the lot of that tragic and unhappy gentleman, Mr. Bruce Ismay, to be aboard and to be caught by the urgent vacancy in the boat and the snare of the moment. No untried man dare say that he would have behaved better in his place. But for capitalism and for our existing social system his escape—with five and fifty third-class children waiting below to drown—was the abandonment of every noble pretension. It is not the man I would criticise, but the manifest absence of any such sense of the supreme dignity of his position as would have sustained him in that crisis. He was a rich man and a ruling man, but in the test he was not a proud man. In the common man's realisation that such is indeed the case with most of those who dominate the world lies the true cause and danger of our social indiscipline. And the remedy in the first place lies not in social legislation, and so forth, but in the consciences of the wealthy. Heroism and a general devotion to the common good are the only effective answer to distrust.