

# Thomas Ismay

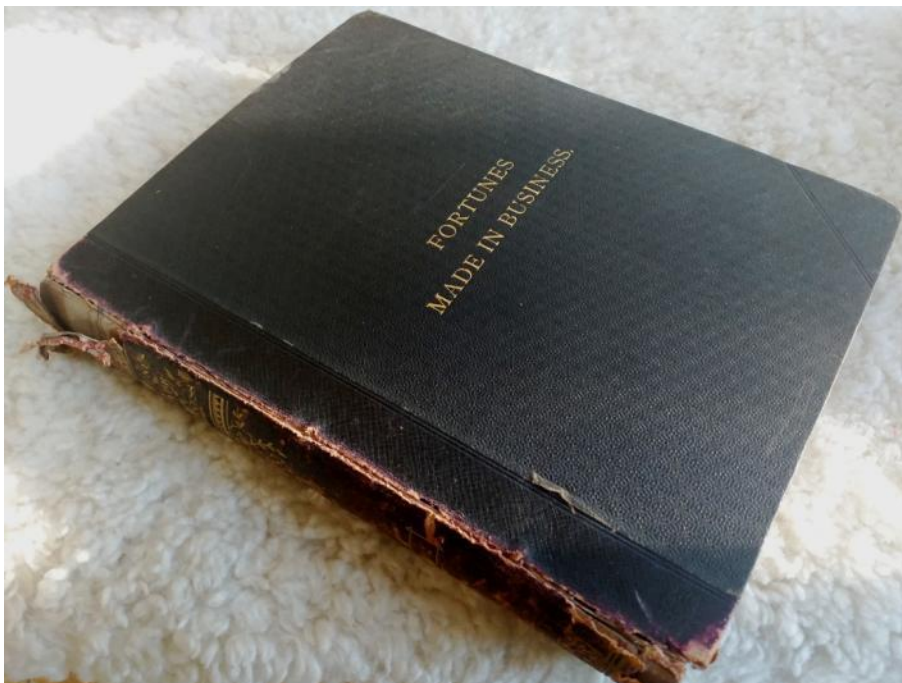
Shipping magnate

Born 1837.

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This life story is of the Victorian shipping magnate Thomas Ismay, founder of the White Star Line. It is extracted from 'Fortunes Made in Business: Life Struggles of Successful People' published by Amalgamated Press in 1902 (above).

# The Founder of the White Star Line.

## THE CAREER OF MR. THOMAS HENRY ISMAY.

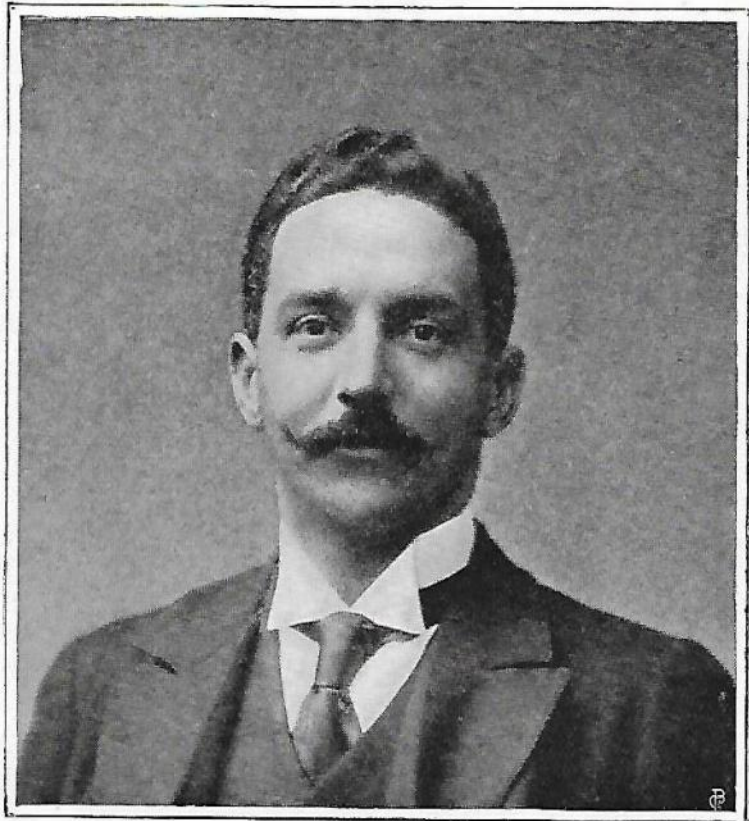
Mr. T. H. Ismay, the founder of the White Star Line, was the son of a Cumberland boat-builder. Apprenticed in Liverpool, he was able to secure an interest in a fleet of boats, and out of that he built up the splendid service of steamers known in all parts of the world. On his death, in 1900, he left the great fortune of £1,297,887.

Among the many stories of the sea with which the port of Liverpool has been intimately identified, it would be difficult to select one that has had a more important bearing upon the expansion of Great Britain's maritime commerce than that of the White Star Line.

This well-known line owes its success mainly to the business genius and thoroughness of effort of one man—Thomas Henry Ismay. Others have borne their share in the building up of the great enterprise, rendering effective, zealous and helpful service, but it was Thomas Henry Ismay's sagacity and determination that laid the foundation of its fame and enabled the White Star flag to extend its sway over the seas of the world. Indeed, the personal history of Mr. Ismay and the story of the rise and development of the White Star fleet are so closely interwoven as to be inseparable. Mr. Ismay was the White Star Company.

### THE SON OF A BOATBUILDER.

Thomas Henry Ismay, who was born in 1837, came of a vigorous Cumberland race. He was the eldest son of Joseph Ismay, shipbuilder and shipowner, of Maryport, Cumberland. For generations the Ismays had been more or less connected with ships and shipping, and although Maryport did not cut any great figure in the maritime world, the savour of the ocean was upon it, and its chief associations were connected with the men "who went down to the sea in ships." The shores of the Solway did not at any time present so busy a scene as the shores of the Mersey, yet the atmosphere was redolent of flapping sails and lapping waters, and amply sufficed for the instilling of the



*Ellis & Walery, Photo.*

MR. J. BRUCE ISMAY.

Present Chairman of the White Star Line, and son of its founder.

sea-going spirit into the mind of young Ismay. It was from the same quiet starting-point that the Brocklebanks—another of the great Liverpool shipping families—embarked upon their prosperous career. The vessels passing in and out of the picturesque Cumberland port were not of a class to give the future shipowner any adequate idea of what was going on in the docks and harbours and shipping yards of the greater seaports, but they were sufficient to give him an incentive to the career that he ultimately adopted, and thus it came about that, after he had finished his schooling at Croft House School, Carlisle, and mastered as much of the shipbuilder's art as his father's limited establishment was able to afford him, he ventured forth into a wider field of action, and settled in Liverpool.

#### APPRENTICED IN LIVERPOOL.

It was some time in the "fifties" that Mr. Ismay took this momentous step, entering the firm of Imrie, Tomlinson and Co., as an apprentice. For several years he devoted himself with rare energy and ability to the duties that fell to him, acquiring a fulness of knowledge of shipping matters, and displaying a tactfulness and a business capacity that gained him the confidence of his employers, and caused him to be entrusted with responsibilities not often reposed in one so young. Mr. Ismay never allowed his energy to outpace his prudence, however, and much of his after-success was due to the power he had of keeping these two qualities in strict harmony with one another. His motto was, then and always, "Be mindful." Imbued beyond most men with the spirit of enterprise, and ever on the alert for business developments, the saving grace of caution enabled him to gauge with a sort of instinctive accuracy the chances and probabilities surrounding a new venture. Thus, while always advancing, he was never called upon to pay the penalties of over-boldness.

The period, the place and the position were peculiarly favourable to a man of Mr. Ismay's gifts. Liverpool was in the flood tide of commercial expansion, and although many strong shipping companies existed, and the bulk of the ocean traffic was under the control of Liverpool houses, there was still room for men of talent and energy to open up fresh lines of intercourse between the Mersey and the lands across the sea.

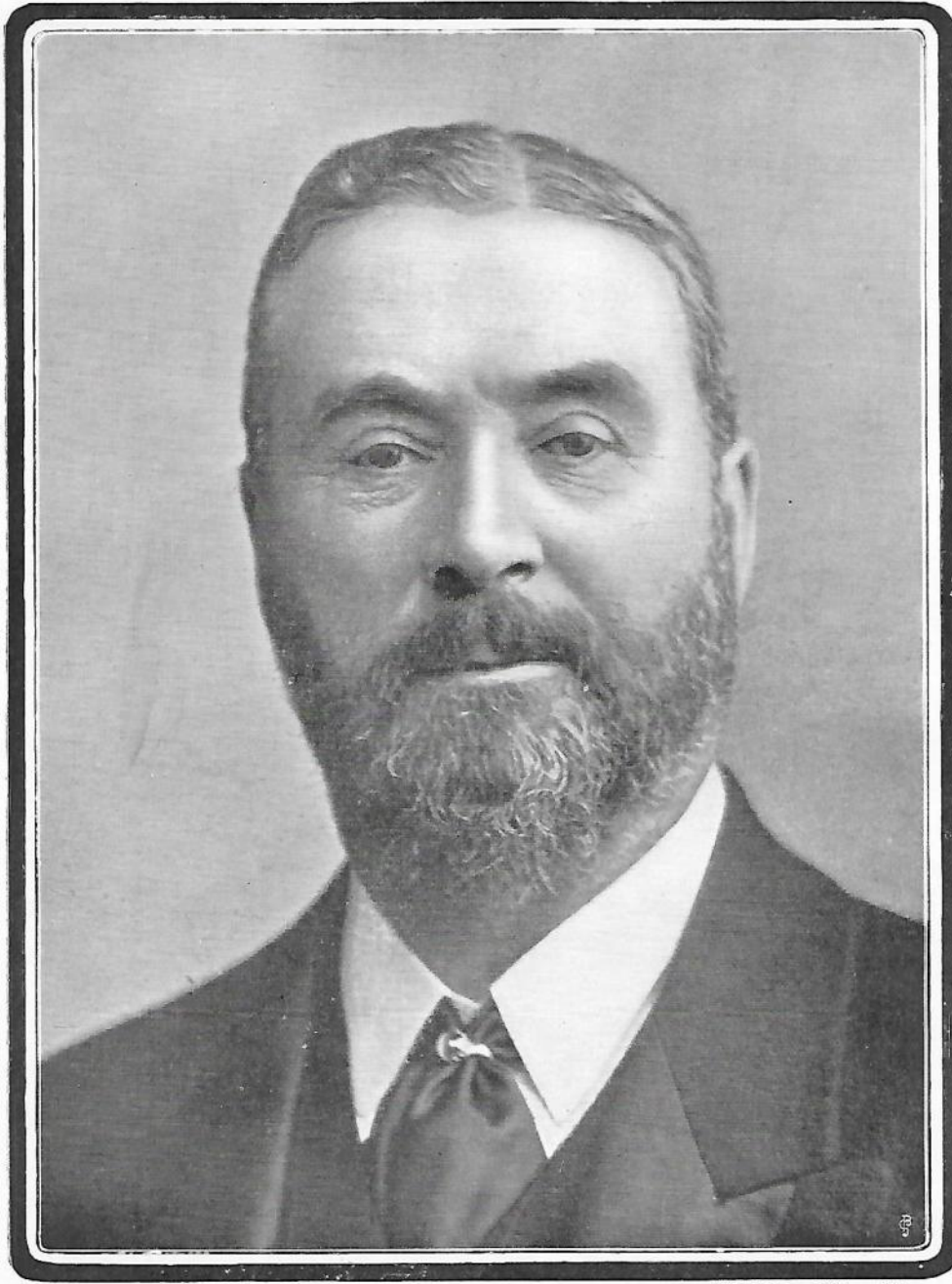
Mr. Ismay's opportunity came in 1867. He was then thirty years of age, and had used the dozen years or so that he had been in Liverpool to such good purpose that his credit stood high and he had a host of friends. Moreover, he had been thrifty as well as energetic, and when the managing-owner of the old White Star Line retired in 1867, Mr. Ismay was in a position to take over the smart fleet of clippers that then composed this line, and, with the footing thus gained, to divert the enterprise into new and more profitable channels.

#### BUYS A WOODEN FLEET.

For some years previously, the White Star boats—wooden clippers of the fleetest build—had been running between this country and Australia. In the course of seven years they had conveyed over half-a-million adventurers to the goldfields of the Antipodes, and had also been actively engaged as carriers of the steadily increasing commerce between the Colonies and the Mother Country. It was a substantial, well-equipped organisation, in every way worthy of the handling of a man of Mr. Ismay's standing and ability, and great things were looked for when he assumed its direction.

#### HOW HE REVOLUTIONISED THE WHITE STAR LINE.

The favourable anticipations of friends were soon more than realised. Wood might have served Mr. Ismay's predecessors well enough; but it would not suffice for him. The more progressive shipbuilders were using iron as the material for their ships, and having satisfied himself that they were on the right tack, and that the leading ships of the future would be built of that material, it was not long before iron vessels were added to the White Star fleet. Again, sails might have yielded propulsion sufficient for former owners; Mr. Ismay must have steam, and all the speed that engineering science could give him, consistent with safety; therefore, the

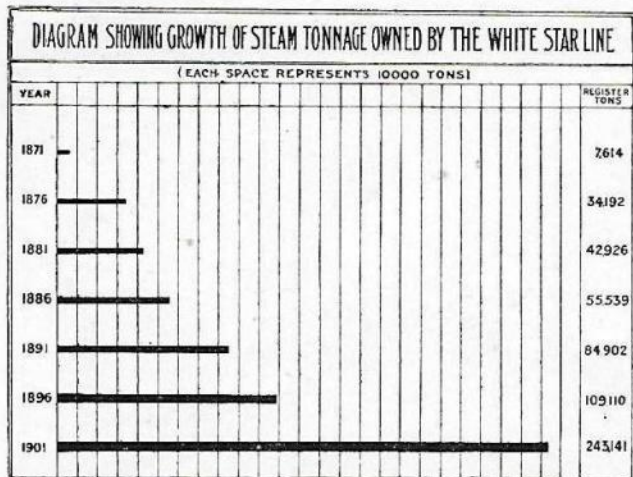


**THE LATE MR. T. H. ISMAY.**  
**Founder of the White Star Line.**

*Alfred Ellis and Walery, Photo.*

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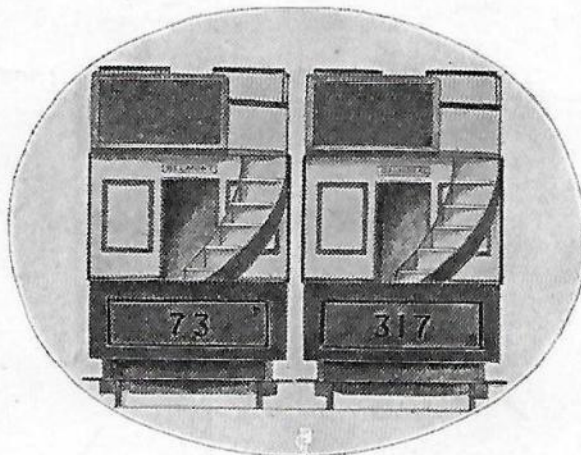
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White Star flag—the red swallow-tail, with the five-pointed white star in the centre—was presently to be seen flying above the funnels of great iron steamers. Further than this, the White Star ships had heretofore been employed almost exclusively in the Australian trade; but Mr. Ismay saw no reason why the vessels under his sway should not steam westward as well as southward, across the North Atlantic as well as the South Pacific. The world was wide, the seas were open, and Mr. Ismay's ambition was unlimited. Therefore, in due time there was a White Star fleet making regular voyages between Liverpool and New York.

**HIS MOTTO: "BE MINDFUL."**

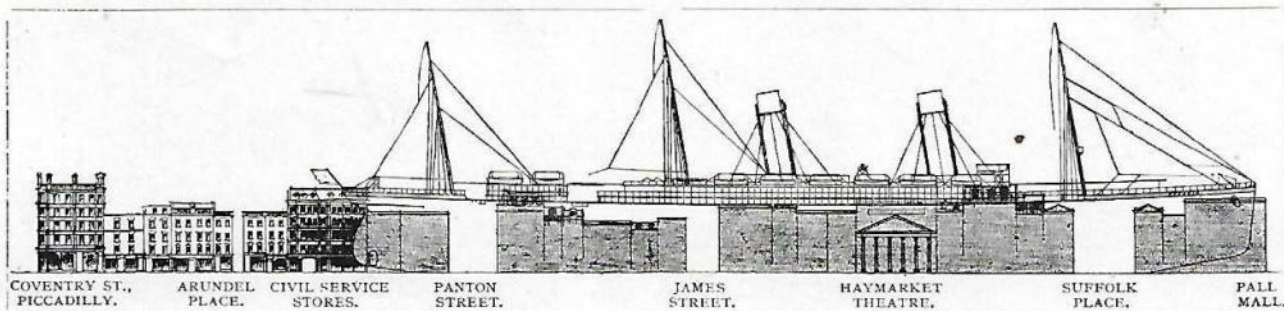
It says much for the strength of character and resourcefulness of Mr. Ismay that within four years of his assumption of the control of the business of the White Star Line, he had vessels of that flag competing successfully for the high-class passenger traffic of the North Atlantic, in addition to those covering the older routes. Of course, he was not able to accomplish these important developments as beyond the any one man, but a stamp—solid, substantial had but little difficulty co-operation that was carrying out of his "Oceanic Steam Navigation Company" to be formed in 1869, of putting a new line on the Liverpool and was an undertaking that ness and judgment. more Mr. Ismay's was mindful to get a before he took this The required capital in fully paid, was immediately subscribed by Mr. Ismay's firm and his friends, including some of the most substantial names in England. Mr. Ismay was mindful in selecting a time that was particularly opportune for the venture; mindful in having built for the new service a class of steamers that in certain noteworthy respects,



THIS OVAL REPRESENTS A SECTION OF ONE OF THE "OCEANIC'S" FUNNELS, WHICH ARE BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD TWO TRAM CARS.

to accomplish these alone. The scheme financial capacity of pioneer of Mr. Ismay's tial and trustworthy—in obtaining all the necessary for the ideas. In this way the gation Company" came with the special object of passenger steamers New York service. It was initiated with bold—"Be mindful," was once guiding principle. He sound financial backing serious new departure. shares of £1,000 each

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THE "OCEANIC" IN THE HAYMARKET.

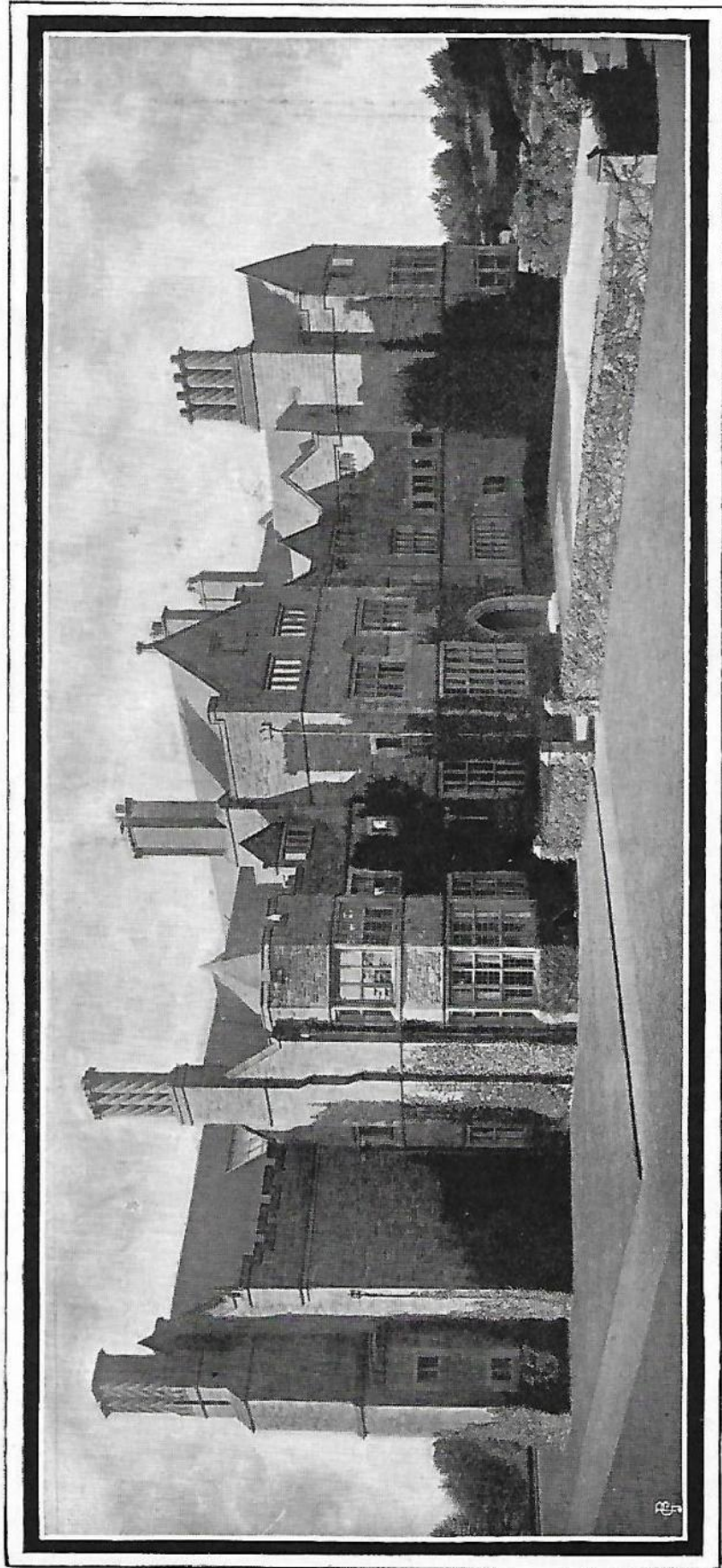
A Diagram drawn to scale to indicate the "Oceanic's" enormous dimensions.

surpassed in accommodation any vessel then afloat; mindful in having them constructed by a firm of shipbuilders whose reputation was of the first order; mindful in getting his money's worth for what was expended; and mindful, when at last the first White Star steamer of the Atlantic fleet—the *Oceanic*—came to be launched on the 27th August, 1870, to have the best service of officers and men that could be obtained. More than this, his mindfulness took the form of an energy and a forcefulness that secured the speediest possible execution of the various tasks and commissions involved in the undertaking.

#### THE FIRST "OCEANIC."

During the anxious days and months of preparation, Mr. Ismay displayed an activity which would have been beyond the physical powers of most men. Early and late he was watching things shape themselves to his purpose, urging forward operations in every detail, going hither and thither as circumstances demanded, and generally acting as the guiding spirit of every branch of the enterprise; and when the *Oceanic* made her first round voyage to New York and back, in March, 1871, Mr. Ismay accompanied her as her most interested passenger. When he returned to Liverpool he knew that he had triumphed, and the word was given to proceed as fast as possible with the building of additional steamers.

In the year following the foundation of the new company, Mr. Ismay was joined in the management by Mr. Wm. Imrie, of the former firm of Imrie, Tomlinson and Co.,



Belford, Lemere & Co., Photo.

THE HOME OF THE ISMAYS, DAWPOOL, ON THE BANKS OF THE DEE.

in whose office he and Mr. Imrie had been fellow-apprentices. The firm thenceforward took the title of Ismay, Imrie and Co., under which style it is still carried on. So long as Mr. Ismay was at the head of affairs, his was the ruling spirit, and from 1867 to 1899, a period of thirty-two years, he was, to repeat a former remark, the White Star Company. He was no dictator, however; no self-assertive business tyrant intent upon grinding the last limit of service out of those under his control; no hard and fast claimant of business rights; geniality and kindness of heart were as distinctly his characteristics as administrative ability and commercial integrity. His will was law, but always a just law. What he

achieved, however, will be best indicated by a short sketch of the successive developments of the enterprise which he founded and brought to such a conspicuous position among the leading shipping companies of the world.

When the White Star Company despatched its first steamer to New York, the main portion of the Atlantic passenger traffic was in the hands of two British lines, which were handsomely subsidised for the carrying of the mails, and well patronised. The vessels of these lines were regarded as the finest passenger steamers afloat, as indeed they were, so that it behoved Mr. Ismay to "go one better," or suffer by



THE GRAND SALOON OF THE WHITE STAR LINER "CELTIC,"  
THE LARGEST VESSEL AFLOAT—

comparison, a thing which he would not be at all likely to submit to. He, therefore, paid a visit to Messrs. Harland and Wolff, the famous Belfast shipbuilders, gave them his views of what he required, and set them to work upon a vessel that was to carry out certain special ideas of his own in construction and arrangement. The commission was readily accepted, and the result was, as we have seen, the *Oceanic*, which proved to be a good deal of a surprise to the shipping world. It was thought by many that the limit of luxury had been reached in the steamers already plying between Liverpool and New York, but when it was found that the *Oceanic* inaugurated a greatly improved type of steamship, it was freely admitted that Mr. Ismay's venture represented the opening of a new era in the Atlantic trade.

On entering the Mersey in February, 1871, the *Oceanic's* great length, yacht-like lines, and general symmetry created in the minds of those who saw her an admiration which her subsequent success amply justified.

## PUTS THE SALOON AMIDSHIPS.

One of the principal improvements introduced in this vessel, and since generally adopted in modern ocean steamships, was the placing of the saloon and the first-class passenger accommodation amidships, whereby the comforts of an ocean voyage were considerably increased. In truth, ocean travellers owe more than is generally supposed to Mr. Ismay and the White Star Line. Their example has been closely followed in the numerous improvements made by them at various periods; and the North of Ireland is largely indebted for her prosperity to Mr. Ismay and his company, the whole of the White Star ships having been built at Harland and Wolff's yards in Belfast, at a cost of over £8,000,000 sterling, all the work having been confided to the builders without a contract, a circumstance which is probably unique in the annals of shipbuilding. Mr. Ismay had confidence in his constructors, and they had equal confidence in him.

## THE WHITE STAR FLEET.

The *Oceanic* was followed in quick succession by the *Baltic*, *Republic*, *Adriatic*, and *Celtic*; and in 1874-5 two larger ships, the *Britannic* and *Germanic* were built. Following these came the *Arabic*, *Coptic*, *Ionic*, *Doric*, *Gaelic*, *Belgic*, *Cufic*, and *Runic*. In 1889 and 1890 the mercantile armed cruisers *Majestic* and *Teutonic* were launched; in 1891 and 1892 the cargo and live-stock steamers *Nomadic*, *Tauric*, and *Bovic*; in 1893 the *Gothic*, a twin-screw passenger steamer for the New Zealand service; in 1894 and 1895 the *Cevic* and *Georgic*, twin-screw cargo and live-stock steamers for the Liverpool and New York trade.

## THE BIGGEST BOAT AFLOAT.

The latest additions to the White Star fleet are the *Oceanic* (the second of that name), and the *Celtic*, the former, a grand vessel of 17,274 tons, being launched in 1899, the latter, a still larger steamer of 20,904 tons, sailing on her maiden voyage in the summer of 1901. Another great steamer, the *Athenic*, is almost ready for taking its place on the Atlantic service, and two more—the *Corinthic* and *Ionic*—are to be launched during 1902. Each of the three last-named steamers is of 12,500 tons. To-day the twenty-eight ships of the White Star Line represent a total tonnage of about 226,000 tons of shipping



—COMPARE IT WITH THE THIRD CLASS DINING ROOM ON THE SAME VESSEL.



of the very highest class. The *Celtic* has the distinction of being the largest vessel in the world. It has a length of 700 feet, and a breadth of beam of 75 feet. She has nine decks, affords accommodation for nearly 3,000 passengers, besides quarters for a crew of about 350, and is considerably larger than the historic and unfortunate *Great Eastern* which was abandoned years ago as too big and unwieldy for sea service. How marvellously our ideas change under the direction of a mind that can grasp the proper proportion of the matters that go to the making of material progress!

In 1877 Mr. Ismay offered to place the whole of the White Star steamships—then, as now, among the swiftest vessels afloat—at the disposal of the Government for service as cruisers or transports in the event of war, the outcome of his proposals being the arrangement, since made permanent with some of the great steamship lines, for securing the services of their vessels in time of national need.

#### GIVES £20,000 TO OLD SAILORS.

Mr. Ismay's manner of celebrating Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1887 was characteristic of the man. It was his own jubilee year, the fiftieth year of his age, and he gave £20,000 to found a pension fund for old and worn-out Liverpool sailors. This fund has since grown to £40,000, and has already provided pensions of £20 a year to 200 old sailors. In commemoration of the founding of this fund, Mr. Ismay was presented with an illuminated address by the Mercantile Marine Service Association, who also had his portrait painted for their rooms.

As might be expected in a man of his pursuits and leanings, Mr. Ismay shewed a strong and deep interest in everything pertaining to shipping and commercial affairs, and did not regard them solely from an interested business standpoint. He was one of the founders, and for over twenty years acted as chairman and treasurer of the training ship *Indefatigable*, the only institution of its kind in Great Britain for training orphans of sailors and other destitute boys for the sea, which since its formation has been the means of educating and giving a start in life to more than two thousand poor lads. Mr. Ismay was indeed as practical in his charities as in the handling of his business affairs.

It was as the practical man of business that he inspired confidence and esteem and won distinction; and it was his practical knowledge of the affairs of life that enabled him to do so much good apart from the enterprise in which he was more directly concerned. So highly was his business sagacity regarded by his



A FLEET OF WHITE STAR STEAMERS IN THE DOCK AT LIVERPOOL.

co-directors of the London and North-Western Railway Company that on the retirement of the late Sir Richard Moon he was unanimously requested to accept the chairmanship of the company, an honour he had to decline because of his other business engagements.

#### MILLAIS PAINTS HIS PORTRAIT.

His life was full of incident, but it was business incident, not incident of the class out of which romances are made or from which stories of adventure are built up. The work that he found to do, and for which nature had adapted him, he did with all his heart and soul, and he, his business associates and the world at large benefited by what he did.

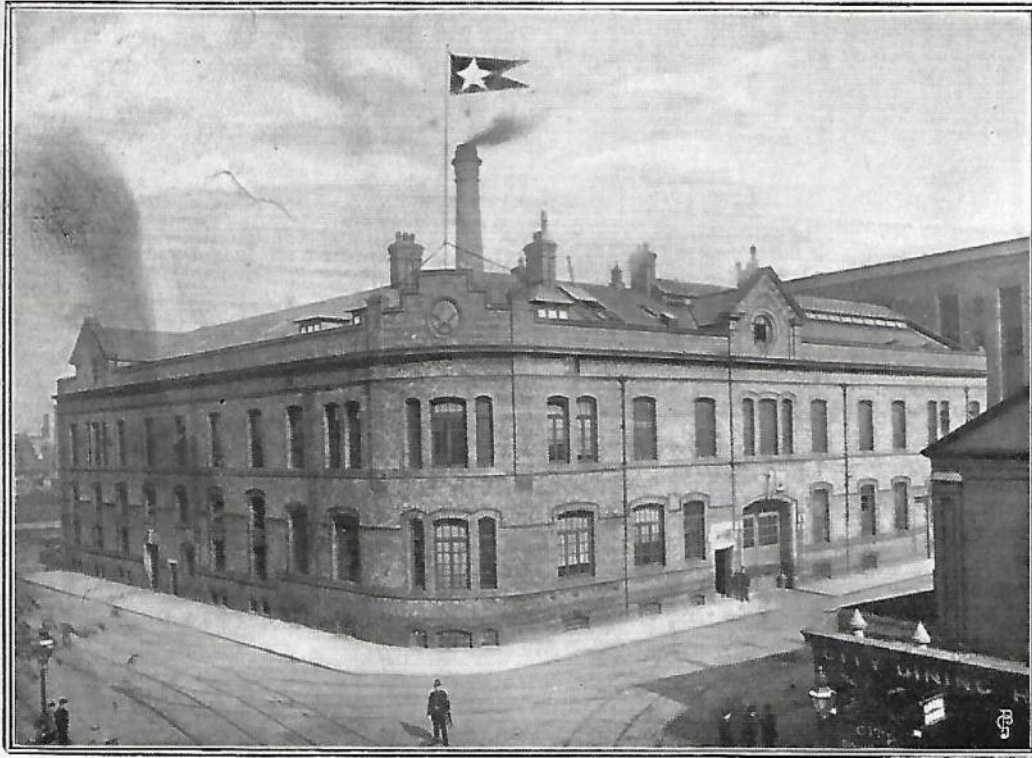


DAWPOOL.—ANOTHER POINT OF VIEW.

*Edford, Lemere & Co., Photo.*

A punctual man, of great method, an admirable administrator, possessing courage, tempered with a cool and cautious judgment, Mr. Ismay was loved and trusted, and much of his success was due to his capacity of surrounding himself with good and capable men and treating them well.

In 1885 the shareholders of the White Star Company, anxious to acknowledge in some prominent way their obligations to Mr. Ismay for his energetic and successful management of their property, presented him with a valuable service of plate, and a portrait of himself painted by Millais. In 1891, after forty years of business life, Mr. Ismay retired from the firm of Ismay, Imrie and Co., but continued to control the destinies of the White Star Line as its chairman until his death, which occurred after a brief illness on the 23rd November, 1899.

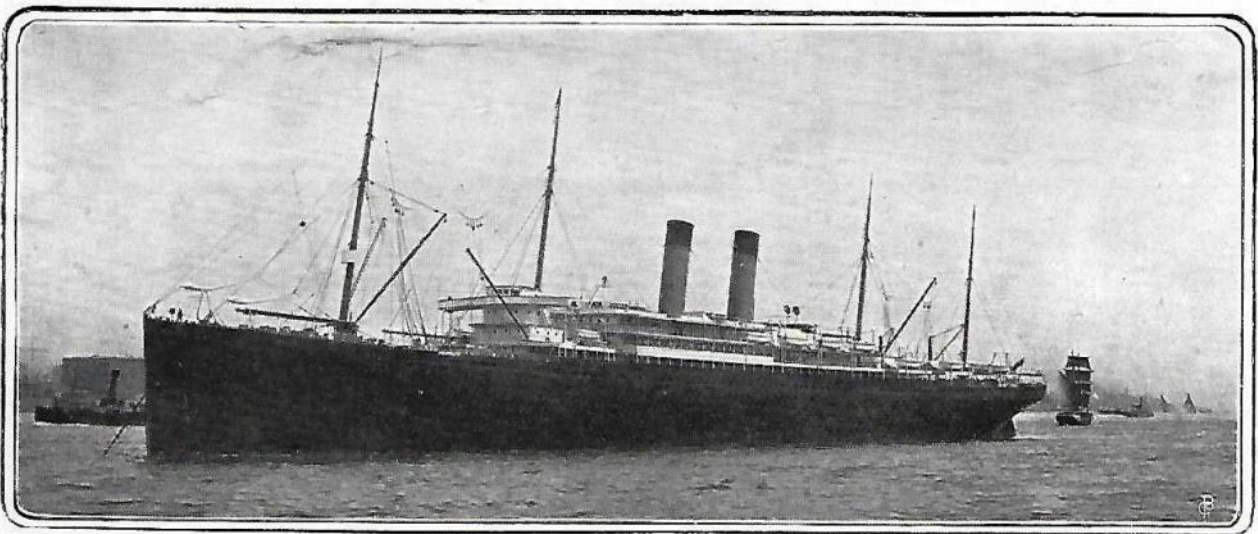


WHITE STAR WORKS AT BOOTLE, LIVERPOOL.

Cheshire. Still, brave and hopeful to the last, he managed, in spite of his suffering, to get on board the ship when it arrived in the Mersey, and would fain have accompanied her across the ocean, but was compelled to abandon the idea, and three months later he quietly passed away at his beautiful house, Dawpool, on the banks of the Dee in Cheshire, where he had lived for many years, and enjoyed the quiet of country life when able to escape from the cares of his active business career.

This house, in which were to be found some fine pictures and many curios collected by him, is now occupied by Mrs. Ismay.

The present chairman of the Oceanic Steam Navigation Company (the White Star Line) is Mr. Joseph Bruce Ismay, eldest son of the founder of the company.



THE LARGEST VESSEL EVER BUILT, THE R.M.S. "CELTIC"; 20,904 TONS, 700 FEET LONG, 75 FEET BROAD, 49 $\frac{1}{3}$  FEET DEEP.

Mr. Ismay had intended sailing to New York and back on the second *Oceanic*, as he had done on the first *Oceanic* thirty years before, but just as the new steamer was on the point of leaving Belfast, of which city he had received the *Freedom* barely a month before, he was stricken with illness and had to be conveyed to his home in