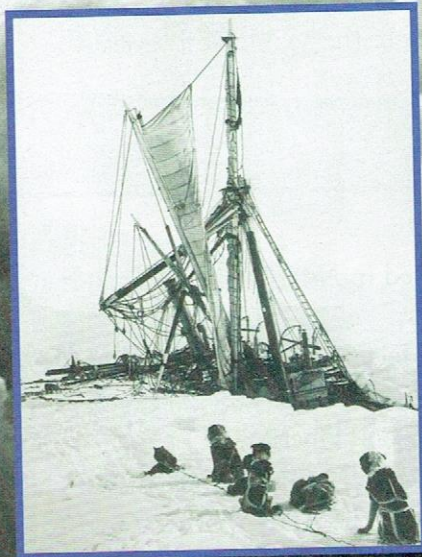
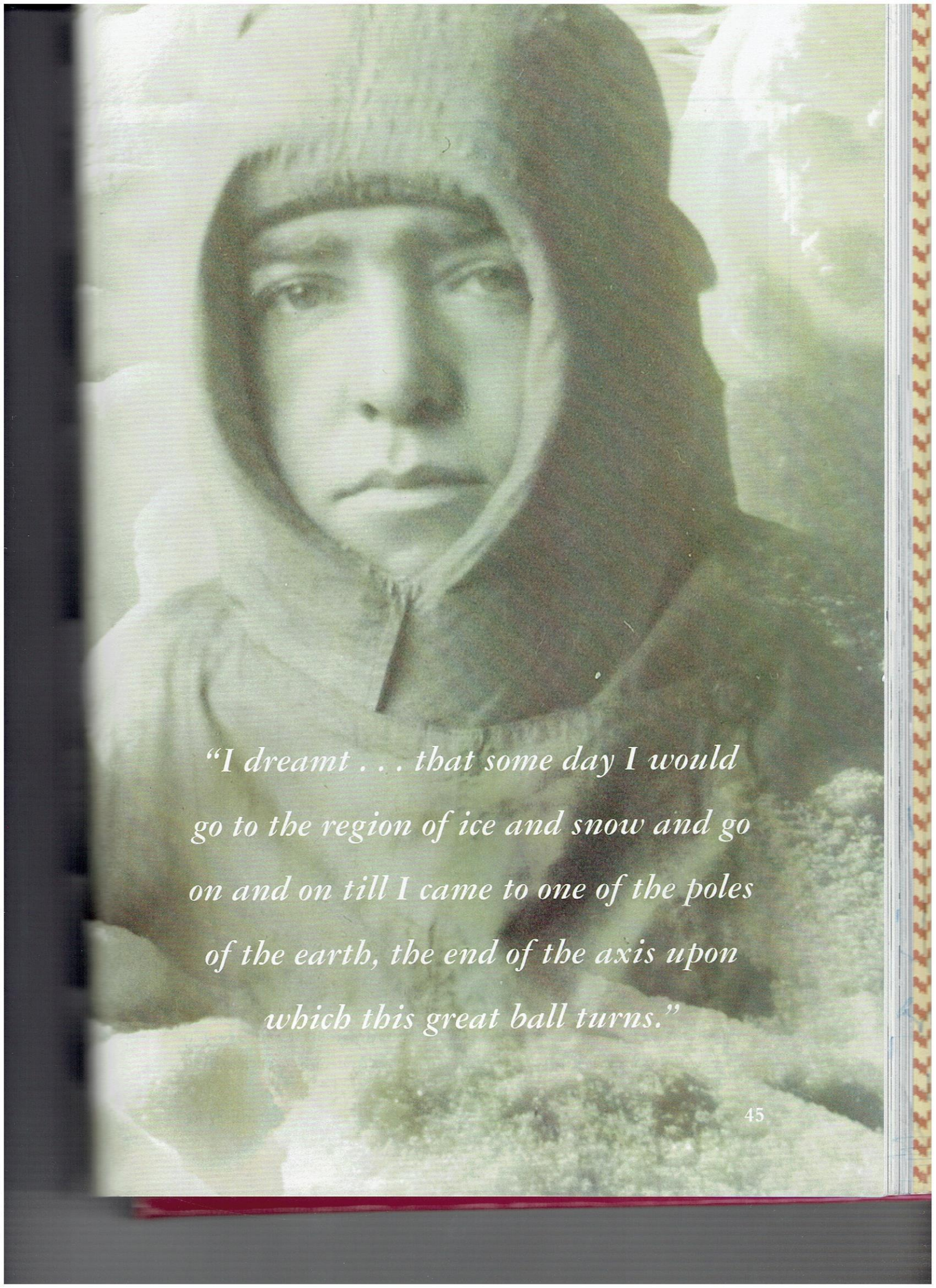


TRIAL —BY— ICE

A Photobiography of Sir Ernest Shackleton



By K. M. Kostyal



*“I dreamt . . . that some day I would
go to the region of ice and snow and go
on and on till I came to one of the poles
of the earth, the end of the axis upon
which this great ball turns.”*



A portrait of Ernest Shackleton, painted in 1921, just one year before Shackleton's death.

FOREWORD

“**A**re you related to the Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton?” Since childhood, I have been asked that question. My father, Edward, was Ernest Shackleton’s younger son, and I cannot remember a time when I was not aware of the part the great white continent had played in the life of my family.

Photographs from my grandfather’s expeditions hung on the walls at home: beautiful black-and-white images from the early years of the century. They showed a world of snow and ice; bearded men in strange, shapeless garments; a little ship being slowly crushed in the ice, her decline more shocking in each photograph until she is finally only a skeleton of a ship. As a child, I was always particularly fascinated by one photograph. It showed the huskies (the sled dogs) sitting patiently on the ice beside the wreck of the ship that had been their home, her end not far away, their future in doubt.

Ernest Shackleton died at the start of his third expedition. He was only 47. My father was nine years old. He did not have the chance to know his father very well (explorers were away for years at a time then), yet he, too, became an explorer. At the age of 20 he went to Borneo and then to Ellesmere Island in the Canadian Arctic. He avoided the Antarctic because he did not want to seem to be trading on his father’s name. When I was a little girl, I remember sitting on the coalhouse roof with my brother one day, pretending it was a ship. I made him promise that he, too, would explore, to make it three generations. And he did. He took part in an expedition to Devon Island, in the Canadian Arctic.

I did get to the Antarctic, nearly a hundred years after my grandfather, on a naval ship bearing the same name as his ship—*Endurance*. It was only a small glimpse of the Antarctic he had known, but it was an unforgettable experience. Perhaps after reading this excellent book, some of you too will be inspired to visit the great white south in the footsteps of Sir Ernest Shackleton.

Alexandra Shackleton



“The cliffs are of a dazzling whiteness, with wonderful blue shadows. Far inland higher slopes can be seen, appearing like dim blue or faint golden fleecy clouds.”

The wild frozen beauty of Antarctica was a long way from the gentle green hills of Ireland’s County Kildare, where Ernest Henry Shackleton was born. At his birth in 1874 no one could have imagined that this baby would grow up to be one of the world’s greatest Antarctic explorers. In fact, it’s doubtful that anyone in Ireland gave much thought to the southern continent at the end of the Earth.

The world of Ernest’s early childhood was simple. People still traveled by horse and buggy, and there were no airplanes or telephones. An old castle topped a hill near the Shackleton family’s rambling house, and country lanes crisscrossed the area’s endless potato fields. But things were not good in Ireland. The potato crops were poor, and people suffered. When Ernest was six, his landowner father decided to begin a new life. He applied to study medicine at the university in Dublin, and the family left behind country life for the city.



Towering above his brother and eight sisters, Ernest stands at the center of a family portrait. Dressed for one of his early Antarctic expeditions (left), Shackleton wears his polar “helmet” and tunic.

After Ernest's father became a doctor, the family moved from Ireland to England and settled in a London suburb called Sydenham. Ernest, the older son in the big Shackleton family of two boys and eight girls, was good-natured and adored by his sisters. Even though school bored him and he was quick to join in a schoolyard brawl, Ernest loved to read, and he had a vivid imagination. He attended a secondary school



called Dulwich College where a publication later described him as a "rather odd boy who, in spite of an adventurous nature and the spirit of romance that was in him, loved a book better than a bat, solitude better than a crowd, his own companionship better than a mob of other lads. . . ."

Probably it was his love of both adventure and solitude that made him long to go to sea. He had read Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, and he could imagine himself as Captain Nemo, commander of the *Nautilus* submarine. His father, on the other hand, hoped that Ernest would follow him into medicine. But in the end, Dr. Shackleton agreed to let his son go to sea. With ten children to raise, the doctor could not afford the cost of training Ernest as a naval cadet. Instead,

he arranged for his son to sign on with a commercial sailing ship bound for South America. Ernest was 16.

Life on board a tall square-rigger meant hard work. Ernest had to climb high up in the ship's rigging to work the sails, even in bad weather and churning waves. "How would you like to be 150 feet up in the air; hanging on with one hand to a rope while with the other you try and get the sail in," Ernest wrote to a friend.

Despite the hardships and months at sea, Ernest loved the life of a merchant marine, a sailor on cargo ships. He also loved poetry and would often recite lines from Robert

Browning, his favorite poet, to his shipmates. "When he wasn't on duty on the deck he was stowed away in his cabin with his books," a shipmate remembered.

Ernest spent ten years as a merchant marine. He advanced quickly through the ranks, and by the time he was 24, he was qualified to command a British ship anywhere in the world. When he was on leave, he would come home to visit his family in the London suburbs. On one trip home in 1900, he heard about something called the National Antarctic Expedition. It was being organized by the Royal Geographical Society. The society had sent explorers to Africa and other parts of the globe, and now it wanted to send them to Antarctica.

Few people had ever seen that frigid, forbidding continent of ice, much less explored very far beyond its coastline. But the year before, a Norwegian named Carsten Borchgrevink had spent the winter in Antarctica and gone farther inland than anyone before him.

As an adult, Shackleton usually looked serious and unsmiling in pictures, but he was really a charming man who loved practical jokes. A boyhood picture of him at school (left) shows him wearing a faint smile. At 16 he left school to become a sailor.

