

South

The Ernest Shackleton Endurance Expedition (1914-1917)

composer Maarten Regtien

narrator Angus McLean

Preface Maarten Regtien

The 1914-1917 "Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition" (better known as the Endurance expedition) is the most famous of all polar expeditions ever undertaken.

While sailing to reach the Antarctic continent, the ship *Endurance* got stuck in the pack ice and finally was destroyed by the pressure. Shackleton and his men managed to survive under the most extreme weather conditions one can imagine, surviving on ice floes, eating penguins and seals (only when possible), pulling rescue boats over the ice to reach open water and rowing to *Elephant Island* for safety. But here the hardship did not end. While the remaining crew tried to survive here, Shackleton and three men sailed 720 miles (1330 km) (!) in a weathered boat over the most perilous sea in the world to South Georgia, where they finally - hardly alive - had to cross various glaciers to find help on the other side of the island. Shackleton was such an extraordinary leader that *all* his men survived this hardship!

For my electronic composition *South - The Ernest Shackleton Endurance Expedition (1914-1917)* I made per chapter an extract of all highlights of the original *South* by Shackleton. The original text was slightly edited or altered only when necessary for compositional purposes.

I am very grateful to Angus McLean for being a fantastic narrator.

The music is entirely based on samples from *Le Sacre du printemps* by Igor Stravinsky, the famous symphonic work completed only half a year before Shackleton set of on his Endurance expedition.

Amsterdam, 30-04-2017

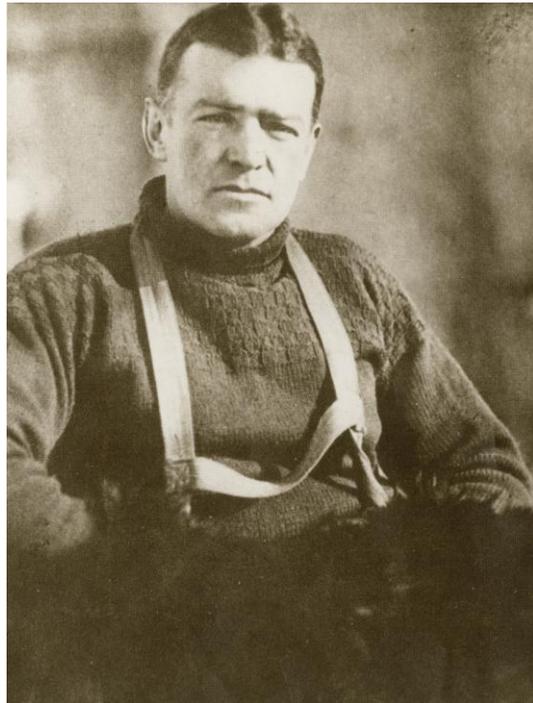
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I PREFACE

After the conquest of the South Pole by Amundsen on the 14th December of 1911, in a narrow margin of days only in advance of the British Expedition under Scott, there remained but one great main object of Antarctic journeyings. --the crossing of the South Polar continent from sea to sea. I began to make preparations to start this last great journey. The first crossing of the last continent should be achieved by a British Expedition.

The story of this attempt is the subject for this tale with recordings of high adventure, strenuous days, lonely nights, unique experiences, and, above all, records of unflinching determination, supreme loyalty, and generous self-sacrifice on the part of my men. It was a privilege to me to have under my command men who, through dark days and the stress and strain of continuous danger, kept up their spirits and carried out their work regardless of themselves and heedless of the limelight.

The struggles, the disappointments, and the endurance of this small party of Britishers, hidden away for nearly two years in the fastnesses of the Polar ice, striving to carry out the ordained task make a story which is unique in the history of Antarctic exploration.



II DEPARTURE AND NEW LAND

The day of departure arrived from the Stromness whaling-station on South Georgia. I gave the order to heave anchor at 8.45 a.m. on December 5, 1914. The morning was dull and overcast, with occasional gusts of snow and sleet, but hearts were light aboard the 'Endurance', as adventure lay ahead and the clanking of the windlass broke for us the last link with civilization.

We made fairly good progress in fine, clear weather. The ship followed a long lead to the south-east and at 11 p.m. on the 30th of December we crossed the Antarctic Circle. An examination of the horizon disclosed considerable breaks in the vast circle of pack-ice, interspersed with bergs of different sizes. The sun did not set that night.

During the following weeks we spent manoeuvring to the south through the tortuous mazes of the pack. It often was necessary to split floes by driving the ship against them. This form of attack was effective against ice up to three feet in thickness.

On the 9th of February solid floes were packed tightly all around the ship. From the mast-head the mirage is continually giving us false alarms. Everything wears an aspect of unreality. Icebergs hang upside down in the sky; the land appears as layers of silvery or golden cloud. Worst of all is the deceptive appearance of open water.

The second half of February produced no important change in our situation. Early in the morning of the 14th I ordered a good head of steam on the engines and sent all hands on to the floe with ice-chisels, prickers, saws, and picks. We worked all day and throughout most of the next day in a strenuous effort to get the ship into the lead ahead. After twenty-four hours' labour we had got the ship a third of the way to the lead. But about 400 yards of heavy ice, including old rafted pack, still separated the 'Endurance' from the water. Every opening we made froze up again quickly owing to the unseasonably low temperature and reluctantly I had to admit that further effort was useless. It was clearly the summer had gone.

My chief anxiety is the drift. Where will the vagrant winds and currents carry the ship during the long winter months that are ahead of us?

Seals appeared occasionally, and we killed all that came within our reach. They represented fuel as well as food for men and dogs.

The dogs went off the ship on the following day. They seemed heartily glad to leave the ship, and yelped loudly and joyously as they were moved to their new quarters. The dogs had been divided into six teams of nine dogs each. Each man in charge of a team, was fully responsible for the exercising, training, and feeding of their own dogs. Also we had begun the training of teams, and already there was keen rivalry between the drivers.

The month of March opened with a severe north-easterly gale....

III WINTER MONTHS

We said good-bye to the sun on May 1 and entered the period of twilight that would be followed by the darkness of midwinter. The disappearance of the sun is apt to be a depressing event in the polar regions, but the 'Endurance's' company refused to abandon their cheerfulness, and a concert in the evening made the *Ritz* a scene of noisy merriment. A strange contrast with the cold, silent world that lay outside.

Three emperor penguins made their appearance in a lead west of the ship on May 3. They pushed their heads through the young ice while two of the men were standing by the lead. We seize them. Another penguin was caught. Its stomach proved to be filled with freshly caught fish up to 10 inches long. Two more emperors were captured on the following day. The dogs, uncontrollable in a moment, made a frantic rush for the bird. The result was a seething tangle of dogs, traces, and men, and an overturned sled.

The drift of the 'Endurance' in the grip of the pack continued without incident of importance through June. The training of the dogs, including the puppies provided exercise as well as occupation. Rivalries arose between teams and on the 15th of the month a great race, the "Antarctic Derby," took place. The betting had been heavy, and every man aboard the ship stood to win or lose on the result of the contest. The spectators could not see far in the dim light, but they heard the shouts of the drivers as the teams approached and greeted the victory of the favourite with a roar of cheering.

By the middle of September we were running short of fresh meat for the dogs. The seals and penguins seemed to have abandoned our neighbourhood altogether. Nearly five months had passed since we killed a seal, and penguins had been seen seldom. If this situation continues, we will have to shoot the dogs.



IV LOSS OF THE 'ENDURANCE'

On Sunday, October 3 two new pressure-ridges had risen along some of the cracks. The air temperatures were still low, -24.5° Fahrenheit being recorded on October 4.

The effects of the pressure around us were awe-inspiring. Mighty blocks of ice, gripped between meeting floes, rose slowly till they jumped like cherry-stones squeezed between thumb and finger. The pressure of millions of tons of moving ice was crushing and smashing inexorably. In the engine room, the weakest point, loud groans, crashes, and hammering sounds were heard. The iron plates on the floor buckled up and overrode with loud clangs. Suddenly the floe on the port side cracked and huge pieces of ice shot up from under the port bilge. Within a few seconds the ship heeled over until she had a list of thirty degrees to port. The midship dog-kennels broke away and crashed down on to the lee kennels, and the howls and barks of the frightened dogs assisted to create a perfect pandemonium.

Then on Sunday, October 24, there came the beginning of the end. The 'Endurance' groaned and quivered as her starboard quarter was forced against the floe, twisting the sternpost and starting the heads and ends of the planking. The ship was twisted and actually bent by the stresses. She began to leak and dangerously at once. The butts of planking were opened four and five inches on the starboard side, and at the same time we could see from the bridge that the ship was bending like a bow under titanic pressure. Pistol-like cracks told of the starting of a trenail or plank.

Almost like a living creature, she resisted the forces that would crush her; but it was a one-sided battle. Millions of tons of ice pressed inexorably upon the little ship that had dared the challenge of the Antarctic. At 9 p.m. I gave the order to lower boats, gear, provisions, and sledges to the floe.

The ship was being crushed remorselessly. It gave one a sickening sensation to see it, for, mastless and useless as she was, she seemed to be a link with the outer world. Without her our destitution seems more emphasized, our desolation more complete. She went down bows first, her stern raised in the air. She then gave one quick dive and the ice closed over her for ever.

Overhead... the sun shone serenely.



V OCEAN CAMP

In the night the temperature has dropped to -16° Fahrenheit, the men are cold and uncomfortable. After the tents had been pitched I mustered all hands and explained the position to them briefly and, I hope, clearly. I have told them the distance to the Barrier and the distance to Paulet Island, 346 miles, the nearest point where there is any possibility of finding food and shelter. After that I began to direct the preparations for the long journey across the floes to Paulet Island.

We are twenty-eight men with forty-nine dogs. In the afternoon the three youngest pups and Mrs. Chippy, the carpenter's cat, had to be shot. We could not undertake the maintenance of weaklings.

At 3 p.m., after lunch, we got under way, leaving Dump Camp a mass of debris. A drastic sorting of equipment had taken place here as we could not afford to carry unnecessary gear.

Next day broke cold and still with the same wet snow. We moved our tents and all our gear to a thick, heavy old floe. We called this "Ocean Camp." This floating lump of ice, about a mile square at first but later splitting into smaller and smaller fragments, was to be our home for nearly two months.

The collection of food was now the all-important consideration. As we were to subsist almost entirely on seals and penguins, which were to provide fuel as well as food, some form of blubber-stove was a necessity. We could only cook seal or penguin hooshes or stews on an improvised stove, and so uncertain was its action that the food was either burnt or only partially cooked.

We are having enough to eat, but not by any means too much; and every one is always hungry enough to eat every scrap he can get. Meals are invariably taken very seriously, and little talking is done till the hoosh is finished. To feed ourselves and the dogs, at least one seal a day was required.

For the next few days we were drifting seven miles to the north. We are now only 250 miles from Paulet Island, but too much to the east of it. Thus, after a year's incessant battle with the ice, we had returned, by many strange turns of fortune's wheel, to almost identically the same latitude we had left with such high hopes and aspirations twelve months previously; but under what different conditions now!

On December 20 I informed all hands that I intended to try and make a march to the west to reduce the distance between us and Paulet Island. A buzz of pleasurable anticipation went round the camp, and every one was anxious to get on the move.

VI THE MARCH BETWEEN

On December 23 all hands were roused for the purpose of sledging the two boats, the 'James Caird' and the 'Dudley Docker', over the dangerously cracked portion to the first of the young floes, whilst the surface still held its night's crust. At each step we went in over our knees in the soft wet snow. Sometimes a man would step into a hole in the ice which was hidden by the covering of snow, and be pulled up with a jerk by his harness. The sun was very hot and many were suffering from cracked lips.

We had been on the march for seven days; rations were short and the men were weak. They were worn out with the hard pulling over soft surfaces. We had marched seven and a half miles in a direct line and at this rate it would take us over three hundred days to reach the land away to the west. As we only had food for forty-two days there was no alternative, therefore, but to camp once more on the floe. Our new home, which we were to occupy for nearly three and a half months, we called "Patience Camp."

1911



VII PATIENCE CAMP

Owing to shortage of food and the fact that we needed all that we could get for ourselves, I had to order all the dogs except two teams be shot.

When one is hungry, fastidiousness goes to the winds and one is only too glad to eat up any scraps regardless of their antecedents. It is enough to say that when the cook upset some pemmican on to an old sooty cloth and threw it outside his galley, one man subsequently made a point of acquiring it and scraping off the palatable but dirty compound. Another man searched for over an hour in the snow where he had dropped a piece of cheese some days before. By this time blubber was a regular article of our diet--either raw, boiled, or fried

Fuel has become so scarce we have had to resort to melting ice for drinking-water in tins against our bodies

The beginning of March brought cold, damp, calm weather, with much wet snow and overcast skies. On the 10th we experienced the worst blizzard we had had up to that time. Temperature dropped and it became bitterly cold.

At all times the wind penetrates the flimsy fabric of our fragile tents and create so much draught that it is impossible to keep warm within. At supper last night our drinking-water froze over in the tin in the tent before we could drink it.

By March 17 we were exactly on a level with Paulet Island but sixty miles to the east. It might have been six hundred for all the chance that we had of reaching it by sledging across the broken sea-ice in its present condition.

Our hopes were now centred on Elephant Island or Clarence Island, which lay 100 miles almost due north of us. If we failed to reach either of them we might try for South Georgia.



VIII ESCAPE FROM THE ICE

On April 7 at daylight the long-desired peak of Clarence Island came into view. At noon we were spewed out of the pack into the open ocean; dark blue and sapphire green ran the seas. Our sails were soon up, and with a fair wind we moved over the waves like Viking ships on the quest for a lost Atlantis and we were making good process.

The killers were a source of anxiety, for a boat could easily have been capsized by one of them coming up to blow. They would throw aside in a nonchalant fashion pieces of ice much bigger than our boats when they rose to the surface, and we had an uneasy feeling that the white bottoms of the boats would look like ice from below.

Constant rain and snow squalls soaked us through and it was down to 4° below zero. When we were not on watch we lay in each other's arms for warmth. Our frozen suits thawed where our bodies met, and as the slightest movement exposed these comparatively warm spots to the biting air, we clung motionless, whispering each to his companion our hopes and thoughts.

Lips were cracked and eyes and eyelids showed red in salt-encrusted faces. Beards even of the younger men might have been those of patriarchs, for the frost and the salt spray had made them white. I doubted if all the men would survive that night.

Thirst is one of the troubles that confront the traveller in polar regions. Ice might be plentiful on every hand, but it does not become drinkable until it is melted, and the amount that may be dissolved in the mouth is limited. And we were dreadfully thirsty now. We would have given all the tea in China for a lump of ice to melt into water, but no ice was within our reach.

The temperature was 20° below freezing-point, one of man's right foot got badly frost-bitten, it was restored by holding it in other man's sweater against the stomach.

At 9 a.m. at the north-west end of Elephant Island we saw a narrow beach at the foot of the cliffs. We brought one of the boats towards the opening in the reef, and then, with a few strong strokes we shot through on the top of a swell and ran the boat on to a stony beach.

A curious spectacle met my eyes when I landed as the last man: some of the men were reeling about the beach as if they had found an unlimited supply of alcoholic liquor on the desolate shore. They were laughing uproariously, picking up stones and letting handfuls of pebbles trickle between their fingers like misers gloating over hoarded gold. The smiles and laughter, which caused cracked lips to bleed afresh, and the gleeful exclamations at the sight of two live seals on the beach made me think for a moment of that glittering hour of childhood when the door is open at last and the Christmas-tree in all its wonder bursts upon the vision.

We drank water and ate seal meat until every man had reached the limit of his capacity.

IX THE BOAT JOURNEY

A boat journey in search of relief was necessary and must not be delayed. The nearest port where assistance could be secured was Port Stanley, in the Falkland Islands, 540 miles away, but we could scarcely hope to beat up against the prevailing north-westerly wind in a frail and weakened boat with a small sail area. South Georgia was over 800 miles away, but lay in the area of the west winds, and I could count upon finding whalers at any of the whaling-stations on the east coast. A boat party might make the voyage and be back with relief within a month, provided that the sea was clear of ice and the boat survive the great seas.

The risk was justified solely by our urgent need of assistance. The ocean south of Cape Horn in the middle of May is known to be the most tempestuous storm-swept area of water in the world. We had to face this sea in a small and weather-beaten boat, already strained by the work of the months that had passed.

The tale of the next sixteen days is one of supreme strife amid heaving waters. The sub-Antarctic Ocean lived up to its evil winter reputation. We took two-hourly spells at the tiller. The men who were not on watch crawled into the sodden sleeping-bags and tried to forget their troubles for a period; but there was no comfort in the boat. The bags and cases seemed to be alive in the unflinching knack of presenting their most uncomfortable angles to our rest-seeking bodies. A man might imagine for a moment that he had found a position of ease, but always discovered quickly that some unyielding point was impinging on muscle or bone. Cramped in our narrow quarters and continually wet by the spray, we suffered severely from cold throughout the journey.

We fought the seas and the winds and at the same time we had a daily struggle to keep ourselves alive. Real rest we had none. The perpetual motion of the boat made repose impossible; often our sail flapped idly in the calm between the crests of two waves. Then we would climb the next slope and catch the full fury of the gale where the wool-like whiteness of the breaking water surged around us.

We were cold, sore, and anxious. Our vitality was declining owing to shortage of food, exposure, and the necessity of maintaining our cramped positions day and night.

The strain of navigating the boat was unceasing, but always we made some advance towards our goal. One of the memories that comes to me from those days is of Crean singing at the tiller. He always sang while he was steering, and nobody ever discovered what the song was. It was devoid of tune and as monotonous as the chanting of a Buddhist monk at his prayers; yet somehow it was cheerful. In moments of inspiration Crean would attempt "The Wearing of the Green".

On the tenth night Worsley could not straighten his body after his spell at the tiller. He was thoroughly cramped, and we had to drag him beneath the decking and massage him before he could unbend himself and get into a sleeping-bag.

At midnight I was at the tiller and suddenly noticed the white crest of an enormous wave. During twenty-six years' experience of the ocean in all its moods I had not encountered a wave so gigantic!!! "For God's sake, hold on! It's got us!" I shouted. Then came a moment of suspense that seemed drawn out into hours. White surged the foam of the breaking sea around us. We felt our boat lifted and flung forward like a cork in breaking surf. We were in a seething chaos of tortured water; but somehow the boat lived through it, half-full of water, sagging to the dead weight and shuddering under the blow. We

baled with the energy of men fighting for life, flinging the water over the sides with every receptacle that came to our hands. We felt the boat renew her life beneath us. She floated again and ceased to lurch drunkenly as though dazed by the attack of the sea.

I decided that the daily allowance of water must be cut down to half a pint per man. The lumps of ice we had taken aboard had gone long ago. We were dependent upon the water we had brought from Elephant Island. Thirst took possession of us and I had to be very firm in refusing to allow any one to anticipate the morrow's allowance, which I was sometimes begged to do.

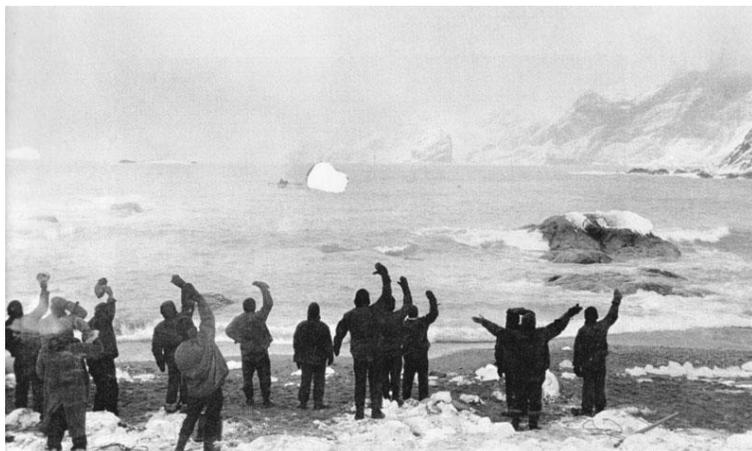
The morning of May 8 broke thick and stormy, with squalls from the north-west and at 12.30 p.m., McCarthy caught a glimpse of the black cliffs of South Georgia, just fourteen days after our departure from Elephant Island.

The pangs of thirst attacked us with redoubled intensity, and I felt that we must make a landing on the following day at almost any hazard. The night wore on. We were very tired, and a high cross-sea was running.

About noon we sighted a line of jagged reef. When we came in again three of the men got ashore, and they held the painter while I climbed some rocks with another line. A slip on the wet rocks twenty feet up nearly closed my part of the story just at the moment when we were achieving safety. A jagged piece of rock held me and at the same time bruised me sorely. However, I made fast the line, and in a few minutes we were all safe on the beach, with the boat floating in the surging water just off the shore.

A moment later we were down on our knees drinking the pure, ice-cold water in long draughts that put new life into us. It was a splendid moment.

Our shelter was a cave in a recess in the cliff on the left-hand end of the beach. It was about 8 ft. deep and 12 ft. wide at the entrance. While the camp was being arranged we found the nests of albatrosses, and, to our delight, the nests contained young birds. The fledgelings were fat and lusty, and we had no hesitation about deciding that they were destined to die at an early age. During the morning we started a fire in the cave with wood from the top-sides of the boat.



X ACROSS SOUTH GEORGIA

The final stage of the journey had still to be attempted. We made a start as soon as we had eaten our meals. McNeish walked about 200 yds with us; he could do no more. Then we said good-bye, he was to be picked as soon as possible after we had reached the Stromness whaling-station.

We roped ourselves together as a precaution against holes, crevasses, and precipices, and I broke trail through the soft snow. With almost the full length of the rope between me and the last man we were able to steer an approximately straight course, since, if I veered to the right or the left when marching into the blank wall of the fog, the last man on the rope could shout a direction. So, like a ship with its "port," "starboard," "steady," we tramped through the fog for the next two hours.

We were now up 4500 ft. and the night temperature at that elevation would be very low. We had no tent and no sleeping-bags, and our clothes had endured much rough usage and had weathered many storms during the last ten months.

Midnight found us approaching the edge of a great snowfield with a gentle slope to the north-east. We thought that at the base of the slope lay Stromness Bay. Our high hopes were soon shattered. Crevasses warned us that we were on another glacier, and soon we looked down almost to the seaward edge of the great riven ice-mass. The disappointment was severe. Back we turned and tramped up the glacier again, tracing our steps. We were very, very tired.

We decided to get down under the lee of a rock for a rest. Within a minute my two companions were fast asleep. I realized that it would be disastrous if we all slumbered together, for sleep under such conditions merges into death. After five minutes I shook them into consciousness again, told them that they had slept for half an hour, and gave the word for a fresh start. We were so stiff that for the first two or three hundred yards we marched with our knees bent.

At 6.30 a.m. we thought we heard the sound of a steam-whistle. Never had any one of us heard sweeter music. It was the first sound created by outside human agency that had come to our ears since we left Stromness Bay in December 1914. That whistle told us that men were living near, that ships were ready, and that within a few hours we should be on our way back to Elephant Island to the rescue of the men waiting there. It was a moment hard to describe. Pain and ache, boat journeys, marches, hunger and fatigue seemed to belong to the limbo of forgotten things, and there remained only the perfect contentment that comes of work accomplished.

The last lap of the journey proved extraordinarily difficult. Vainly we searched for a safe, or a reasonably safe, way down the steep ice-clad mountain-side. The sole possible pathway seemed to be a channel cut by water running from the upland. Down through icy water we followed the course of this stream. We were wet to the waist, shivering, cold, and tired. Presently our ears detected an unwelcome sound. It was the splashing of a waterfall, and we were at the wrong end. When we reached the top of this fall we peered over cautiously and discovered that there was a drop of 25 or 30 ft., with impassable ice-cliffs on both sides. To go up again was scarcely thinkable in our utterly wearied condition. The way down was through the waterfall itself. We made fast one end of our rope with some difficulty, due to the fact that the rocks had been worn smooth by the running water. Then Worsley and I lowered Crean, who was the heaviest man. He disappeared altogether in the falling water and came out gasping at the bottom. I went next, sliding down the rope, and Worsley, who was the lightest and most nimble member of the party, came last. At the bottom of the fall we were able to stand again on dry land.

A few moments later, as we hurried forward, the masts of a sailing-ship lying at a wharf came in sight. then we saw the sheds and factories of Stromness whaling station

Our beards were long and our hair was matted. We were unwashed and the garments that we had worn for nearly a year without a change were tattered and stained.

Close to the station we met two small boys ten or twelve years of age. They ran from us as fast as their legs would carry them!

At the outskirts of the station we met an old man, who started as if he had seen the Devil himself. He also hurried away.

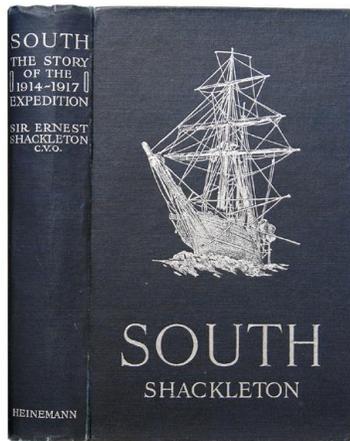
Five minutes later Mr. Sorlle (the manager of the whaling station) came us to meet, and said,

- "Well?"

- "Don't you know me?" I said.

- "I think I know your voice," he replied doubtfully

- "My name is Shackleton."



Maarten Regtien, composer, pianist

- regtien.info
- [maarten regtien youtube channel](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC...)