Back from the Icebound

Peace hath her victories. The conquering of seemingly insuperable difficulties, the unveiling of the secrets of the unknown, the placing of our mark indelibly on the credit of human science, are all acts of a memorable epoch in the annals of the history of the world. It is for the people to give honor to the explorer as to the leader in battle. But how can they do it? A few years ago there arrived in Sydney, the capital of New South Wales, a man of whom it was said, "He is the brain of the British Army." Crowds welcomed him on his coming. His journey through the city streets was as that of a triumphant march. Yesterday there arrived in South Australia another man of mighty deeds—deeds that have been accomplished in silence, but which must in their own sphere be placed on a level with those of the warrior. He was a man who had won for himself a spot in the great history of the world. Yet he returned to the State which he claims as his home unheralded, practically unknown, without a doubt. Unobtrusively as the day breaks he took his place in the bustling world again. One could have counted on one's fingers the number of people who yesterday knew that Dr. Douglas Mawson was in Adelaide once more.

It was an unemotional homoecoming. For all the notice that was taken of him as he landed at the Semaphore during the afternoon Dr. Mawson might have been an ordinary individual returning from a fishing trip. There was no cheering, no waving of hats and handkerchiefs, no crowd that pressed round to see what manner of man was he who had spent years of his life in the service of science among the unknown regions of the world's extremities.

Dr. Mawson stepped on to the Semaphore jetty, from the Customs Launch Antarob, and grasped the hands of the few friends who had come out to welcome him. Then, almost before the few people on the jetty recognised him, he hurried away, took his seat in a motor car, and was carried towards... "That's Dr. Mawson," said a policeman to a friend in a casual tone of voice. "Is that Mawson? It is. Well, wonder who it was." The friend denoted his interest in just those words.

South Australians do not give credit where credit is due. Yesterday's occurrences therefore require some explanation. The steamer Aurora which brought Dr. Mawson and his party back from the Southern Hemisphere arrived some days ahead of her schedule. The men who were expected to have a good idea as to the vessel's movements did not anticipate that she would put in an appearance before the last week in March. No programme of reception had been drawn up, and the gentlemen who had the matter in hand felt that they could make all the arrangements this week-end and still have plenty of time to spare. The near approach of the distinguished explorer was, as a matter of fact, quite unknown outside of a certain intimate circle. It therefore came as a surprise to the public as well as to the officers concerned when the newspapers yesterday morning announced the fact that the Aurora had been sighted off Cape Borda at 9.45 p.m. on the previous day, and would arrive at Port Adelaide some time during the afternoon. This, doubtless, was the reason of what seemed like a decided lack of interest on the part of the people. It was reported that all the public men who might have been expected to hurry down and congratulate the doctor on his safe return delayed their interest by remaining in Adelaide. Members of the State Ministry were conspicuous by their absence. So were those earnest University youths who made such a fuss at the Adelaide Railway Station when certain members of the expedition returned home last year.

Dr. Mawson may or may not feel disappointed at the manner in which he was received yesterday, but after all his case is only parallel with that of Captain Amundsen, whose arrival in Hobart after his discovery of the South Pole was so unexpected. The only person to welcome gallantly the Norwegian was the harbormaster at Hobart and a couple of professors who happened to be on the River Derwent when the Fram arrived. Captain Amundsen made his way to the office of the consul just as would any other seafaring man who arrived unexpectedly at the port. But a couple of days later he was the man of the hour. So it may be with Dr. Mawson. At any rate he may be certain that South Australia will honor him in no uncertain manner for his great exploratory work, which, after all, is of greater value in many ways than the mere determining of the position in which the pole is situated. It has already been decided that he shall be tendered a public welcome in which the Governor-General Lord Denham will be present. His worship the mayor (Mr. Alderman Simpson) will also welcome Dr. Mawson and his party on behalf of the City of Adelaide. The formalities of the reception have yet to be fixed, but they will most certainly be held within the next few days.

It was on December 5, 1911, that the Aurora sailed from Hobart for Adelaide land with the Australian Antarctic Exploration Expedition on board. Dr. Mawson had, therefore, completed two years of the ice land, when he embarked on his vessel to return to Australia at the end of 1913. The story of his sojourn will, when published, add a brilliant chapter to the annals of the Antarctic investigation which has already been written by the writings of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the late Sir Robert Scott, and Captain Amundsen. It is not Dr. Mawson's intention to tell his tale just yet. Following the lead set by other explorers, he does not wish to expose the material in certain directions, and it is quite possible that some days will elapse before the world at large is at liberty to read of what was done in the south, and of the discoveries, which it is believed have been made which will be of the utmost value.