

BACK AT LAST.

TWO YEARS IN THE ANTARCTIC.

Dr. Mawson's Party All Well.

Happy Homecoming.

It was expected, and yet it was surprising! Almost like a ghost from the night the Aurora broke through the southern darkness on Wednesday, with the gallant remnants of the Mawson expedition on board. The coming of the tight little ship from away down among the icefield of the huge and silent continent had quite a dramatic phase. People had not ceased wondering where Dr. Mawson and his colleagues were exactly, although, perhaps, some had forgotten for the moment about the plucky band that had just been released from a long imprisonment on Adelie Land.

—Home Again.—

Then, suddenly, the eyes of Cape Borda Lighthouse flashed out across the waters and discerned a vessel of stranger pattern than many that had swept past those watchers by the sea—a steamyacht, it might have appeared, so graceful was its outline and of such quiet dignity of movement. Nobody, except those who had been away for two long, anxious years, wrapped in the white expanse of the glittering southern world, will ever quite understand the joy that must have filled the hearts of the wanderers as the Borda lights twinkled the first welcome. Night passed, all too slowly, no doubt, for the Aurora had not much coal, and speed had to be economical. When daylight came the first streak of the land showed through the haze. And, that listed, the contour of the familiar hills took shape, and by-and-by the faces of friends and relatives of long ago were the final word! It was home!

—A Slow Passage.—

There was in idea that the message from the Borda might have been a hoax. But there was too much to support the good news that came through. The master of a sailing vessel that reached the anchorage on Wednesday night reported that the Aurora was approaching under slow steam—necessarily slow, for she is not a fast boat, and cannot be in the nature of things. Even if there had been any doubt about the message from Cape Borda there was further substantiation on it on Thursday morning. Another inward-bound ship notified that she had passed Dr. Mawson's boat some miles down. The Aurora is only about an eight-knot vessel. An ordinary steamer could have reached the offing in nine or 10 hours and at the earliest the Aurora was not expected until 6.30 a.m. But advices went to indicate that it would be towards the close of the afternoon before she would be boarded. That proved to be right. It was after 3 o'clock when the anchorage was reached.

—Eager Watchers.—

The officials at the signal station were early astir. In fact, they hardly went to bed at all. Capt. Richardson, the courteous pilot in charge, had the big telescope pointing down the southern horizon at daylight for a peep at the smudge of the important little vessel that was making a non-stop run from historic Adelie Land in order that the first official reception to the band of the explorers from the uncharted white fields of the far-away south

should take place in Adelaide, the residence of the splendid leader and organizer of the expedition. Telephones began to tinkle almost at the first streak of daylight, and during the day the staff at the signal station answered hundreds of calls from friends of the returning men and officials. Capt. Richardson, with his long experience of ships, was able to tell them that it would be at least midday before the vessel would be seen in the waters of the Semaphore. Anxious enquiries came quickly and persistently from all parts of the metropolitan area, and several telegrams for tidings of the vessel arrived from the country. At about 8 a.m. Capt. Richardson put off from the jetty in the petrol launch Premier, with representatives of the press, to take a pilot on board, and at the same time have a look down the gulf for possibly a glimpse of the Aurora. It was a bright morning, and the sunny calm of the cruise was a delectable enjoyment. An hour later the smart little Premier hauled alongside the jetty again. There was no news at the Signal Station, and none was likely for a few hours. The powerful telescope on the white platform at the lookout can pick up vessels very early when they appear on the horizon—perhaps 15 miles, or 20 if the day be particularly fine.

—Definite News.—

It was clear to the old hands at the signal station that when she was sighted the Aurora would be about two hours steaming from the anchorage. Right away from the early hours there were many friends and relatives of the incoming party with handkerchiefs waiting to flutter messages to those who had been away for two years. Capt. Richardson stated in explanation of the slow travelling of the vessel that it was probably short of coal, and was coming along under very economical steaming. It was not clear whether she would not have to do the trip under sail.

—Visitors from the University.—

A party from the Adelaide University arrived at the Semaphore anchorage in ample time for the official welcome. The Chancellor (Sir Samuel Way), owing to Executive Council duties and pressure of judicial work, was unable to be present, but he was represented by the Registrar (Mr. C. R. Hodge). Others present were Mr. F. A. Robertson (Dr. Mawson's cadet at the University), and Mr. Richard Correll (father of Mr. P. E. Correll, who came back from the antarctic with Wild's party, but subsequently left for the south again with the Aurora to continue duties already so carefully begun.

—At Last.—

The long wait upon the jetty was at last rewarded. Through the haze, away down on the southern horizon, were seen the first faint glimpses of the Aurora. From the smallest speck the gallant little vessel slowly took definite shape and form. Throughout the day almost a dead calm had ruled, but, as if to greet the intrepid

explorers, a well-disciplined south-wester sprang up as the vessel proceeded shorewards. The watchers upon the pier wasted but little time, and the official party on board the launch Conqueror was soon steaming outward. Friends and relatives were there to greet the party who had waited so long and patiently away down south. In the Conqueror's wake came the press launch to secure the story

of the long winter's sojourn. As the tugs advanced the details of the incoming craft were picked out one by one. The masts and spars of the Aurora's brigantine rig, with the low funnel, loomed up largely against the daintier hull. A trim and dainty picture looked the gallant little vessel as she proceeded, under close-reefed topsails, towards the shore. Four miles distant from the Semaphore the visitors came within close range of the Aurora. The blue ensign fluttered gaily from the ice-boat's gaff, and the vessel, free in bow, presented a spick-and-span appearance. Perched high upon the foremast could be seen the crow's nest—a white-painted barrel, from which, two years before, the voyagers had first viewed the ice floes of the antarctic. A slight list to port was noticeable, and there was a gash in the bulwarks—significant, perhaps, of some hearty smack of wind or wave, or too close acquaintance with an icepack. Down the wind came a chorus of canine greetings. The instinct of the sledge dogs told that shore was near, and they whined and yelped most heartily. Once or twice a medley of sharp, high-pitched notes told of a vigorous scuffle. Then came the master's hand, a short, brief struggle, and the Rhodes Scholar (Mr. Madigan) could be seen to emerge triumphant. He had known the trouble, and corrected times out of number before. The animals seemed wild with excitement. Peering above the rails one barked his greeting to the launch, and another yellow fellow made most frantic efforts to escape via a handy scupper hole.

—First Greetings.—

Rounding the stern of the Aurora the Conqueror drew alongside the other's port bow. The pilot in charge (Capt. Richardson) was the first aboard. His was a happy privilege, for his office gave prior right to greet the travellers, despite the absence of pratique. It was a moment of suppressed excitement. The pent-up feelings of the men, long separated from home and friends, burst out in quick, impressive action. Waiving, or maybe forgetting, the quarantine regulations, Dr. Mawson stepped aboard the Conqueror and gripped the hand of the Registrar of the Adelaide University (Mr. C. R. Hodge) and others. It was a spontaneous demonstration of his joy at returning home once more. Several members of the party followed suit, and it was a pretty and impressive scene. The authorities will surely officially forget its informality. There was a strange yet quite explicable restraint about the meeting. Words for awhile were quite inadequate. Mr. Hodge it was who broke the silence. "Three cheers for Dr. Mawson and his gallant comrades," he cried, and the answer came loudly and heartily. Then the emotional and demonstrative temperament of the ladies was shown. Across the intervening space they waited messages of greeting, and white handkerchiefs fluttered in the wind. Conspicuous among the Aurora's occupants was Capt. Davis. A neat figure in white, he stood upon the bridge, the chief officer at his side. Fugitive glimpses of Dr. Mawson were obtained as he hurried from deck to poop and from poop to bridge, making the final preparations for the disembarkation. Large, athletic, and energetic, he looked as he hurried hither and thither. The members of the returning party had concentrated upon the poop, and, even from a distance, they seemed fit and well. Sunburned and stalwart, they looked indeed as if they had braved dangers and hardships in plenty.

—Granting Pratique.—

There was a trifling wait before pratique was granted. The Quarantine Officer (Dr. Gething) was away on another official visit. The time was spent in exchanging greetings as the vessels lay side by side. Shortly after 4 p.m. Dr. Gething arrived. A short examination of the men, a brief chat with the Aurora's doctor, and the business was over. It was only a matter of from five to 10 minutes, and the yellow flag, which had been waving its message of warning, came down and the Aurora was "clean." No need to trouble about the health of the sojourners in the silent spaces of the south. They were all as fit and strong as the proverbial fiddle. In fact, remarked Dr. Mawson subsequently, the trouble was, in some cases, to keep down the weight. The cold of the antarctic kills the germs all right. With the legal preliminaries over, the visitors clambered up into the boat from the south. Professor Chapman and Mr. Hodge were the first to board, and the rest soon followed.

—Dr. Mawson.—

No delay for Dr. Mawson. The quarantine officer had scarcely signed the bill of health before the leader had snatched up his bags, made for the customs launch, and set out for the Semaphore. The rest of the party remained upon the Aurora, which proceeded towards the mouth of the river, bound for a berth at Port Adelaide.