

The Register.

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DR. MAWSON'S RETURN.

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Dr. Mawson has had many experiences of the mutability of this mortal life, and it was quite in harmony with the irony of fate that his return from the unrelenting cold which had so long afflicted him in the Antarctic Circle should have been heralded by a meteorological warning of "rising temperatures!" "Rising temperatures" is, of course, a matter of comparison. To a man accustomed to endure many degrees below zero an advance to even the lowest-recorded South Australian cold would at least be as welcome as a frog's escape from a fire into a frying-pan; and Dr. Mawson would probably have preferred a gradual thawing-out to the sudden melting-out which should naturally follow the 141 degrees of sun-heat which was an incidental part of the warm welcome which greeted him on his long-looked-for arrival in Adelaide yesterday. Yet it seems likely that—as Australians, carrying stored-up caloric with them, feel the cold less than the permanent residents when they expose themselves to a rigorous English winter—so polar explorers are fortified in some curious fashion against great heat when comparatively suddenly brought under its influence. One of the side episodes most commented upon in connection with Captain Amundsen's visit to Adelaide on his return from the South Pole was that he was manifestly, of all the men present on the occasion, the least troubled by the almost intolerable temperature on the afternoon when he was formally welcomed by the Council of the South Australian branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia.

The chief consideration, however, is not what Dr. Mawson feels in the way of corporeal sensations, but the fact that he is able to feel anything—that he is back again among his own folk instead of being only a memory of a lost hero. A year ago no cautious speculator would have cared to wager on such a prospect as that which was realized in Adelaide yesterday. Then Dr. Mawson and his intrepid companions were unavoidably left stranded in the most inhospitable region on the earth's surface, with the polar night beginning to encompass them, and with all the apparent chances against them. Even the most irresponsible optimist might have been excused if he had felt the cold clutch of despair at his heart when, after keen and inspiring anticipations of immediate departure to civilization, Dr. Mawson found himself condemned to another year's detention amid the eternal ice. He had just dragged himself wearily back—day and night after day and night for three seemingly interminable weeks—from a tragic expedition in which he had witnessed, one after the other, the deaths of two dear and dauntless companions, whose decease had left him to plod on alone in a great wild waste, hoping against hope, only at the end of the journey to discover that

he had to endure another long spell of unrealized expectations, such as might have been applied to a modern Tantalus in the higher instead of the nether regions. Yet there was no repining, or sign of repining, in the quietly strong leader of the expedition. His messages wafted through the ether were all philosophical and cheery. He admitted that nobody had blundered; that he and his loyal comrades were merely victims of untoward circumstances; and that, as they had not been able to control those circumstances, they intended to utilize the opportunity to extend their researches concerning the natural phenomena of the Antarctic Circle. They have done this as best they might; and, as brave men, they evidently would prefer that nothing more should be said about the matter. That, however, is not the public view. Australians would not subject them to a fussy heroizing process; but they would be deficient in the performance of an obvious duty if they did not tell brave men publicly that they love undaunted courage and self-sacrifice displayed unfalteringly in scorn of consequence. The object of such an attention is not merely to laud the valorous who have quit themselves as men, but to emphasize their example so that emulation may be inspired in others who require a spur to their intent. For always true in some sense or other is the adage which teaches that courage and zeal beget zeal and courage.

The human nature aspect of the great undertaking which has now come virtually to its ending so far as moral and physical achievement is concerned has been specially commented upon because it is the more picturesque complexion of the matter, and the one which appeals most to the public. The other, however—the practically utilitarian and the scientific—was what induced the South Australian taxpayers to contribute so liberally to the expedition—directly, through their own

State, as payers of Commonwealth taxes also, and as personal subscribers. The Antarctic zone holds not merely ice and snow and a sparse animal life, but—Problems! And the solution of those problems certainly means an important addition to the sum of human knowledge; and it may mean money. Dr. Mawson did not set out to find the South Pole—the honour of that he left to Capt. Scott, who was doomed not to be spared to enjoy the distinction which he won at the cost of his life. His purposes were Antarctic exploration—to chart mysterious and unknown coasts which might contain harbours for commercial whalers and sealers; to continue a previously begun search for minerals which might enrich the Commonwealth; to dredge the ocean for its own quaint treasures; and generally to add to the geographical as well as the meteorological lore of the world. All these things and more he has done, but the time to estimate in detail his exploits and those of his party is not yet. There still remains to them the task of measuring their work—of bringing rude matter into due form; but they may safely be judged regarding the uncertain by what has been established of the certain, and all Australians will unite in the opinion that they deserve the heartiest of commendations and the most cordial of welcomes.