

—Magnetic Pole Not Reached.—

A party, consisting of Bage, Webb, and Hurley, returned three days before the Aurora arrived. Their objective was to reach the magnetic pole from the north, so as to complete observations taken by Mawson during the Shackleton expedition. They had arrived within 50 miles of the pole before insufficiency of food compelled them to retreat. Bage merely gave a cryptic idea of the trials from severe weather and hunger pangs that had been endured. Hurley, however, let drop a few words about missing depots and tightening waist belts, which furnished an impression of what a vale of tribulation they had travelled. Subsequently it was learned that but for Hurley's resolute action in abandoning a search for a lost depot and proceeding foodless to the next, the whole party would have met disaster.

—Geographical Discoveries.—

Madigan, Dr. MacLean, and Correll were detailed to survey eastward from the main base. They made some interesting geographical discoveries, mostly on the return journey on sea ice. They reported that for 300 miles eastward there was no possible place for a ship to land a party, as the icecliffs were unscalable. Food supplies were augmented by seals and penguins. The little band made their Christmas dinner off a solitary emperor penguin. Most of the country traversed was terribly crevassed. Once they failed to locate a depot and spent two days foodless in a sleeping bag till the weather moderated, but otherwise they suffered little except in regard to cracked lips. Leader Madigan highly praised young Correll, whose face is tanned by wind exposure and gives the appearance of an Eskimo. Another sledging team, comprising Stillwell, Hodgeman, and Close, traversed 17 miles of the coastline and provided a detailed coast map.

—Motor Sledging.—

After the serious accident in Adelaide with the aeroplane built by Vickers, Maxim, the work accomplished by it in the spring indicated that it was admirably adapted for a smooth surface, but was unsuitable for the conditions at the main base. A party consisting of Bickerton, Dr. Whether, and Hodgeman were instructed to proceed southward with the motor sledge as far as possible, and to return along the west coast. The motor, towing two ordinary sledges, flew up a 17 deg. slope at the rear of the camp at the rate of nearly 40 miles an hour. The engine was incapacitated 13 miles out, and the journey was continued on foot. The party covered 300 miles, and returned on January 18. Subsequently they retrieved the motor, which slid from the 5-mile camp at a great pace. The total sledging from the main base, excluding that done by Mawson's party, was 2,100 miles, mostly in unprecedentedly bad conditions, both as regards the weather and the surface.

—A Memorable Storm.—

Have you experienced a typhoon at Hong-kong, a tornado on the Queensland coast, and a 2-gun gale off the Horn? When you have lashed those three together, transported them to a refrigerator, to be frozen stiff and solid, and then set them going simultaneously, then, only then, can you imagine the week-long storm which the Aurora now experienced in Commonwealth Bay. The thermometer was down to 19 deg. Fahr. The waves rose high, their edges blown into spume, covering the whole vista with a curtain of translucent white, which gave place only to sea smoke—that mysterious brown vapour which appears only when the wind's velocity has exceeded 60 miles an hour, and which almost obscured the white-capped Mackellar Islands, protecting the mouth of the boat harbour. Perhaps it was no disadvantage that the Aurora had already lost all her anchors, as it was doubtful whether any ordinary cable would hold even that little vessel against such a strain. With full head of steam she drifted, snorted, and then crawled back under the shelter of the 100 ft. high ice cliffs, when the wind moderated to a mere howl. Spray coming on board was frozen solid immediately, until the deck was like a skating rink and the running gear was as stiff and hard as cast-iron. Each rope was like a long icicle, and the stacoliths and stalagmites feet in length, so to speak, looked like the Temple of Baal in the famous Jenolan Caves. The general appearance of the ship reminded one of Ballantyne's word picture of a spectre ship in the arctic. Except for the officer of the watch and the men at the wheel, not a soul was visible on deck for hours. The kip was the only warm place, peculiar economy having provided the messroom with a piano, but no stove. After the storm it took us three days' hard work to dig 50 tons of ice off the fore-castle head.

—Search for Dr. Mawson.—

Dr. Mawson had stated definitely in a letter left behind that he would return from sledging on January 13. When that date passed without any appearance of

the commander, no particular anxiety was felt for some time, as his party was very strong. The commander, Dr. Mertz, and Lieut. Ninnis were all of splendid physique. The Swiss was the only one under 6 ft. high, but he had compensation in muscular development, which was the admiration of the camp. He had been an officer in the Swiss Army, and the champion ski runner of Switzerland, so his knowledge of ice work must be accounted to his advantage. Mawson is acknowledged a most capable and cautious leader, having made ice travelling a study. Ninnis stood 6 ft. 3 in., and though only 22 years old, was a powerful man. The party also had the enormous advantage of 18 Greenland dogs to haul their sledges. Mertz and Ninnis had had charge of the dogs ever since they were placed on the Aurora at the London docks, and had achieved great success in training them to harness. Three men can easily haul the sledge and load, 800 lb., over a good surface. Experiences had shown that three dogs are equal to one man, so the party had abundance of haulage power. True, they had over 600 miles to traverse, but at the worst they would have dog-flesh to eat. Indeed, Dr. Mawson calculated the ration basis on returning to camp.

—Anxiety to Rescue Party.—

With only three out of 18 dogs, we had hoped that the Aurora would be able to proceed on January 20 to relieve Wild's party, which were located on the ice barrier 1,600 miles to the westward. The sea route, though, was only 1,133 miles, as the crow flies. As we feared that the ice barrier might become detached from the land ice, our anxiety to rescue them before the sea was frozen over may be imagined. It still required a great deal to inspire these men with pessimistic thoughts, so deep and implicit was their faith in the leader. Had not Dr. Mawson passed unscathed through great dangers in the New Hebrides, and had also gone down almost to the valley of death when struggling back from the magnetic pole during the Shackleton expedition? If any man could find escape from a tight corner then that man was Dr. Mawson. Eventually doubt loomed more distinctly. Precautionary measures had to be adopted, and sledge parties sent out searching. The Aurora cruised 60 miles along the eastern coast. A kite was flown, detonators were fired at frequent intervals, and the ice cliffs were narrowly scrutinized. The theory obtained that Dr. Mawson might run for the coast to replenish his larder with seals and penguins. The ice cliffs were so precipitous, however, that he would have found it impossible to descend to the water's edge. The ship was kept nine days owing to a hurricane, and compelled to do the mulberry bush trick around Commonwealth Bay owing to having lost all her anchors. The wind for most of the time was at a velocity of 11 miles according to Admiral Beaufort's scale. Communication with the shore was impossible. All the members of the shore party were anxious to leave this place, but their courage was indicated by their unanimously agreeing to remain behind another year.

—Search for Mawson.—

While the ship proceeded to the rescue of Wild's party, it was finally decided that only six men could be left behind. Cecil Madigan, the South Australian Rhodes' Scholar, was appointed leader, and his comrades were:—R. Bage (Melbourne), A. N. H. Bickerton (London), Hodgeman (Adelaide), McLean (Sydney), and S. Jeffries (wireless). Not a murmur was raised by them, though they felt keenly the disappointment of being kept on the ice prison another year. It was a special sacrifice for Madigan, as he had doubts whether his scholarship could be kept open another year. No man is more admirably fitted as leader. All are physically strong, hardened by long sledging, and provided with plenty of food and coal. The ship also landed Amundsen expedition dogs, and with sad hearts the party bade farewell to the ship, which steamed out of Commonwealth Bay on February 8.

—Startling Wireless.—

Our position was now more precarious than that of the shore party. It is customary to victual exploring ships for two years, but shortage of funds induced the executive to provide only one year's victuals for the crew. They relied upon securing surplus stores at the main base to feed the members taken on board. Circumstances had necessitated landing some of the ship's stores at the main base for the relief party, so it was felt that if the ship were caught in the ice there would be a big chance of the party starving. We had left the main base eight hours, and were congratulating ourselves upon the splendid progress, when a bolt shot from the blue. We were standing at the lee funnel, a warm spot on deck, when it was noticed that the mate was helping to pull the wheel round. To our consternation the ship was turned again towards the main base. Why? It trans-

pired that a wireless message had been received from the main base, reading:—"Returned to main base safely. Ninnis and Mertz dead. Return and pick up shore party immediately. Signed, Mawson." The effect of the message on the light-hearted voyagers was striking. Many had previously feared that the whole party had met with disaster, but lived in hope. Now that it was definitely known that two comrades were dead, gloom spread over the vessel. Eyes were dimmed, and all the men—strong men, too—spoke with a huskiness they tried hard to hide. The action of Mawson in recalling the ship when he and the shore party were in complete safety, and endangering the lives on the ship and at Wild's Base, will probably be criticised, but Mawson is such a thoughtful leader that it may with confidence be said that he will provide a satisfactory explanation. The circumstances, however, justified Capt. Davis in questioning whether he should obey the order, but the instructions were so explicit that they gave no discretionary power. The Aurora returned to Commonwealth Bay next morning, but a strong hurricane prevented communication with the land. The ship flagged a message to send instructions. The signal was observed by the shore party, who made no attempt to reply either by wireless or flags. On the same evening the hurricane increased with such intensity that the anchorless Aurora found it impossible to keep her ground.

—An Anxious Conference.—

Capt. Davis called us together in the messroom, explained the situation regarding Wild's Base, and said the delay was jeopardizing their lives. There was great solemnity in this little ceremony. A glance at the captain showed that the responsibility weighed keenly on him. He looked positively haggard. All sympathized with him, knowing the terrible strain that he endured, and unanimously supported his decision to start immediately for Wild's Base, leaving Mawson and the relief party to be brought back next year. If ever blame is laid at the captain's door for deserting the main base every member will stand shoulder to shoulder with him. It is true that earlier that day volunteers were forthcoming to row the whaleboat to the shore, but the captain refused to allow the men to risk their lives. There was little doubt, even in the minds of the volunteers, that the boat would have been swamped by the high seas, the crests of which were lashed into spindrift by hurricane gusts.

—Mawson Left Behind.—

The captain left us in the saloon discussing the situation. In a few minutes we heard the engine telegraph ring "full speed ahead." We rushed on deck, and saw the helm pointed once more towards the open sea. The blue ensign was raised and dipped, but the telescopes levelled on the camp could discern no movement. The flag announcing Mawson's return was still flying on the wireless mast, and there is every reason to believe that the ship's departure was unobserved. We pictured their dismay upon discovering next day that they were condemned to another year's imprisonment in this windy ice waste. There was nothing in the nature of a sudden panic about the decision to desert Mawson. The only reason was that we believed Wild's party would perish, and we had every reason to believe that the brief season of summer calms were over for another year. Shortly after leaving the main base we crossed the antarctic circle for the fourth time. Apparently the winds in Commonwealth Bay are of a local character, as 20 miles out the gale moderated to a breeze, although the telescope showed the bay to be still the fulcrum of storm activity. That night no wireless message reached the Aurora, thus confirming the impression that her departure had been unobserved.

—A Jumbled Wireless.—

Late next afternoon we came abreast of a tubular iceberg 36 miles long. That night Mawson attempted to communicate by wireless, but as the Aurora was nearly 200 miles distant the signals were indistinct. All that could be deciphered were the

words:—"Please wait—cable—Ninnis and Mertz—" and the word "crevasse" repeated several times. It is understood that this meant that before complying with the news contracts we should cable the relatives of Ninnis and Mertz stating that they had been killed in a crevasse. This was another instance of Mawson's thoughtfulness.