

MAWSON LEFT BEHIND.

RETURN OF THE AURORA.

WILD'S PARTY SAFE.

REMARKABLE INCIDENTS.

HOBART, March 14.

The Aurora entered Esperance Bay this morning, and landed the Mawson expedition party. The Secretary (Mr. Conrad Eitel) proceeded to Hobart by the channel steamer Dover in order to comply with an English press contract. The Aurora will not arrive at Hobart until to-morrow morning. Mr. Eitel supplied the following account of the trip:—The Aurora left Hobart on Boxing Day to retrieve two parties of the Australasian Antarctic Expedition which spent a year on the antarctic continent. We were shocked to discover that morning the town plastered with placards announcing the wreck of the Aurora. The coffin ship proved to be a namesake of our vessel, which had been made the subject of cinematograph pictures, but caused us to wonder whether history was about to indulge in hackneyed repetition. This was scarcely auspicious, but good omens were present. There was a bright sunshine, and not a ripple disturbed the harbour. King's Pier was crowded by Hobart friends. Everything was so blythe and gay that it almost felt like a summer excursion instead of the graver proposition. As the Aurora steamed down the Derwent River in slow and stately fashion, followed by excursion steamers and launches, signals were made by shipping and sailing craft. Our Blue Ensign was frequently dipped in answer. At the Tarooma Quarantine Station we embarked 21 Greenland dogs. Amundsen's presentation to the ship was a regular Noah's Ark—28 men, 21 dogs, 45 sheep, two turkeys, four fowls, and one pig. At night when the ship was rolling the animals gave voice. "If a ship approaches in a fog," remarked the mate, "those aboard will imagine that they have come close to a farmyard." We had purchased a large quantity of desiccated barracouta fish to feed the dogs, but so many sheep dodged the butcher by dying in the middle of the night that the dogs fared sumptuously on mutton, and were landed eventually in magnificent condition. The Aurora, fitted with wireless receiving apparatus, was able to secure messages from the Mawson base at Macquarie Island until two days before reaching Adelie Land. We also had a whaling expert (Capt. James Davis) to test the whaling potentialities of the antarctic. This was done at the request of the Federal Government, but not a single whale was observed during the whole voyage. At one stage the presence of innumerable birds and much drifting kelp impressed us that possibly we were in the vicinity of the elusive Royal Company Islands. Despite a keen watch, however, no land was discerned.

—At the Main Base.—

We found that the 40-mile long ice barrier, charted last year, 60 miles westward of Adelie Land, had disappeared. The Aurora had less than 30 hours' sailing in pack ice before reaching the main base. Even then there were many wide leads, which confirmed Mawson's assertion to me in a letter that it was possible to visit the base in an iron steamer. Early on the morning of Monday, January 13, the Aurora sighted the main base. The crew recognised a piano-shaped berg stranded in the identical position of last year. Altogether there were six big bergs. In Commonwealth Bay the channel leading to the anchorage varies in depth from 20 to 90 fathoms, but on either side ugly reefs are exposed by a rough sea.

—Wireless Failure Explained.—

Through telescopes we noted that only one wireless mast was erect. The other was shattered, and lying on the rocks. It furnished the reason for the sudden stoppage of wireless news from Adelie Land. Although we clearly discerned the camp there was no sign of life visible. The Aurora passed out of view of the base, and anchored under the lee of an ice cliff 100 ft. high. The dogs, seeing the ice cliff's proximity, howled piteously to go ashore. Penguins and seals were seen on the rocks. Later a strong gale blew, and a windlass, having been negligently left open, the heaviest cable glided into the water. It had not been made fast, and left us dependent on a much lighter cable. This was a serious loss, as events subsequently proved.

—Joy in the Camp.—

In the afternoon the sea moderated, and the motor boat conveyed on shore our captain, the chief engineer, and myself. As we entered the boat harbour we saw Mr. Murphy ascending a hill with a sledge and to dogs. We "coo-ee'd," but failed to attract his attention. On reaching the landing place we waved our arms like windmills, and screamed "Ship, ship." The occupants of the camp poured out like ants, and dashed 50 yards to meet us. Nine unkempt, wild-looking men, wonderfully attired, grasped our hands, cheered, yelled, and danced in excitement and joy. Some were scarcely recognisable owing to their hair and whiskers being bleached by the snow during sledging journeys. Bage, with a shade over a temporarily snow-blinded eye, looked weird. It needed not them to tell us that they had passed through a strenuous and anxious time. The hardship they had undergone was indelibly fixed on their faces, although each man was robust and in the pink of condition. The boys had become men. This applied specially to the 19-year-old Correll, of Adelaide, the baby of the expedition. The motor boat having been made fast, we entered the camp, where the mailbag was opened. Some of the men received a hundred letters. The winter quarters were most comfortable, and consisted of a living room, 24 ft. square, a smaller workroom, and two enclosed verandahs—one used as a hangar for the motor sledge.

—Antarctic Diet.—

What a reception we got! We had brought on shore cases of pineapple, oranges, and fresh mutton. Those commodities were exactly what the beleaguered garrison were craving for, although they had not been faring badly. In turn we were regaled on raspberry sponge made partly with penguin eggs and black tea made from melted snow, which was nectar compared with the stewed ship's tea. Later we enjoyed a custard made with powdered milk and penguin eggs, flavoured with vanilla essence. This was ambrosia. Then, fancy! Fanned strawberries and custard, in a dreary desolate waste. After the ship's fare this was indeed luxury. The culinary successes achieved provided evidence of the adaptability of the Australian. This, of course, was a special feast day. When dinner time came an appetizing aroma filled the

camp. "What is it?" we asked. Then was brought forth a big dish of penguin breast, baked with bacon. It surpassed Christmas turkey. The shore party attacked the mutton, and we feasted on penguin. Silence reigned for a time. Dr. Maclean exclaimed, "Mutton is splendid for a change, but give me penguin breast every time."

—Terrible Gales.—

Beyond a doubt, the most interesting scientific results will consist of meteorological data gathered in the winter quarters. It is no exaggeration to say that Commonwealth Bay proved absolutely the windiest corner of the world. The expedition is specially equipped with anemometers. The lay mind cannot conceive wind velocity when expressed merely in figures. Wind blowing at 50 miles an hour constitutes a full gale. The shore party staggered us by their records. It is indisputable that the average wind velocity during the whole ten months they were there was 52 miles an hour. A maximum of 202 miles was actually registered. The gusts were of varying duration. The highest average for any one hour was between 90 and 100 miles. Some gales lasted several months, with only a few hours' interval. When the gales took the form of a blizzard it was impossible to see a yard ahead. On one occasion Correll was lost for two hours negotiating a journey of 10 yards from the camp to the meteorological screen. Hodgman was similarly lost for two hours and a half when returning from the magnetic but less than 200 yards distant. It was necessary for travellers to crawl on hands and knees. It is certain that no other antarctic party has been in such an ideal location for securing meteorological data. These figures eclipse the records of any other part of the world. They relate to experience at the actual base. On the plateau above the wind is always greater. The keynote of the scientific results is undoubtedly the velocity of wind, although much other striking scientific work has been achieved. The temperature descended to minus 29 Fahr., so that it will be realized that the expedition from sunny Australia endured a full measure of hardship. Yet some people have characterised it as a glorified picnic.