

Back from the Ice- Bound Fastnesses

Peace hath her victories. The conquering of seemingly insuperable difficulties, the unveiling of the secrets of the unknown, the placing of another forward move to the credit of science, are all worthy of the eulogism which the spectacular achievements of martial prowess evoke. It is for the people to give honor to the explorer as to the leader in battle. Is it always done? But a few years ago there arrived in Adelaide 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 triumphal 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 victory over that great fortress of Nature—the ice barrier of the Antarctic. Yet he returned to the State which he claims as his home unheralded, practically unsung, without a doubt. Unobtrusively as the daybreak he took his place in the hustling 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 homecoming. 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 for two years delved for the cause of science among the cold stillnesses of the white south land. Dr. Mawson stepped on to the Semaphore jetty from the Customs launch Asteroid, and grasped the hands of the few friends who had come 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 townwards. "That's Dr. Mawson," said an onlooker to a friend in a casual tone of voice. "Dr. Mawson, is it? Well, I wondered who it was." The friend denoted his interest in just those words.

South Australians do not refuse to 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 South Antarctic arrived some days ahead of her scheduled time. Those 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 first week in March. No programme of reception had been drawn up because the gentlemen who had the matter in hand felt that they could make all 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 others concerned when the newspapers yesterday morning announced the fact that the Aurora had been sighted off Cape Borda at 8.45 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 very noticeable that all the public men who might have been expected to hurry down and congratulate the doctor on his safe return displayed their interest by remaining in Adelaide. Members of the State Ministry were conspicuous by their absence. So also were those exuberant 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 as unexpected. The only persons to welcome the gallant Norwegian were the harbor-master at Hobart and a couple of pressmen who happened to be out on the River Derwent when the Fram arrived. Captain Amundsen made his way to the office of his country's 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 at which the Governor-General Lord Denham will be present. His worship the mayor (Alderman Simpson) will also welcome Dr. Mawson and his party on behalf of the City of Adelaide. The date of these functions has yet to be fixed, but they will most certainly be held within the next few days.

It was on December 25, 1911, that the Aurora sailed from Hobart for Adele land with the Australian Antarctic Exploration Expedition on board. Dr. Mawson had, therefore, completed two years in 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 book of Antarctic investigation which has already been enriched 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 awhile. Following the lead set by other explorers, he has disposed of 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.