

## WHY MAWSON WAS LEFT BEHIND.

### The Captain's Story.

#### A Difficult Position.

The Aurora entered Esperance Bay on Friday, 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 did not arrive at Hobart until Sunday morning. Mr. Eitel supplied an account of the trip, the greater portion of which appeared in The Register on Saturday. The concluding portion is as follows:—

HOBART, March 14.

#### —Land of Monotonous White.—

"Upon the captain of the mail steamer disputing his way, I glanced at my companion. Both felt guilty. Fancy penguins causing us to blush at our bad steering. On Sunday, the 23rd, we sighted the barrier at a point 30 miles from Wild's base. How delighted we were to observe that the barrier was not carried away from the land, taking Wild's party to destruction. We steamed to the lee of the barrier, from which last season a sea of ice extended some miles as flat as the foe's edge. On this foe we descried dark objects. The telescopists declared that they could recognise Wild and Kennedy distinctly. We were therefore dismayed when we observed the objects to plunge suddenly into the ice and cold water. They were emperor penguins, so difficult was it to conceive a sense of the proportion of this land of monotonous white. Subsequently we were often similarly deceived.

#### —Party Safe.—

"Evidently our approach was early discovered, as when the camp was sighted two sledge teams loaded with provisions were already progressing to the ice edge. Eagerly we counted the men. "Yes, thank God. All there. Eight." At this we cheered from deep thankfulness. Our anxiety was over. Soon the nose of the ship pressed against the edge of the ice. The men of the second base stood in a row on the ice. We crowded the fore-castle head and exchanged greetings, but they could see something had transpired. Sad to see our faces gloomy, we saw them exchanging whispers. Then their eyes searched our ranks. More whispers were exchanged. We knew they were looking for Dr. Mawson. Finally Wild shouted, "Is all well with the first base?" Many of us felt a lump in our throats. The deaths of two comrades seemed to be too sacred for even us roughened men to shout about. None answered, but our solemn countenances told that all was not well. The silence was significant. With the tact of strong men they deliberately forgot having asked the question. "Did you have a good voyage?" they pursued, and in this way the painful subject was turned aside. Explanations came later. The second base was just as remorseful as we at the loss of two comrades.

#### —New Territory for Britain.—

"Frank Wild, who holds the Scott and Shackleton polar medals, told us that his base had accomplished an aggregate of 1,524 miles by sledge journeys, without counting relay work. The party had taken formal possession for Great Britain of the whole area of land from Kaiser Wilhelm Land to a longitude of 101 deg. 30 min. east, and as far south as 67 deg. 30 min. The trend of the land is almost due east and west of the coastline, and almost on the antarctic circle. This land was ceremonially named King George the Fifth Land. Probably this was the only opportunity the Australians had to confer their Sovereign's name upon new territory. The leader delivered a patriotic address. Cheers were given for the King. Wild's party originally had nine dogs. Only two had survived. Three had been killed for food. Two died naturally. The other two wandered off and were probably engulfed in crevasses. The Aurora remained at Wild's base for a sufficient time to take on board specimens, scientific instruments, and a few stores. The water tanks were replenished with ice. At 9 o'clock that night the Aurora sailed for Hobart."

#### —A Difficult Task.—

Referring to the passage from the main to the second base, Capt. Davis reports:—"On the evening of February 9 we left Commonwealth Bay, and the ship met an icepack on the following day. After a very trying morning we got through the heaviest, and continued our course in fairly open water for the next three days. Our chances of getting to the second base looked gloomy when an easterly gale burst, and soon developed into a heavy blizzard. It lasted three days. We drove westward before it under steam and sail, often unable to see a length ahead of the vessel. There was no alternative if we were to get west in time but to keep going. As daylight came each morning we felt thankful that another night had passed without disaster. We made good progress until February 18, when the icebergs became numerous. On the next day we were held up by a heavy pack extending right across our course. At this time we were 90 miles from the northern point of Termination Barrier, and had found open water right up to this barrier on our previous voyage. There was no alternative but to follow the pack northward for 80 miles before we were able to steer west again.

#### —Terrible Disappointment.—

"The position of the pack was a terrible disappointment. It appeared unlikely that we would be able to penetrate the second base at all. Countless bergs made navigation after dusk difficult. On the following afternoon we reached the longitude of the Termination Barrier, but for 20 miles a close pack intervened. We tried to push south through the pack, but a couple of hours' effort showed that progress in that direction was impossible. Anxious to retain the ship's freedom, we decided to go westward. On February 21 we found the ice looser, and pushed south into it. We were able to progress without much difficulty, and at noon next day had penetrated 80 miles. Heavy flocs, fortunately separated by water leads, reached a region where the bergs were so numerous that they could be avoided only with difficulty, even in clear weather. The wind was rapidly growing to a blizzard. Our position was one of great anxiety. At 8 o'clock the darkness and snow rendered it impossible to see any distance. The night that followed was one of the worst we have experienced. Never was dawn awaited more anxiously. Soon after 4 o'clock in the morning the Shackleton Glacier was sighted. Next day in the afternoon we reached the second base."

### Capt. Davis Speaks.

HOBART, March 16.

The members of the Mawson Expedition who returned with the Aurora comprise eight members of the western party—Messrs. Frank Wild (leader), C. T. Harrison, A. L. Kennedy, M. H. Moyes, G. Dovers, A. D. Watson, C. A. Hoadley, and Dr. S. A. Jones—and 10 members of the main base party—Messrs. J. Hunter, S. Webb, J. H. Close, C. F. Laceron, G. F. Hurley, P. E. Correll, H. D. Murphy, W. H. Hannam, F. H. Stillwell, and Dr. L. H. Whetter.

#### —Adverse Conditions.—

Capt. Davis in his report of the Aurora's voyage, after describing the trip down to the main base, the search for Dr. Mawson, and the sending of the relief party consisting of Messrs. Madigan, Bage, Bickerton, Hodgeman, Jefferies, and Maclean, proceeds:—"I had instructed the relief party that it was urgent that the Aurora should proceed to Wild's base on February 1, as the lengthening of the nights would make the voyage south from Termination Barrier one of great difficulty on account of the enormous quantities of ice which collect in this region. The weather in Commonwealth Bay was steadily getting worse, and by January 27 we had lost our three anchors, and parted our cable twice. On January 29 the weather being clear the Aurora proceeded eastward along the coast looking for any sign of the party. Nothing was to be seen of any flag or depot, and on the night of January 30 we were stopped by heavy pack ice, and returned to the winter quarters the following night. There, as usual, we found it blowing hard, and we steamed about waiting for the weather to moderate sufficiently to send a boat ashore to pick up the 11 members of the expedition who were returning with us. Instead of moderating, however, it freshened up, and for the following seven days it blew a very heavy gale. During this period I don't think the velocity of the wind was ever below 40 miles an hour, and frequent squalls were recorded by the anemometer on shore as 80 miles an hour. For the whole of the seven days we maintained a constant struggle to keep the shelter of the shore. This, by driving the vessel at full speed, we were able to do, although during the

squalls we were frequently blown well out of the bay. The growing length of the darkness and the numerous reefs and grounded bergs, made it evident that unless we maintained our position the situation would be very serious. The gale continued without lull until February 8, by which time all hands were exhausted, and the vessel covered with ice, and our likelihood of being able to reach the second base this year looked doubtful.

#### —Ten Men Taken Off.—

"On February 8, at daylight, the wind suddenly moderated, and at 10 a.m. fell to calm. We steamed in shore, picked up the returning party, consisting of Messrs. Murphy, Stillwell, Hannam, Close, Hunter, Laceron, Whetter, Thorley, Webb, and Correll. We said goodby to the relief party, and started on our voyage west. I was already 10 days later than I considered prudent. We had 1,500 miles of ice-strewn water to traverse at what in these latitudes, 64 S. to 66 S. lat., is late in a season, the duration of which is controlled not by temperature, but by the increasing length of the nights. I knew that unless we could arrive at the second base before February 20 our getting in at all past Termination Barrier would be an extremely difficult matter, as the sea from here for 180 miles south is just a sea of bergs and heavy flocs. At 8.30 o'clock the same evening when we were about 50 miles distant from the main base, and were approaching a heavy pack, Mr. Hannam received a wireless message informing us that Dr. Mawson had arrived at the hut, and that his two companions, Dr. Mertz and Lieut. Ninnies had perished, and instructing me to return and pick up all hands. We immediately turned around and steered back again, hoping that the fine weather would last long enough to enable us to pick up the party.

#### —Attempts to Land.—

"At 8 a.m. on February 9, when we were approaching the base the wind had freshened to a gale again, and showed signs of getting worse. At noon we stood right up to the ice face to see if it were possible to send a boat ashore, but the wind was too violent. The vessel herself was only just steering. I then signalled for instructions, but although these signs were observed we could get no answer. We then stood on and off hoping that the wind would moderate. At 6 p.m. it was evident that the weather was getting steadily worse. With a falling barometer I felt it was necessary to decide whether I was justified in remaining any longer trying to pick up the members of the party who were in safety and fully provisioned and equipped in every way for a second year, or whether I was not bound to proceed westward, without further delay, to the relief of the party under Mr. Wild, whose position on the floating barrier was such that it seemed absolutely imperative that we should reach them this year.

#### —The Reasons Why.—

"It was a difficult position, but, after careful consideration I decided to proceed west for the following reasons:—1. The party at the main base were in perfect safety and fully equipped in every way for a second winter. 2. The short summer season at Adelie Land was evidently over, violent weather having apparently set in, with falling temperatures. The gales often lasted for a week and without cessation, which facts we were able to learn from the previous year's records. 3. The further detention of the vessel was seriously endangering our chance of being able to relieve Mr. Wild's base this year to reach which we had to traverse a distance of 1,500 miles, the navigation of which distance was rendered extremely difficult on account of the constant snowstorms and the growing darkness. 4. The only other vessel which had penetrated south of this region, the Gauss, had been frozen in on February 22, and the Aurora was not provisioned for a winter in ice, as we had landed most of our spare stores for the relief party at the main base. 5. As a seaman, knowing the difficulties that we encountered both in getting to and getting away from the second base the previous year, I felt that nothing could exonerate me from blame if we further delayed our departure, and that being unable to communicate with Dr. Mawson, it was clearly my duty to act, as I was convinced he would wish me to do, were I able to make him acquainted with the situation of the western party. At 6.30 p.m. on February 9 I gave orders for the departure. As we left Commonwealth Bay and got away from the snow slopes, the weather again improved."