

## Excerpts from *The Heart of the Antarctic* re ‘Aurora Australis’

The next cubicle on the same side was occupied by Marston and Day, and as the former was the artist and the latter the general handy man of the expedition, one naturally found an ambitious scheme of decoration. The shelves were provided with beading, and the Venesta boxes were stained brown. This idea was copied from “No. 1 Park Lane,” where they had stained all their walls with Condy's Fluid. Marston and Day's cubicle was known as “The Gables,” presumably from the gabled appearance of the shelves. Solid wooden beds, made out of old packing-cases and upholstered with wood shavings covered with blankets, made very comfortable couches, one of which could be pushed during meal times out of the way of the chairs. The artist's curtain was painted to represent a fireplace and mantelpiece in civilisation; a cheerful fire burned in the grate, and a bunch of flowers stood on the mantelpiece. The dividing curtain between it and No. 1 Park Lane, on the other side of the cubicle, did not require to be decorated, for the colour of Joan of Arc, and also portions of Napoleon, had oozed through the canvas. In “The Gables” was set up the lithographic press, which was used for producing pictures for the book which was printed at our winter quarters.

*The Heart of the Antarctic*, London, 1909 (first edition), vol I, p147.

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Next came one of the first cubicles that had been built. Joyce and Wild occupied the “Rogues' Retreat,” a painting of two very tough characters drinking beer out of pint mugs, with the inscription *The Rogues' Retreat* painted underneath, adorning the entrance to the den. The couches in this house were the first to be built, and those of the opposite dwelling, The Gables, were copied from their design. The first bed had been built in Wild's store-room for secrecy's sake; it was to burst upon the view of every one, and to create mingled feelings of admiration and envy, admiration for the splendid design, envy of the unparalleled luxury provided by it. However, in building it, the designer forgot the size of the doorway he had to take it through, and it had ignominiously to be sawn in half before it could be passed out of the store-room into the hut. The printing press and type case for the polar paper occupied one corner of this cubicle.

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It would only be repetition to chronicle our doings from day to day during the months that elapsed from the disappearance to the sun until the time arrived when the welcome daylight came back to us. We lived under conditions of steady routine, affected only by short spells of bad weather, and found amply sufficient to occupy ourselves in our daily work, so that the spectre known as "polar ennui" never made its appearance. Mid-winter's day and birthdays were the occasions of festivals, when our teetotal *régime* was broken through and a sort of mild spree indulged in. Before the sun finally went hockey and football were the outdoor games, while indoors at night some of us played bridge, poker, and dominoes. Joyce, Wild, Marston, and Day during the winter months spent much time in the production of the "Aurora Australis," the first book ever written, printed, illustrated, and bound in the Antarctic. Through the generosity of Messrs. Joseph Causton and Sons, Limited, we had been provided with a complete printing outfit and the necessary paper for the book, and Joyce and Wild had been given instruction in the art of type-setting and printing, Marston being taught etching and lithography. They had hardly become skilled craftsmen, but they had gained a good working knowledge of the branches of the business. When we had settled down in the winter quarters, Joyce and Wild set up the little hand-press and sorted out the type, these preliminary operations taking up all their spare time for some days, and then they started to set and print the various contributions that were sent in by members of the expedition. The early days of the printing department were not exactly happy, for the two amateur typesetters found themselves making many mistakes, and when they had at last "set up" a page, made all the necessary corrections, and printed off the required number of copies, they had to undertake the laborious work of "dissing," that is, of distributing the type again. They plodded ahead steadily, however, and soon became more skilful, until at the end of a fortnight or three weeks they could print two pages in a day. A lamp had to be placed under the type-rack to keep it warm, and a lighted candle was put under the inking-plate, so that the ink would keep reasonably thin in consistency. The great trouble experienced by the printers at first was in securing the right pressure on the printing-plate and even inking of the page, but experience showed them where they had been at fault. Day meanwhile prepared the binding by cleaning, planing, and polishing wood taken from the Venesta cases in which our provisions were packed. Marston reproduced the illustrations by algraphy, or printing from aluminium plates. He had not got a proper lithographing press, so had to use, an ordinary etching press, and he was handicapped by the fact that all our water had a trace of salt in it.

This mineral acted on the sensitive plates, but Marston managed to produce what we all regarded as creditable pictures. In its final form the book had about one hundred and twenty pages, and it had at least assisted materially to guard us from the danger of lack of occupation during the polar night.

*The Heart of the Antarctic*, London, 1909 (first edition), vol I, pp216-18.

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Joyce devoted what spare time he could find to the completion of the volumes of the "Aurora Australis." Practice had made him more skilful in the handling of type, and he was able to make a good deal of progress, Day assisting with the preparation of the Venesta boards in which the volumes were to be bound. Some of the contributions towards the literary part of the work had come in late, so that there was plenty of work left to do. Marston went on with the lithographing for the illustrations.

*The Heart of the Antarctic*, London, 1909 (first edition), vol II, p28.