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NEWFOUNDLAND GOVERNMENT RAILWAY

The Northern Lights.

By I. C. MORRIS.

(For the Bay Roberts Guardian)

Of all the heavenly bodies, perhaps none are more beautiful than those which blaze forth in the polar night. True it is, that the Sun in his glory reflects the greatest grandeur of all the heavenly bodies, visible to the children of men by day, but at night a myriad suns are seen, and a myriad planets twinkle, and worlds innumerable come to view. Of these nightly orbs the moon perhaps is the best known; because of its monthly visits and silvery light. All these planets belong to the celestial order of creation, but may be ranked amongst the material elements of space. But the Aurora Borealis, of which we now write, does not come under this heading, for it really does not exist, and is at best but a reflection of these greater bodies. But though the Aurora be but a reflection, it has ever been a source of wonderment to the dusky and roving tribes which are found within the confines of the Arctic circle. These people are but few in number, and most of them are now Christianized; but in their benighted state they were like all heathen people, full of superstition, and to them the Aurora was considered as a God, to which, during their long Arctic night, they looked with fear.

In the first place they were attracted by the light, and further, they were almost awestricken by its movements, as the very heavens seemed to dance above them, or its inhabitants seemed to be at war. Those who have any knowledge of the Mythology of the ancients are not in the least surprised that poor, benighted men and women, living in ignorance, and blinded by superstition, should thus interpret those moving phantoms of the northern latitudes—the home of the Aurora. At the same time it is well to remember that the brightest displays of the Aurora take place at about latitude sixty, or sixty-five. This statement is established by the reports of surveyors and meteorologists, and by competent authorities upon these phenomena.

Of all the vantage points from which the Northern Lights, as the Aurora is called, may be viewed, the deck of a whaling ship, anchored near the south of Greenland, affords one of the best. To view the Aurora from some city, or from some mountain height, or other promontory, is to be impressed; but to see them at their best, and to catch the action of their movements, one must imagine himself in the far north, with the ships of the New England states or with the Dundee whalers, or perchance one of our own whalers of the early Victorian period.

Let us, therefore, for a moment or two call to mind one of those old barks which years ago sailed away on a whaling voyage. Let us imagine we are one

of the crew, and having arrived in the mouth of Hudson's Bay, or on the borders of Baffin's Land. Let us further fancy that we have been on an eighteen months' voyage, and therefore have spent a winter in these latitudes. The winter brought with it the long Arctic night of many months; as well as its winds and vapours. The dim lights of the ship were but flickering tapers, produced by the oil which had been rendered from the whales. At best it would be dismal on board ship, and the long darkness intensified the lonely situation. Under such conditions no element would be more welcome than light. Hence the attraction and the glory of the Northern Lights to every member of the crew.

If anybody ever saw the northern lights at their best, it would be the whaler's crew, and though they had often beheld them from their more southern homes and had noticed their grandeur and beauty, they now saw them as only few are privileged to do. Let us look at the lights. For a moment they seem to stand still, and then, as if at some word of command, they begin to move, and to expand, until the entire heavens appear as under marching orders, and the firmament becomes a sea of silver light. Movement after movement, expansion beyond expansion, shadow beyond shadow, until the firmament appears as a huge sheet of polished steel—all in action, and yet all silent, but all radiating from some unseen source of light.

This light was, of course, the sun's rays, or the reflection of its rays, and though the benighted tribes of the north knew it not, the whaler's crew was aware that these wonderful and mysterious lights above them, were but reflections of a real light, and that in due time it would appear above the horizon, and bring light and life to all around.

The whaler's crew knew this, and it meant that the icy barrier would again give way, and that the good ship that was bound in the Ice Kings' grip, would soon be liberated, and that the Arctic waters would again splash her sides. But the glory of the Aurora had impressed the crew none the less. They had seen it at its zenith, and to them it appeared as a canopy of silver, dancing and bidding defiance to the long Arctic night. Often had their ship had been storm swept, and enshrouded in blizzards, and for long weeks fast bound in what seemed an eternal ice-bed.

But all the while the Aurora danced about them, and shot out further to the north, and like some army wheeled about, and took up similar position to the south; so that there was not only light over head, but there was the action of a myriad figures, and the countless shapes which defied the brush of the best artist.

But it is not possible to de-

scribe those lights, and even though some of us have studiously watched them for half a century, and have wondered at them, we but fail to perceive their mystery, or interpret their meaning. They reflect a higher power than man's, and in a manner they present a picture of the earth held in the power of the Frost King. The lights appear as so much molten silver, and their reflection upon the sea, and snow, seems to send back a challenge which belongs entirely to the Arctic regions, and which comes and goes with the order of the seasons. Only the whalers and those who penetrate into the far north, are permitted to see those eternal snows, and those mighty icebergs; but not so with the northern lights, for they are seen by the people of the great cities, as well as by the whalers and the benighted tribes of the solitary north.

The Northern Lights tell their own tale. They teach their own sublime lesson to the children of men, and as the seasons succeed each other, they regularly appear, and dance their flirtations during the Arctic night. For ages untold they have taught the one great lesson, the lesson of reflection. In themselves the lights possess no substance; for the substance which they represent, and to which they owe their cintillation, is the Sun—that great centre of heat by which our lower world is sustained. In this respect the Aurora may be taken as an illustration of many people. The Aurora reflects light and action, and seems to defy the blackness of the Arctic night. So with our lives—they should reflect that greatness of character which is the heritage of all true men, and which makes the world bright, and life better.

The old whalers have all gone, and their timbers are limbered on many reefs; and modern ships, and ocean greyhounds, have taken their place; but the Northern Lights have not gone, nor have they been supplanted. As they shone on the old ships one hundred years ago, so they shine still, and as they danced so dance they still; and though their lights be but the shadow of a greater light, they are none the less real. The dusky tribes of the far North still wonder at them, and to a large degree misunderstand them. But though those benighted people may not have been able to solve the mystery of the Aurora, they perhaps have succeeded in doing so, as well as some of the critics and denizens of the cities have done. It was said of old, "that the world by wisdom knew not God," and the same truth applies to-day. Hence some great men have failed to see God, in his own works; but the benighted tribes of the Arctic circle knew that they saw something greater than themselves, and in their ignorance they called these things the spirit of the gods. But now they have come to a better place; and having learned the story of Christianity, they have a clearer vision, and what they once thought of, and looked to, as the spirit of the gods, they know to be the works of the true God.

We may all learn good lessons from these things, for nature is a splendid teacher, and if we open our eyes to its beauty, we shall soon come to understand what the Psalmist meant when he said "all Thy works praise Thee, O Lord." And having seen God in His works, we will the better comprehend His love, and see the meaning of the angels' song, who on the first Christmas morning sang, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will towards men."

CHRISTMAS NUMBER,
"DIOCESAN MAGAZINE."

We are in receipt of a copy of the Christmas Number of the "Diocesan Magazine" and wish to express to the publishers our congratulations on the excellence of this edition.

The message from the Bishop of Newfoundland is well worth commendation for the true spirit of Christmas shines therein.

We note, too, that there have been three Ecclesiastical appointments recently, viz.—
Rev. Walter Bugden, Incumbent of Tack's Beach.

Rev. Max B. Way, Incumbent of Bay de Verde.

Rev. Geo. H. Seavey, Curate of Bay Roberts.

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Outport applicants requiring this material are requested to communicate directly with this Department.

W. J. WALSH,

Minister Agriculture & Mines.

NOTICE

To Owners and Masters of
British Ships

The attention of Owners and Masters of British Ships is called to the 74th Section of the "Merchant Shipping Act, 1894."

75.—(1) A Ship belonging to a British Subject shall hoist the proper national colors—
(a) on a signal made to her by one of His Majesty's ships including any vessel under the command of an officer of His Majesty's navy or full pay, and
(b) on entering or leaving any foreign port and
(c) if of fifty tons gross tonnage or upwards, on entering or leaving any British Port.

(2) If default is made on board any ship in complying with this section the master of the ship shall for each offence be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds.

At time of war it is necessary for every British Ship to hoist the colours and heave to if signalled by a British Warship; if a vessel hoists no colours and runs away, it is liable to be fired upon
H. W. LEMESURIER
Register of Shipping.