

Chilean Government Planning Big Things for Future



Natives of Tierra del Fuego

VALDIVIA.—The Chilean government has new plans for colonizing and developing the Territory of the Magellans. It has sold at auction several million acres and has leased large tracts for cattle breeding and sheep raising. It is putting in public improvements at Punta Arenas, the capital of the straits, and elsewhere; and there are now something like one thousand miles of road in the territory. Some lands have been given over to two private colonization companies, and special inducements are offered to native Chileans who will go there to settle.

The Territory of the Magellans is one of the least known parts of South America. It consists of the southern end of the range of the Andes, including a long strip of country that runs from a little below Valdivia to the Strait of Magellan. It has also the islands at the western end of the strait, and the most of Tierra del Fuego. It comprises more than one-fifth of all Chile, and it has a land area almost as great as the state of Missouri. About one-half of it is on the mainland of the continent and the rest is made up of islands.

This region has a fairly good climate. The northern part is temperate, and in the summer season, or from November till May, one can travel almost anywhere, through it in a two-wheeled cart. There are now about a thousand miles of wagon roads in the territory, and these are being improved.

Huge Live Stock Concerns.

Until within the last few years the Territory of the Magellans was supposed to be worth nothing. It was so near the south pole that many thought it was all ice and snow, and its mountainous character was such that no one imagined the lands could ever be of great value. Today this territory has developed a live stock-raising industry that bulks large in the assets of Chile. It has one sheep-growing company, capitalized at more than \$7,000,000, which is now producing 2,000,000 or 3,000,000 pounds of wool every year. This company owns 2,000,000 acres of land, and its sheep number more than 1,500,000. It has also 25,000 cattle, and more than 8,000 horses. It sheared more than 1,000,000 sheep last year, and the average fleece weighed almost eight pounds. It had more than 500,000 lambs, and it shipped vast quantities of frozen mutton to England.

La Sociedad Explotadora de Tierra del Fuego or the Tierra del Fuego Exploration society, owns 1,000,000 sheep and also cattle and horses. It has its own meat-canning factory and a plant for producing tallow by boiling down sheep. A freezing establishment has recently been installed there, and another freezer exists at the Rio Seco, to which 150,000 sheep are annually shipped. The annual output of these two freezing establishments is almost 400,000 carcasses, and the tallow works connected with them have marketed more than three-quarters of a million pounds of that article.

A Brand New Country.

During my stay at the Strait of Magellan in 1888 the era of sheep raising was at its beginning. The value of the lands had just become known and stock farmers were coming in from Australia and Europe. The first sheep brought in came from the Falkland Islands, which lie in the same latitude about 200 miles eastward. The Falklands are and have long been famous for their fine sheep. The first exportations to the Strait of Magellan occurred in 1878. Seven years later the flocks had increased to 40,000, and when I first visited Tierra del Fuego they were considerably over a million. At that time one of the largest sheep owners was the American consul, a Russian by birth, who had spent most of his life in the Magellans. He had 240,000 acres of land in Tierra del Fuego, and his house at Punta Arenas was one of the finest in Chile. It is of red brick covered with stucco, and is so finished that it looks like a light brown stone. Every part of the building was brought in from abroad, and all the laborers who worked on it were imported from Buenos Aires or Santiago. The house cost something like \$100,000, and is still the wonder of this part of the world.

The grazing farms of the Strait of Magellan are not only on the mainland, but also on Tierra del Fuego. They number millions of acres, and some of the best are on Tierra del Fuego, the great island which belongs partly to Chile and partly to Argentina.

Rats Are a Menace.

Tierra del Fuego is half as big as the state of Ohio, and the greater part of it is made up of plains and wide stretches of moorland covered with grass, which is green in the summer and reddish brown when winter comes on. This grass furnishes good grazing all the year round. In the winter the sheep sometimes dig down through the snow and as a rule the snows melt soon after falling. The grasses of the strait are noted for their richness and sweetness. They are excellent for the production of both mutton and wool, and they would feed far more stock than they do were it not for the rats. As it is, this pest is so great that it now takes three or more acres to supply one sheep. The rats not only eat the grass, but they burrow through the earth to such an extent that it is impossible to drive over the plains with a wagon, and on horseback one has to ride



The Alacalufes are the lowest of the human race.

very carefully. Cattle are used as rat exterminators. They are driven over the ground and the rats in their burrows are trampled to death by them.

The sheep farms of Tierra del Fuego are much like those of Australia. They are fenced with wire, and the sheep are kept in large paddocks some of which are as big as an average American township. The ordinary flock contains about 2,000 head, and each flock has its own shepherd, aided by dogs. The dogs are Scotch collies, so intelligent that they seem almost human. They will pick any sheep from a flock at the command of their master, who directs them by a motion of his hand, which way to go. If he waves to the front, they know they are to go ahead. If he throws his hand to the rear they come back, and the holding up of his hand in the air brings them to a standstill.

Herders Are Scotch.

The most of the shepherds are Scotchmen, who came to the Strait of Magellan on five-year contracts. They receive about \$20 to \$40 a month, and have in addition house rent, fuel and meat. Their houses are two or three-room shacks scattered over the farm. The fuel comes from the woods, and their meat is mutton from the flocks they herd. On the whole, the farms are almost self-supporting.

The most important part of the year at the Strait of Magellan, is when the shearing is done. This season begins in January, and on the big ranches it may last for two months. Much of the work is done by professional shearers, although the shepherd comes in to help handle the animals. On some of the farms this work is paid for by the fleece. The present scale of wages fixes the rate at \$4.13 per 100, or a little more than 4 cents per fleece. When a man begins to shear he is given a booklet, in which is recorded the number of animals he shears during the week and the amount of his credit. If any dispute arises it is to be settled by a committee composed equally of the owners and employees. The company furnishes the shears, and every man gets three pairs of shears at the start and an additional pair for each 1,000 animals. At 4 cents a sheep the man can make very good wages.

The average fleece of wool now produced in Tierra del Fuego is much larger than the average fleece of the United States. It runs at seven and a half pounds and upward. The wool is of good quality, having a staple length of three or four inches and selling at the same price as the wool of New Zealand. The sheep are not washed, and the wool is exported in its greasy state. The most of it goes to Great Britain, and the remainder to Germany, Belgium and France. It is shipped in bales of 450 pounds net.

Metropolis of Region.

The capital of the Chilean territory of the Magellans is Punta Arenas. This place has now 20,000 inhabitants and it is the metropolis of the strait. It is situated on the mainland, facing the great island of Tierra del Fuego, just about half way between the Atlantic and the Pacific oceans. It is more than 100 miles north of Cape Horn, and it has the whole length of the continent between it and Panama.

may have railway connections with the rest of Chile.

Nevertheless, Punta Arenas is an up-to-date municipality. Fifteen years ago the greater part of it was still in the woods. Stumps still stood in the principal streets, and in the rainy season the roads were rivers of mud. Today the town is well paved and it has a plaza surrounded by good houses and stores. The streets are lighted by electricity, and there are churches and schools. The government has recently erected a wireless station, and the navigation of the straits is being greatly improved. The value of the city property is now estimated at more than \$10,000,000.

The people of Punta Arenas are of a dozen different nations, and they come from all parts of the world. There are English and Germans, and also many Danes, Norwegians and Swedes, who have a large share in the navigation of the straits. There are Australians and Italians, and also Chileans and Indians. Some of the most successful business men are Scotchmen, and the Scotch have large interests in the sheep industry.

Indians Dying Out.

The Indians of the Strait of Magellan are fast dying out. I doubt whether there are now, all told, more than 1,000, although they numbered three times as many a decade ago. As it is, the Onas and Yaghanas, the largest tribes, have almost disappeared, and the canoe Indians, or Alacalufes, are fewer than ever. I have seen all of these various Indian tribes. The Alacalufes I met when I traveled through Smythes Channel some years ago. These Indians are seldom seen by the traveler. They live in the islands about Smythes Channel and in the western parts of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago. They go about in canoes and subsist on what they can get from the sea and on the roots that they dig up on land. They sleep sometimes in their canoes and sometimes on land. In the latter case they build wigwams about a yard high, made by bending over the branches of low trees and tying them together. The wigwams are used only for sleeping. They are so low that the Indians have to crawl in on their hands and knees, and the cooking must be done on a fire built in the canoe or on the ground outside of the wigwam.

The Alacalufe canoes that I saw were well constructed, and some of them were fifteen feet long, a yard wide and about two feet in depth. They were made of strips of bark sewn together with sinews and fastened to ribs which ran across the canoe. Each boat had its fire, which



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was built on some earth in the center. The Indians who were not paddling or steering the boat sat around these fires, and some cooked the white over the coals. The Alacalufes are perhaps the lowest of all the human race. They are more like beasts than men. Those I saw were almost naked, although there was snow on the ground and the winds were bitter cold. A few of them had on guanaco skins, which half covered their bodies, and others had shreds of rags that only accentuated their nakedness. I remember one man who wore a rag apron as big as a woman's handkerchief tied to a string about his waist, and excepting this, only a short vest open at the front and a hat. This man paddled the boat, and his wife sat at the stern and steered. The woman was naked to the waist, and she was suckling a baby clad in little more than a string of beads and a breech cloth. She held the naked baby to her breast with one hand and steered the boat with the other. Another wife near the prow aided in paddling. She had a guanaco skin tied around her waist, but the upper part of her body was bare. She bent back and forth as the oar rose and fell in the water.

Navigation is Dangerous.

During our stay in the straits we had to tie up every night, as the navigation was too dangerous to risk after dark. At every anchorage a number of these canoe Indians came to our steamer. All were undressed, but the most of them were plump and fat, and not a few had paint on their faces and bodies. Their faces were something like those of the North American Indians. They had black hair and brown skins, and their teeth were white and apparently good. They had skins and furs to sell, or rather trade, for they knew nothing of money. They swapped them for knives, food and beads. They were evidently afraid of us, and would not come on board. We dickered with them over the side of the vessel, they staying in their canoes the while. They were shrewd, and they often got the better of the bargain. The things they most valued were tobacco, candy and cake. They were ready to trade for biscuits or cigars or tobacco in any shape, and they seemed quite as anxious to get tobacco as food.

The Onas and Yaghanas are the Indian tribes of the island of Tierra del Fuego. They are of a higher civilization than the Alacalufes, and of late they have been so changed by the missionaries that in the past the Onas houses were merely holes in the ground, with wind breaks of branches bent over them. The holes were about big enough to contain one Indian family, and were used only for sleeping. The Indians crawled in at night, cuddling up there with their dogs lying about and over them for warmth. The cooking of the Onas was done outside their houses. They moved about from place to place, believing, so it is said, that the devil was after them, and if they had

permanent homes he would surely destroy them. They are much taller than the Alacalufes, although they are not giants, as they have been described. The men are about six feet in height, and the women perhaps six inches lower.

New Dress Like Whites.

In the past the most of these Onas went naked, save for a coat of fish oil and a guanaco skin, which they wrapped around their shoulders. Today they are almost all clad like the whites, although they still use the skins as an extra protection. I am told that they have become subject to colds and consumption and pneumonia since they began wearing clothing, and that these diseases have killed them off by scores. They are also no better for the foreign food that they have now and then, and their normal death rate is now so great that the race will soon disappear.

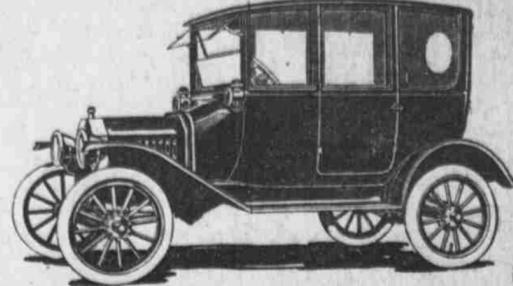
The Onas are found principally in the northern part of Tierra del Fuego. They are plains Indians, and are hunters rather than fishers. The Yaghanas are found more in the southern portions of the island. They are fishers rather than hunters, and they have been misrepresented as associated with the Alacalufes, and some travelers have described them as the most miserable specimens of humanity on the western hemisphere. This is not so. Mr. Brydges, a missionary, who has been living among them for something like fifty years, says they have excellent qualities. He denies that they are cannibals and that they eat meat which is not cooked. Before the missionaries came the Yaghanas had several wives, but the intermarriage of relatives was looked upon as abominable. They lived in groups of twenty or thirty families, and at night sat around the fires in front of their wigwams. Dr. Brydges describes the Yaghanas as good-natured and not un-intelligent. He says they have a language of their own, which contains no less than 8,000 words. This is in striking contrast to the Eskimos, who are said to use less than 10,000 words, and to the Bible, which has altogether only 7,300 different words.

These Yaghanas have also been injured by the wearing of clothing. They formerly numbered about 3,000 souls, but smallpox, the measles, pneumonia and tuberculosis have cut them down until there are now only a few hundred. They may have gained in civilization, but they have lost their rugged health, and are physically on the road to destruction. The missionaries say that some of them have learned to read and write, and above all "to fear God and keep His commandments." At the present death rate, however, the best of them will soon be in heaven.

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