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THE CAPITAL OF THE MAGELLANS

Punta Arenas, Patagonia, September 30, 1898.—Punta Arenas is the southeasternmost city of the world. It is at the bottom of the South American continent, 1,200 miles nearer the south pole than Cape Town, at the lower end of Africa. It is 7,000 miles south of New York, and its latitude is that of Labrador. Still its winters are warmer than those of Washington City, and just now, at its coldest, everything is covered with green.

Situated on the northern coast of the Strait of Magellan, midway between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, more than a hundred miles north of Cape Horn, Punta Arenas is the commercial capital of a vast region of sea and land which is almost unknown to the rest of the world. From where I write I can see the blue forests of Tierra del Fuego, on the opposite side of the strait. There are a vast number of smaller islands about it, and behind me, stretching away for hundreds of miles, are the mountains and sheep farms of Patagonia. There is no town of any size within 1,000 miles of this. We have no telegraphic connection with the rest of the world, and the only news we get comes from the steamers passing through the Strait of Magellan. All of the supplies are brought in by steamers and may of the ships stop here to lay in new stores, as they go on their way from Australia to Europe or in passing to and from the east or west coast of South America. The city does a big business as a coaling station and it scruples not to put on the prices whenever it can. When the Oregon coaled here on her way home from the Pacific at the breaking out of the war she was charged 90 shillings, or about \$22, a ton for coal, and her bill was more than \$320,000. Punta Arenas is a free port, and quantities of provisions and other stores are brought here to supply the steamers and sailing vessels which pass through the Strait of Magellan. Just now there are English and German steamers on their way to and from Europe in the harbor loading and unloading freight. An American schooner from Boston, with a party of a dozen men enroute for the Klondike, is taking in provisions, and one of the ships of Grace & Co., bound for New York, passed by this morning. A steamer from New Zealand with a cargo of frozen sheep for London, left yesterday. There are a number of wool schooners in the harbor, and the little steam tug which carries passengers three times a week to and from Tierra del Fuego is just puffing out on its voyage across the strait.

Punta Arenas lies right on the Strait of Magellan. There is a good harbor at this point, the land about which slopes gently upward from the water. Upon this has been built a straggling town more than a mile long and a quarter of a mile wide. Back of it there is a hill perhaps a hundred feet high, and farther away in the rear you can see the last of Andes, which here rise from

3,000 to 5,000 feet above the sea, their tops covered with snow. The city has been cut out of the woods, and as you enter it you are reminded of the settlements of our wooded frontier of the northwest. It is just now one of the boom towns of this continent, and its houses are scattered along wide streets with many gaps. These streets are a mass of black mud, through which huge oxen drag heavy carts, pushing them along by yokes fastened to their horns. Here the sidewalk is of concrete, there it is of wood, and a little farther on you find it of mud and must balance yourself on a log as you make your way over it. Many of the houses are built of sheets of corrugated iron, their walls wrinkled up like a washboard, and all have roofs of this material. A few are painted, but nearly all are of the galvanized slaty color of the metal as it comes from the factory. None of the cheaper houses has a chimney. The stove pipes, which stick up through the roofs and which you see here and there coming through the windows with up-turned elbows, take their places. There is plenty of building space, but when you ask the prices of the vacant lots you find that property is very high. What would be a \$50 shanty in America is here worth \$500, and a good business corner will sell for several thousand dollars. Nevertheless, within a few years these same lots were given away for a revenue stamp. The Chilean government was anxious to increase the size of the colony and it offered building sites to all who would erect houses and pay the 5-cent stamp which the law provides shall be upon every deed. "That lot," said a man to me today, as he pointed to a corner just above the Kosmos Hotel, "cost me a postage stamp, and I hold it now at \$5,000." The days for such investments, however, are past, and better buildings are going up every year. Now every inch of town property has a fixed value, and there are several business blocks which would not be out of place in an American city.

There is one residence here which would be a mansion in the best part of Washington City. It is by all odds the finest house near the south pole. It has cost more than a hundred thousand dollars, and its owner is a millionaire widow, young, beautiful and accomplished. She is the sister of our consul here, and the daughter of a Russian who made a large fortune in sheep raising. She got another fortune with her husband, and she now owns thousands of acres of land and tens of thousands of sheep. Her house is situated on the plaza or public square. This is a grass plot of about two acres, fenced with a wooden paling. It has wide pathways running through it and a band stand in the center. On the north side of it is the governor's house, a long brown two-story structure, with a wall of glass in the rear. On the west is a large frame building, the new barracks of the national guard, and on the east are some stores and the palace of this million-

aire widow. It is made of red brick covered with stucco, so finished that it looks like a light brown stone. It has two stories and a mansard, with several towers and plenty of ginger-bread work. The artists are now decorating it. They were imported from Buenos Ayres for the purpose, as were also the carpenters, the bricklayers and, in fact, all of the laborers connected with it. The bricks were also imported. Every bit of the furniture will come from Europe, and the house when finished will be as comfortable as any in Paris. It is, however, the only house of its kind in Punta Arenas, the most of the other dwellings being one-story structures, which could be built for from \$500 to \$1,500 in the United States. It shows you, however, that all of the people here at the tail end of creation are not poor. On the contrary, Punta Arenas has more rich men, perhaps, than any frontier town of its size in the world. It is the metropolis of the great sheep industry of southern Patagonia, and there are rich sheep owners here who live almost as luxuriantly as do our millionaire miners in Denver. There are thirty-three men and companies who each own and control from twenty-five thousand acres to two and one-half million acres of land. They have their sheep by the tens of thousands, and several of them have an annual wool clip worth more than the salary of the President of the United States.

The citizens of Punta Arenas come from all parts of the world. You hear English, German and Spanish on every corner, and your ears are dinned with the jargon of the Austrian, the Italian and the Russian. Some of the richest of the people are Russian, and others are Scotchmen, who have come from the Falkland Islands to engage in sheep farming here. There are treacherous Spaniards, smooth-tongued Argentines and hard-looking brigands from Chile. The lower classes are chiefly sailors and shepherds, and among them you may find as many rough characters as in our mining camps of the west. There are no licensed gambling dens or sporting houses, but there are plenty of saloons, managed by hard-featured young women, who sit in the doorways during the day and smoke cigarettes. Knots of bearded men, with their trousers in their boots, and clothes of all descriptions, are to be seen on the street. There are plenty of Spaniards, and I have several times been warned to be careful as I go about after nightfall, as the Spanish knife has just now a magnetic attraction for the American's body, and as most of these men are prone to stab in the back. The order kept is, however, very good, considering the population. The governor of the Magellans lives here. He is appointed by the president of Chile, and he rules not only the Magellans, but the whole of these islands of the Tierra del Fuego archipelago. He has four hundred soldiers stationed in the city. You