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Tierra Del Fuego in 1898

New Facts About Man and Nature in One of the Least Known Parts of the World.

The Tree Indians, Who Go Naked and Sleep in Holes in the Ground—Their War With the Whites and How the Sheep Farmers Shoot Them on Sight—Among the Vagabonds of Southern Tierra del Fuego—The Dense Vegetation of the Great Island—Its Mighty Forests and Great Green Plains—The Gold Mines of the Far South Where Nuggets and Scales of the Yellow Metal are Found in the Sands of the Sea.

"What do you do to keep out the Indians?" I asked a man who has chosen to wield sheep in Tierra del Fuego the other night. "Do?" was the reply "We shoot them." "Sometimes we catch them and send them to the Catholic mission station on Dawson Island, but it is cheaper to kill them on the spot." I have heard other men make similar statements. The Gun Indians of southern Tierra del Fuego are hunted like wild beasts. They are shot at sight and hunted out of the country. Sheep without question water they are seen near the white establishments, and only by sheep station hands are men who keep a lookout for them. No question is made of such as are killed. There is practically no law in Tierra del Fuego, and, although both Argentina and Chile own portions of it, the greater part of it is as wild as it was when the United States at the time of Columbus.

The Indians feel much the same as the whites. They arrogate not to send their arrows into them, and when they have the greater force they are not afraid to attack. Only a few months ago two Chilean naval officers were cruising one of the smaller islands off Tierra del Fuego. They were killed by the natives. The men, when found, were stripped and in one of them there were twenty-five arrows with glass heads. As a result of this warfare, it is difficult to see them outside the mission station on Dawson island. I have met with almost none in my travels through the strait of Magellan and along the northern coast of Tierra del Fuego. I passed one or two last trails near the isle of Pinguins on the south of the strait and have seen some of the half civilized out of the Catholic mission. I have, however, talked with the priests who are working among them and from them and other parties have gathered some more information about these Indians. Women's people. One of the Catholic missionaries has very kindly given me some of his photographs, but these represent them to better and than the average people of their tribe.

The most of his pictures are of the Gun Indians, who are located in central and northern Tierra del Fuego. I have met with many representatives of the tribe in Punta Arenas, according to the Chilean census, a contribution from the Gun Indians, the other being the Yaghans, of whom there are only 100, and who live almost entirely on muscles and shellfish.

THEY DO NAKED AND SLEEP IN HOLES IN THE GROUND.

Nearly all of these Indians go naked. When they have been captured by the missionaries you find them wearing some clothing, but they do not wear it when they are left alone. There is scarcely one among them who will not sell his whole suit for a plug of tobacco, or a woman, who, when it is a chilly zero storm take off all she has on and give it for a piece of red cloth or a string of beads. The men of the wild wear a strip of guanaco skin over the shoulders tied on by thongs round over the chest. The men and women among them have branch cloth for the children go naked, barring the use of whale or fish oil with which they are liberally smeared. This oil seems to keep off the cold. Much as I have seen them in sight of snow and freezing, although they live in the isle of Lafonder, and I, with my white leggings and overcoat, am none too warm.

These Indians have been pointed by tourists as wretched and miserable in the extreme. I do not find them so. They look fat and apparently well off. Those I saw farther up in the Magellan had a peculiar grin on their faces, and both the Onas and the Yaghans, as, I am told, good natured. I have seen a little of the Gun Indians of Tierra del Fuego you come every now and then to my ranch. It is merely a hole in the ground with a wind break of branches or trees bent down and tied together over it. This hole is about three feet deep and is just big enough to contain the Indian and his family. They sleep it chiefly at night when they are huddling up together with their dogs lying about and over them for warmth. Each Ona as they call the Gun Indians has a dog, and, as I said, the sleeping hole. They do not like to stay more than a night in one place, and when they are forced to do so they say the devil, or evil spirit, is after them, and they must move on or he will catch them.

HOW THE INDIANS LOOK.

The Onas are of a good size, though not so large that some travelers have claimed. They are, as a rule, strong on the legs and the women about big for feet. The Yaghans are much smaller and the Alacalufs are between the two. There is not far from a foot difference in the height of the men and women. The women are short, deep-chested and muscular. The women when young are plump and well-rounded, with fine necks and breasts. They are all, however, very dirty, and the men and women have every themselves so that their faces are stretched like a drum head and extend out into pot-bellies. Their skins are lighter than those of most of our Indians. They have high cheek bones, flat noses and straight, dark eyes, with rather full eyelids. Their hair is straight, it is long, and with the men is singed close at the crown, forming a sort of tonsure. The women let their hair grow long, and it hangs down over their shoulders. The men do not begin to have beards until late in life, and as they grow old they pluck out the straggling hairs on their faces. As Onas seldom has a beard before he is twenty or forty.

THEY EAT RUTTED MEAT.

The Onas do not apparently care whether their food is fresh or not. Before the advent of sheep farming in Tierra del Fuego they lived on fish, birds and guanacos. Guanacos are wild animals which look like a cross between the deer and the camel, and the Onas kill the most of them. They do not use the bow and arrow in hunting them, but they drive them down with their dogs and follow them alone on foot. They are very fast runners, and take steps as an Argentine man who lived on the islands says, six feet apart. When they kill their game then they eat and they bury the left-over in the holes of a stream in which a week or so later they eat out them. The Indian partially as of the sheep they steal or kill, and the Yaghans and the Alacalufs live on fish, as do the Yaghans and the Alacalufs, who also eat crops as with game. They are only bows and arrows in war and for hunting. The Onas have guns, which they get from the white men, and some are armed with Winchesters, which they get from the Street of Magellan. The Ona women wear very pretty beads made of a bone, shaped like a bone, shaped like a bow. They are the shells which their husbands bring to them the bird and are a hard, white, pearl, and are into rings or rows or ropes. These Onas, I am told, have no Great Spirit or God, but our Indians do not seem to have any religion in I am unable to learn. They believe in witchcraft, one man having several wives, which he buys of their fathers at as low a price as he can.

ABOUT THE YAGHANS.

Before the whites came here there were something the three thousand of the Yaghans in Tierra del Fuego. They are described by an engineer as a healthy, hearty, naked, savage race. The Englishmen who have lived among them, the most of them in Tierra del Fuego and proceeded them to put on clothes. It is claimed that with the exception of a few cases they are free and peaceable, and that the few related their number to less than 100 in the Tierra del Fuego. Dawson Island, I have spoken, is the Tierra del Fuego Indians in the New Tennent Bridge, who has a big sheep farm in the south, the last very pretty place in the world. The Indians live in houses and when they farm on a small scale. The information I have about Yaghans comes almost entirely from Mr. Bridges. He says they live in groups of about thirty families. They get their living by fishing, hunting, and, in the season, by gathering berries. The women seek these things in different ways. They look birds by placing them on the nest, and they gather the eggs in baskets of them. They take eggs by breaking a small hole in one end and sucking the contents out of the shell before the fire, turning them round and round to make them cook evenly. They also dig for roots, bulbs, or anemone, but, as a rule, eat their vegetables raw. The women are the hunters of the men do the fishing. The men make canoes, but the women paddle them. They are good boatmen and are more hardy and more fearless swimmers than the men.

One of the wonderful things about the Yaghans is their language. With no means of writing, they have a vocabulary of about 6,000 words. Mr. Bridges, who is the author of a Yaghan-English dictionary, gives this as the number. The Hebrew, as, it is said, has but 3,000 words, and Shakespeare's vocabulary contained only 15,000 words. There are only 1,500 different words in the Bible, and, as all Mr. Bridges's words are, will find less than 15,000 words. I take these figures from John R. Spears' book, recently published, on "Gold Diggings of Cape Horn."

TIERRA DEL FUEGO IN 1898.

The Tierra del Fuego of the geographers and mapmakers is a dreary land of snow and ice, of glaciers and rocky wastes. Let me tell you what the most Tierra del Fuego is. My business has taken from what I have seen and from what I have learned from the men who lived upon it and who have visited nearly every part of it. It is important to know, for it is one of the keys of connection between Chile and the Argentine Republic, and in the war which seems to be imminent may be divided. As it is, Chile owns the lion's share of it, having quietly surveyed the coast and sounded up the Straits of Magellan before the Argentine knew what it was about. The Argentines have done that the island should belong to them, but rather than have a war they have compromised and let Chile west of a line running south of Cape Virginia, at the eastern entrance to the Straits of Magellan. The result is they own only a beating on the archipelago and only a small slice of Tierra del Fuego proper.

The archipelago of Tierra del Fuego resembles so much that of Alaska. It is as wet and cold and is never less than Cleveland to Chicago and from north to south it is larger than from New York to Washington. The archipelago is made up of hundreds of wooded islands, many of mountainous, but a few of which have valleys and plains covered with rich grass on which sheep and cattle quickly grow fat. The largest islands of the archipelago are Dawson, or King Charles Southback, or Tierra del Fuego proper, Desolation Island, which lies near the western entrance to the straits, and Navarino, along which I coasted for miles on my way here, the isle of St. Ives, Charlotte Island and Hoste Island. A little farther to the eastward, and the large islands of Hoste and Navarino on the south, Clarence Island, and, still farther to the south, the islands at the bottom of the archipelago. The chief island is Tierra del Fuego proper, and it is half as big as Ireland. It also supports hundreds of thousands of sheep. The best lands of the Chilean side of it have been taken up in years by the few years under land laws from the Chilean government. The Argentine portion is not so well settled, owing to the difficulty of access and the uncertainty as to boundary.

THE PLAINS AND PAMPAS OF TIERRA DEL FUEGO.

But this what I can both the Argentines have some of the best lands in Tierra del Fuego. Nearly all of the southern and eastern portions of the island are plains, with stretches of undulating land, like prairies, covered with grass, which in summer is green, but now in winter is turned to a reddish brown. The other parts are made up of mountains, valleys and plains. Along the east and south coast there is a rim of mountains, many of which rise abruptly from the sea, and, as I have said, are probably some thousands of feet high. The plains are generally in the interior, running midway between the north and south across the country there is an elevated tableland and from this to the coast is a second plain. The grasses of the plains are rich, but they are so heavily eaten up by ground rats that it takes from three to five acre to support one sheep. These rats survive in the earth, living in holes like a prairie-dog town. They make a big prairie-dog town. They make a big drive from the plains with a wagon and horseback riding has to be in a slow pace. Cattle are the only things that will drive the rats away. They are often used to tramp the ground for this purpose.

THE DENSE VEGETATION.

It is the queer to think of a dense vegetation in Tierra del Fuego. One might almost not believe that grass can be raised on an island. The Irish Sea is only about 300 miles from Tierra del Fuego is colder than that of Canada. The footpaths are seldom covered with snow for more than a day or two at a time, and the snow rarely lies in sight of snow and glaciers on the mountains all the year round. The climate varies in different parts, but it is cold and wet, and the winds are high. The westerlies come in the winter, which at times blow for days at a time, and the rain falls in sheets or through great tunnels in orderly order. Tierra del Fuego is in the latitude of Labrador, but as it is in the path of the Gulf Stream and of the Japan current of Asia it is not so cold. I remember that burning three winds in Tierra del, as they have nicknamed the Chilean, blew a gale from the south and we thought we should be blown out to sea, or frozen to death, as do the Yaghans and the Alacalufs, who live on the coast, crops as with game. They are only bows and arrows in war and for hunting. The Onas have guns, which they get from the white men, and some are armed with Winchesters, which they get from the Street of Magellan. The Ona women wear very pretty beads made of a bone, shaped like a bow. They are the shells which their husbands bring to them the bird and are a hard, white, pearl, and are into rings or rows or ropes. These Onas, I am told, have no Great Spirit or God, but our Indians do not seem to have any religion in I am unable to learn. They believe in witchcraft, one man having several wives, which he buys of their fathers at as low a price as he can.

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