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JOHN BULL'S NEW NAVAL STATION

Port Stanley, Falkland Islands, Nov. 12, 1898.—I have come to the Falkland Islands because they promise to be one of the new centers of the world in the near future. Their governor tells me that it is true that Great Britain will probably establish a naval and coaling station at Port Stanley. The necessary surveys have been made and within a few years at the farthest John Bull's gunboats will command the passage around Cape Horn and the entrance to the Straits of Magellan. The distance between Cape Virgins, the last point we saw of the South American continent, and the Falklands is three hundred miles, or less than a day's steam for one of England's fast war vessels. The Falklands lie even nearer the track of the sailing ships about Cape Horn, so that these great trade routes, over which hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of freight goes every year, will practically be at the mercy of England. Outside Punta Arenas, which is midway through the Magellans, there is no chance for coaling stations within a thousand miles of Port Stanley. Montevideo is a thousand miles north, and the Cape of Good Hope 4,250 miles away to the northeast. Punta Arenas belongs to Chile, and by the neutrality laws it could not furnish coal except in peace, and even then it will charge exorbitant prices, as it did in the case of the Oregon. The establishment of a naval station here will bring a protest from the Argentine Republic. It has for years claimed the Falklands as a part of its territory, so that altogether the prospect for trouble, diplomatic and otherwise, is refreshing.

I find the Falklands interesting. They are among the little-known islands of the Atlantic. Travelers seldom visit them. Their only connection with the outside world is by a German steamship line, which is under a subsidy from the English government to call once every three weeks to carry the mails. These ships come here on their way to and from Hamburg and the west coast of South America, so that the Falklander has a chance every six weeks to go to Europe via Montevideo, and on alternate six weeks to the Pacific via the Straits. Now and then a whaler or seal hunter comes to the islands, and occasionally of late the English gunboats have been visiting them in the summer.

It was in one of the Kosmos steamers that I came from the Strait of Magellan to Port Stanley. We sailed one whole night along the north coast of the islands, for they extend from east to west about two hundred miles. There are two hundred of them, consisting of two large islands and many so small that they do not even make a dot on the map. Some of the smaller islands are inhabited only by penguins, there being so many of these curious birds that the governor of the Falklands has been called the king of the penguins.

The islands altogether have about

two-thirds as much land as the state of Massachusetts, and East and West Falkland, the two larger islands, are about five times as big as Rhode Island. All of the larger islands are covered with sheep farms, of such immense size that twenty-seven men, it is said, own the whole country. The total population is about two thousand, and over nineteen hundred of these work in one way or another for these twenty-seven men. The inhabitants are nearly all Scotchmen, and the islands are a little slice of Scotland in the South Atlantic.

The pasturage of the lands comprises 2,225,000 acres. Upon them more than three-quarters of a million of the finest sheep of the world are feeding, and from them half a million dollars worth of wool is exported every year. One company alone has 240,000 sheep, and the man who owns less than 25,000 sheep is considered a very small farmer indeed.

Outside of sheep raising there are no other industries. There are only fifty pigs in the whole territory, and although the grass is good for cattle there are but few in the Falklands. Not enough wheat is raised to make a Maryland biscuit, and the only sign of agriculture is the little garden of cabbages, potatoes which you see back of each of the houses of the shepherds on the moors, at the capital, Port Stanley, and at the other small settlements scattered here and there.

The Falklands are a very cave of Acolus. The cold winds blow almost all day and every day. They sometimes blow, it is said, the vegetables out of the ground. They blow so hard that not a tree can live, and today there are not enough bushes here to furnish the switches for a country school.

The pasture, however, grows luxuriantly and the sheep keep fat if the land is not overstocked. They breed so fast that tens of thousands are killed and thrown into the sea every year, their skins only being saved. There is a curious grass here which acts as a tonic as well as a food for the animals eating it. It is to sheep and cattle a sort of vegetable cocktail. It is called tussock grass. It has a stalk from four to six feet high and its blades are about seven feet long. The plants grow in bunches close together, as many as 250 roots springing from one plant. Animals eat the roots as well as the leaves, and feeding upon them speedily become fat. The roots are even eaten by men, and it is said that two Americans once lived for fourteen months upon them on one of the smaller islands. The roots decay in the old plants and raise the grass upward, so that it grows upon a cushion of manure, as it were. Some of these cushions are six feet high and five feet in diameter, so that the grass springing from them makes them look in the distance like a grove of low palm trees. This tussock grass grows along the coast even down to high-water mark. It is fast disappearing, however, as the

sheep are so fond of it that they eat it far down into the roots.

Another curious plant grows in the bogs. This looks like a stone. It forms in bunches as hard as a rock and from three to eight feet tall. It is so hard that you cannot cut it with a sharp knife. On hot days a pale yellow gum comes out on its surface and a rich aromatic odor fills the surrounding air. It is known here as the balsam bog.

It is always cloudy in the Falklands. The air is moist and the aspect of nature is dreary in the extreme. Imagine a dull leaden sky hanging low over reddish brown moors, out of which here and there jut the ragged teeth of white rock masses, and you have general idea of the Falkland island landscape. The islands are gently rolling, with here and there a ragged hill; the land is as black as your hat, full of peat, and here and there streaked with little streams and spotted with treacherous bogs, in which horses and men are sometimes lost. The ground is so soggy, in fact, that wagons cannot be used. There is not a four-wheeled vehicle in the whole country. Carts can be used only in Port Stanley. All travel is on horseback, and a stranger dare not go from one sheep farm to another without a guide. Such hauling as is done is by the shepherds on sledges dragged over the wet but snowless ground by horses. All herding of sheep is done upon horses and with shepherd dogs, which are raised and trained for the purpose.

Notwithstanding all this, the islands are excellent for cattle and sheep. The latitude here is about that of Holland, and the animals feed out all the year round. Before sheep was introduced, the islands fairly swarmed with wild years ago it is estimated that there were 800,000 wild cattle on the island. Now these have all disappeared and almost that many sheep have taken their places. The wild cattle were the first cause of the settlement of the islands. A rich cattle and hides dealer of Montevideo named Lafone bought the right to the southern part of East Falkland and all the wild cattle on the islands in 1844 for \$50,000 down and the promise to pay \$100,000 additional in ten years from 1852. In this deal he got over 600,000 acres of land and the skins of the wild cattle. In 1852 he sold out his property to the Falkland Islands company for \$150,000, and since then this company has been the leading power in the Falklands. It has bought more land and it now probably has more than a million acres. It has about 300,000 sheep and it has a sailing vessel which goes to London once a year to carry its wool and bring back the canned goods, clothes, farming implements and other things required by the islands. It has a line of boats which periodically make the round of the islands, carrying the farmers such goods as they order and bringing their wool to Stanley for shipment to Europe. The wool is put up in bales just as we bale cotton. Much of it goes to the markets by the regular steamers. That on which I came is now loading in the harbor. It will take on