

THE GIANT INDIANS OF TIERRA DEL FUEGO.

Extracts from an article with the above title, by Dr. Frederick A. Cook, of the Belgian Antarctic expedition, published in the March Century.

In the western Chillan channels, living in beech-bark canoes and in dugouts, using mussels, snails, crabs and fish in general as food, are the short, imperfectly developed Aliculufs. These are met by many vessels navigating the Strait of Magellan, and most of our reports of Fuegians are limited to hasty glimpses of these people; but they are now nearly extinct, and they always were the lowest and the most abject of the Fuegians.

Closely allied in habits to the Aliculufs are the Indians inhabiting the islands about Cape Horn and northward to Beagle channel. These are called Yahgans. They have been the most numerous and the most powerful of the Fuegian people, but to-day they too are nearly extinct. They are dwarfed in stature, dwarfed in mental development, and, like the Aliculufs, live in canoes, and feed upon the products of the sea.

The third tribe is the race of giants. They are called Onas by their neighbors, the Yahgans. The Onas have thus far evaded all efforts at civilization, have refused missionaries and have, to the present time, with good reason, mistrusted white men. They have, in consequence, remained absolutely unknown.

The homes of the Onas are on the main island of Tierra del Fuego. For centuries they have fought to keep this as their preserve; but the Yahgans have been allowed to pitch their homes on the southern coastal fringe along Beagle channel. In a like manner the Aliculufs have been permitted to use the shore-line of the west. Neither the Yahgans nor the Aliculufs, however, nor white men, until very recently, have dared to venture into the interior. The great prairies of the north and the mountain forests of the middle of the island, with its still unknown lakes, have been guarded as hunting ground exclusively for the Onas. The island is nearly as large as the state of New York. The boundary line of Chili and Argentina, running from north to south through the middle of the island, gives each republic a nearly equal share of the country. Gold has been found in the sands along the beach of various parts of the land. This is being mined with considerable success. The pampas of the north and a

part of the southern ground have proved to be some of the best sheep-farming country of the world. The gold diggers and the sheep farmers have thus rediscovered Tierra del Fuego. The mining camps and the wire fences are crowding the once ruling race of Onas into the useless forest-covered lowlands and the ice-covered highlands of the interior, where they must either starve or freeze or perish at the hands of Caucasian invaders. The old happy hunting ground of the Ona has gone the way of all other Indian homes; but he has fought bravely for it, and he will continue to do so until the last skeleton is left to bleach on the wind-swept pampa.

The Onas, as a tribe, have never been united in a common interest, nor have they ever been led by any one great chief. They have always been divided into small clans under a leader with limited powers, and these chiefs have waged constant warfare among themselves. To the present they have had their worst enemies among their own people, but now that sheep farming and gold diggers want their country, they are uniting to fight their common enemy.

The Ona population at present is about 1,600, divided into 16 tribes of about 100 each. From this number there is a constant diminution. Many of the children have been taken from their wild homes bordering on the sheep farms and placed in European families about Punta Arenas. These children thrive well at first, and are capable of considerable education, but few reach adult age. The minor children's diseases, such as measles and whooping cough, are extremely fatal to them, and those who escape other diseases are almost certain to succumb to tuberculosis.

Physically the Onas are giants. They are not, however, seven or eight feet in height, as the early explorers reported their neighbors and nearest relatives, the Patagonians, to be. Their average height is close to six feet, a few attain six feet and six inches, and a few are under six feet. The women are not so tall, but they are more corpulent. There is perhaps no race in the world with a more perfect physical development than the Ona men. This unique development is partly due to the topography of their country and to the distribution of game, which makes long marches constantly necessary. The Ona men are certainly the greatest cross-country runners on the American continent.

The mental equipment of the Ona is by no means equal to his splendid physical development. He understands very well the few arts of the chase which he finds necessary to maintain a food supply. His game in the past has been easily gotten; his needs have been few, which fact accounts for the lack of inventive skill portrayed in the instruments of the chase. The home life, the house, the clothing—everything portrays this lack of progressive skill. Instead of the children being well dressed and well cared for, as is the rule among savage races, they are mostly naked, poorly fed, badly trained and altogether neglected, not because of a lack of paternal love, but because of the mental lethargy of the people. It is the same as to shelter and garments. They have abundant material to make good tents and warm, storm-proof houses; but they simply bunch up a few branches, and throw to the windward a few skins, and then shiver, complaining of their miserable existence.

The Onas have been masters of Tierra del Fuego, not because of the perfection of their implements of war, but because of their splendid physical force. The only destructive weapon which they have brought to effective use is the bow and arrow. The bow used by them is made of the wood of the Antarctic beech, which is scraped and worked into the desired shape by the sharp edge of one of the numerous shells which everywhere are found on the beach. The string is made of the sinews of the guanaco, neatly braided. The arrow-shaft is a reed-like branch of a tree called the winter's bark; it is winged with feathers of native birds, and is tipped with a unique glass point.

With the bow and arrow as their sole implement of chase, the Onas roam about always in the footprints of the guanaco from the barren interior mountains to the forest-covered lowlands, and during the winter from the forests over the pampas to the seashore. If they fail in securing their favored game, the guanaco, they capture a kind of ground rat, or gather the snails and mussels of the beach; but the one grand aim of life is to hunt the guanaco.

The matter of clothing, with the Onas, is a very simple affair. Although the climate of their region is cold, stormy, and even humid, they are very imperfectly dressed. The children run about in the snow either naked or nearly so. The men have a large mantle made of several guanaco-skins sewed

together. This reaches from the shoulders to the feet, but it is not attached by either buttons or strings; it is simply held about the shoulders by the hands. On the chase the mantle is allowed to drop, while the hunter rushes on, naked, to capture his game. The women, when well dressed, wear a piece of fur about the waist, and another loosely thrown about the shoulders; but they are not often well dressed, and must generally be contented with a kind of mantle carelessly suspended from the shoulders, which is allowed to fall upon the slightest exertion.

Nothing could be more homeless than an Ona house. It is proof to none of the discomforts of the Fuegian climate. Rain, snow and wind enter it freely. The house is a simple accumulation of tree branches thrown together in the easiest possible manner. Sometimes it has a conical shape, but more often it is only a crescent or breast-work, behind which the entire family sit or sleep. To the windward are thrown a number of skins to keep out the wind, but from overhead the cold rains drizzle over poorly clad bodies. In the center of this circle of shivering humanity, or just outside of it, is a camp-fire, which, however, serves better for cooking purposes than for heating.

The arrangement of the house is such that the heat all escapes. At night the fires are allowed to go out, and the adults, lying in a circle, place the children in the center, with blankets of guanaco skins placed over all. To keep the blankets from being blown off, and to add additional warmth, they next call their dogs to take their positions on the top of the entire mass of Indians. In former years it was a poverty-stricken family that did not have enough dogs to cover it out of sight; but the shepherds have now killed the dogs, and the Indians must rest cold and comfortable without their canine bedfellows.

The unwritten laws which govern the actions of the tribe as a whole are very vaguely understood. There never has been any great need for the Onas to assemble and unite against an enemy. Any one of the numerous clans under one chief has been more than equal to overcome the feeble onslaughts of other Indians and white men. Hence the lack of tribal organization. In the family, however, the organization is firmly fixed by habits which never change. The loose arrangement of marriage and divorce does not seem to disturb seriously the equilibrium of the home circle. The camp is pitched from day to day at

spots convenient for the chase. This makes elaborate houses or complex fixtures impossible. It never requires more than half an hour to build an Ona house.

The work of the man is strictly limited to the chase. He carries his bow and quiver of arrows, and his eye is ever on the horizon for game; but he seldom stoops to anything like manual labor that is not connected with the actual necessities of the chase. He kills the game, but the wife must carry it into camp. In moving, the women take up all of their earthly possessions, pack them into a huge roll, and with this firmly strapped across their backs they follow the unencumbered lead of their brave but ungallant husbands. Thus the women carry, day after day, not only all the household furniture, but the children and the portable portions of the house. The women certainly have all the uninteresting detail and the drudgery of life heaped upon them, but they seem to enjoy it. In defense of the men it should be said that they are worthy husbands. They will fight fiercely to protect their homes, and they will guard the honor of their women with their own blood. It is a crying sin of the advance of Christian civilization that this red man of the far south should be compelled to lay down his life at the feet of the heartless pale-faced invaders to shield the honor of his home.

I doubt if missionary efforts will improve the hard lot of this noble band of human strugglers. The efforts thus far made have certainly had the contrary effect, and altogether they do not need a new system of morals as badly as we do ourselves. I do not mean to infer that missionary work, in general, is hurtful to aborigines. There is a legitimate field for such efforts, but it is not among Onas, unless the work is conducted in a new manner by a thoroughly practical man. They need to be placed in a position where they may follow their wild habits without the infectious degeneration of higher life. Individually and collectively they have fewer sins than New Yorkers. It is true that there are among them no faultless characters, but there are also no great criminals. There are some good and some bad, but the worst and the best are found side by side.

The bitter and the sweet of human life flow in the same stream. They have the same origin and the same termination. The lesson of ages to untutored man has impressed upon him a prescription of moral direction, which is quite as good as, and far more ap-

propriate for him than, the white man's code of ethics.

A MISGUIDED MONARCH.

Once upon a time there was a king who was marvelously wise and who knew it. Therefore, he communed thus with himself one day, when he felt particularly Solomonic: "It's a shame that all my wisdom should go to waste; besides, my fame as the knowingest thing ever perched on a throne isn't as great as my distinguished deserts merit. I wonder if there isn't some way to make the Sunday newspapers make a scare-head article of me. By crickey, I have it! I'll do the ancient fairy-tale act, and offer my daughter and half my kingdom to anyone asking me three questions I can't answer; unsuccessful applicants to be treated as usual."

Now, the princess was wondrous fair and the kingdom was so preposterously prosperous it hadn't even a national debt; so every prince who read the papers flocked to the contest, and the hotel rates in the king's capital were doubled, to the satisfaction of his subjects. But there was the customary melancholy result; princes' heads got so common they were used for cobblestones, and it was pronounced by experts to be the finest block pavement ever seen.

One day, however, a tall, gaunt, sal-low individual presented himself, and signified, with a nasal twang, his intention of forthwith putting his majesty up a tree.

"Where are you from?" asked the king, curiously.

"Connecticut, U. S. A.," replied the man.

"Oh," said the king, beginning to look troubled. "Well, go ahead."

"What makes a novel successful?" demanded the man, briskly.

The king mentally reviewed the successes of the last few years, and sighed deeply. "Er—hum—ah—I guess that's one on me," he conceded, reluctantly.

"Why do we Americans retain confidence in the republican party as it is at present controlled?" demanded the man, chuckling.

The king's lower jaw dropped with a dull thud against his breast. "The Lord only knows!" he groaned, helplessly. "No, no more of your cussed conundrums," he shrieked desperately, as the man was again about to speak. "I give up. But say," he continued, cunningly, "I'll go you doubles or quits. I'll bet you the rest of my family and kingdom against your winnings that you can't answer those questions yourself."

"Do you take me for a gambler?" demanded the man, severely, as he tucked