Preface

A Stranger in His Own Land

José María Sobral was a person of science, a patriotic Naval officer, and a pioneer of the great frozen white continent. He explored where others did not dare go, fostering an insatiable curiosity that led him to attempt to understand the nature and the humanity that surrounded him. He was a brave young lieutenant and Antarctic pioneer; a scholar and doctor of geology; a philosopher and student of human behavior; a friend and a foreigner. He desperately wanted to contribute to knowledge and to society. And yet his isolation haunted him throughout his life—in the Navy, in Antarctica, in his adopted home of Sweden, and in his homeland of Argentina. He devoted his life to his work and study at home and abroad, but could not convince his own government to support him. He brought the Argentine homeland to the great white continent, but could not remain with his beloved Argentine Navy. Even after the end of his life, for many years, Sobral was not given the recognition he deserved. It is the author's hope that, through these writings, Sobral's story will be better known, and his personality and achievements will be more closely embraced.

This book is the first publishing of Under-Lieutenant José María Sobral's expedition diary and daily journal, kept during his participation in the Swedish-Argentine Antarctic Expedition of 1901–1903, under the leadership of Otto Nordenskjöld. It portrays the role and achievements of this young pioneer within this historic expedition and provides the raw, real-time account he wrote about his experiences, including personal thoughts he did not later include in his official published book about the expedition. It also retells the remarkable accomplishments of this military officer turned explorer turned scientist, both before and after the expedition—prior to his being selected to participate in the Antarctic expedition, and after he returned from Antarctica and began to pursue geological studies in Sweden.

Sobral was the first Argentine to explore Antarctica, and his expedition was the first scientific expedition to endure two consecutive winters on the Antarctic

continent. The young Under-Lieutenant Sobral was the lone "Argentine" in the "Swedish-Argentine" expedition. The other members of the expedition were Swedish scientists and Norwegian sailors. Thus, Sobral was doubly isolated—in his new environment and among his foreign colleagues. Yet, he worked closely with them, learning their language and learning the science. Despite extreme danger and almost unendurable hardships, the expedition made geographical, geological, paleontological, and meteorological discoveries of historic importance along the Antarctic Peninsula.

The Swedish-Argentine Antarctic Expedition was the first scientific expedition to intentionally overwinter in Antarctica and unwittingly became the first to spend two winters in the Antarctic, when their expedition ship, the *Antarctic*, captained by the Norwegian whale and seal hunter Carl Anton Larsen, became trapped in the ice and sank near Paulet Island. Three parties from the 29-member expedition spent the second winter separated by ice and distance, and stripped of any hope for rescue. They fought isolation, deprivation, and near starvation, yet they never ceased their scientific work. The parties were stranded in three separate locations—at Snow Hill Island (Cerro Nevado), Hope Bay (Bahía Esperanza), and Paulet Island. Sobral and his team at Snow Hill continued their scientific studies and specimen collection throughout their second winter, traveling across Seymour Island (Marambio) and the nearby islands, with Sobral writing of these excursions in his personal diary. By this time, the men did not know if a ship would ever appear to pick them up, and still, they pursued their scientific passion, adding to the knowledge of humankind. The expedition was one of the most successful in terms of scientific data and fossil collections of land vertebrates and plants discovered on the Antarctic Peninsula, and provided evidence and further credence to the Gondwana theory of continental drift. It also proved that the Antarctic Peninsula was not an archipelago but was part of the Antarctic continent, and that Antarctica had experienced a climatic transformation from a warmer, wetter climate to a frozen region of ice. The expedition members were also the first to sight the Larsen Ice Shelf, which since that time has been greatly reduced, changed, and affected by a now progressively warming climate.

After the expedition parties' miraculous reunion at Snow Hill, and heroic rescue by the Argentine corvette *Uruguay*, Lieutenant Sobral took his newfound love of science and, finding no place for it in his role with the Navy, uprooted to Uppsala, Sweden, where he studied geology with his mentor Dr. Nordenskjöld. Later, he returned to his homeland as the first Argentine scientist to doctor in geology and petrography. In Argentina, Dr. Sobral devoted his life to contributing to the scientific fields of geology, petrology, and hydrology. But, whether for political reasons, commercial profit, or simple short-sightedness, he was basically ignored at home. Only at the very end of his life did his country muster some appreciation for its accomplished son.

The diary featured in this book provides a compelling, first-hand, personal account of the Antarctic expedition activities, findings, and discoveries, including Sobral's private thoughts, intimate observations, and real-time recounting of events. It reflects the courage and dedication of the scientists. It represents the first-ever

continuous recording of weather data in Antarctica. And it sheds further light on the importance of this expedition to world knowledge and to Antarctic history, as well as on the significance of Sobral's role in the expedition.

After the Antarctic expedition, in Sweden and in Argentina, Sobral continued his extensive writings, preparing copious tomes that provide insight to the science and the man. He was at home with his research, his explorations, and his family. But he was still a stranger in his own land.

Sobral was not always an easy man to live with, often quite demanding and exacting in what he felt needed to be accomplished. The under-lieutenant was conscientious almost to a fault. At times in Antarctica, he drove his colleagues crazy, unfairly earning their ridicule and teasingly humorous jokes, and enduring their ostracism of him. At other times, he was their voice of reason, speaking to them in their own language that he had painstakingly learned during the voyage and during the seclusion at Snow Hill. But at all times, he strove to do what he thought was right—following his government's orders, representing his country, minimizing the harm done to the Antarctic environment and its wildlife by the actions of the expedition, and supporting his colleagues in seeking and collecting the science, data, and sampling material to better understand the earth, the ocean, and the meteorological phenomena of our world. He was a meticulous record keeper and a student of human behavior. He was a poet in describing the icy beauty of the frozen continent. And he was a friend to the friendless, attempting to stay the hand of those who would kill more penguins than necessary and advocating for ethical treatment of the sledge dogs. He was isolated, but not an isolationist, seeking companionship with those around him. And he loved his country, torn between serving on the Antarctic expedition and serving in the war that he thought was being waged back home (it was not, but the question of possible war was an agony to him until the very end of the expedition). Later, he was torn between the Navy and science. He chose science and that decision changed his life and took him away from his country. But with his new science degree, he returned to Argentina and made history there. And yet history has not fully acknowledged him, any more than his contemporaries had at the time of his great work. This book is intended to place Sobral in his rightful position in history—as a dedicated Navy man, a devoted scientist, an Antarctic pioneer, and a heroic son of Argentina.

Vancouver, BC, Canada Mary R. Tahan

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Tahan, M.R.
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