

A Narrative of William Culbertson's Travels in Chile of 1930

by *Ryszard Stemplowski*

Introduction

Culbertson wrote his account shortly after his travels had taken place. He was 45 in 1930, and the US Ambassador to Chile since 1928, a man of a considerable experience in American politics (he had been involved in commercial issues since 1910, and was a member of the Tariff Commission, 1917—1925) and US diplomatic service (as the Ambassador to Romania, 1925—1928), a man "at the height of his public career, his physical powers and his ambition as yet undiminished".¹

Technically, the account was meant for the Secretary of State, Henry Lewis Stimson. Judging from the finding aid for Culbertson papers at the Library of Congress, he intended to write a book.² On closer inspection of his papers one can read a version of the chapter XVI of book: *El último rincón del mundo (Chile, 1928—1933)*. I know of nothing that would contradict the supposition that he wrote his account, having his book in mind, and he certainly had academic ambitions.³ Anyway, his dispatch for the Department of State is hardly a bureaucratic piece. Neither is it a work that could pass for a regular report.

¹ J. R. Snyder, "William Culbertson in Chile: Opening the Door to a Good Neighbor, 1928—1933," in: *Inter-American Economic Affairs*, vol. 26, 1972, No. 1, pp. 81—96.

² Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, William S. Culbertson, A. Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress, Washington D. C., 1963.

³ S. P. Duggan, Director of the Institute of International Education, to Mrs. Culbertson, June 2, 1932; E. M. Borchard, Professor of Yale University, to Culbertson, June 6, 1932; "It was a very great pleasure to [...] recall [...] our days in Yale [...] I sometimes have a longing to return to academic life and perhaps I shall do some day [...]" — Culbertson to A. C. Judson, Professor of Indiana University, July 27, 1932; LC (MD): Culbertson Papers.

"I have the honor — he wrote — to transmit herewith a survey of Chile, with particular reference to its geographical aspects. By way of preface, I should say that this despatch is in many places little more than my contemporary notes [...] I approach Chile by the avenues of romance and mystery [...]"

The survey is dated May 23, 1930. One part of the travel was made at the end of summer of that year, in February and March (*sic!*), another at the beginning of winter (1929?). He certainly draws upon his impressions of various travels, if only from the trips made in the vicinity of Santiago, e.g. to the Uspallata Pass, earlier during his mission there.

Sometimes he warns his reader, e.g.: "I have been only as far as Aysén"; he has not seen Magallanes. However, when he approaches the description of Chile from the point of view of her two Pacific possessions, he does not stress the point that he was not there, he allows Daniel Defoe and the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to speak for him, instead. Nevertheless, he speaks from personal observation, in most cases.

His text is selfexplanatory. Some footnotes come from the author, those added by this editor being initialled (RS). It would be superfluous to footnote such topics like the salpeter or copper mining, or the German colonization, etc. Hence I am confining myself to the less obvious cases. Some sources of his quotations are being given by the author himself. One exception is the excerpt in Spanish (p. 234 of this publication), which is probably taken, as Alfredo Lastra Norambuena leads me to believe, from Diego Barros Arana's *Historia General de Chile* (as it would be typical of an Ambassador to have such a luxurious edition, 16 vols., 1884—1902), although I thought it was rather Francisco Valdés Vergara's little history of Chile (the one quoted on p. 248 of this publication). I am equally unable to identify the Latin classification of the majority of the rare plants as mentioned on pp. 240-1 of this publication, as well as to find data concerning the book quoted on p. 248 or a verse on p. 232 of this publication. These rather minor deficiencies will have been removed by the time I include the survey in a book edition of sources for Chilean history. They do not make it impossible for a researcher to make use of the survey in its present form, I believe.

I came across the survey in the National Archives, Washington D. C., in 1976, when inspecting the files related to Chile of the Great Depression period. Nothing similar did I find in the Public Record Office, London; or in the Archives Diplomatiques des Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Paris, or in the Politischen Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes, Bonn; or in the Archivo General del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Madrid. In the last case, however, I found information as to such travels of Spanish diplomats in Chile of the epoch under consideration, but I have been unable to locate the reports, if there were any. The Spanish Ambassador,

Ricardo Baeza, made the trip, actually, Mrs. M. Baeza Llovet, Ambassador's daughter, has kindly shown to me the letters written to her mother by the Ambassador during the trip in question, but alas, they have, first of all, a personal value.⁴ In other words, it does not seem like saying too much when insisting that the Culbertson survey is something pretty rare, if not unique.

The 50-page long and neatly typed survey is important for historians in many ways. In the first place, it allows for a better understanding of the image of Chile as reconstructed from the diplomatic reporting of those days; it is one tool more for "looking below the surface of things".⁵

**The National Archives, Washington D.C.,
Department of State Decimal File, Record Group 59, 825.00/561**

**Embassy of the United States
Santiago, Chile
May 23, 1930**

The Honorable
The Secretary of State
Washington

Sir:

I have the honor to transmit herewith a survey of Chile, with particular interest to its geographical aspects. By way of preface, I should say that this despatch is in many places little more than my contemporary notes. For several months I have sought time to write the exhaustive despatch which the subject deserves, but vacancies in the Embassy staff and the insistent demands on my time made by urgent problems have forced me to abandon my original plan.

The Approach to Chile

I like to approach the description of Chile, as it were, from the point of view of her two Pacific possessions: Juan Fernández and Easter Island, the former a symbol of romance; the latter a symbol of mystery.

⁴ Interview in Madrid, June 24, 1982.

⁵ "I have kept my academic interest in looking below the surface of things" — Culbertson to Judson, July 27, 1932; LC (MD); Culbertson Papers.

Juan Fernandez has been the scene of many romantic adventures, the most famous being that of Alexander Selkirk, the prototype of "Robinson Crusoe". Selkirk was put ashore there in September, 1704 and remained on the island alone for over four years. Defoe, although locating his island at the mouth of the Orinoco, based his romance on the adventures of Selkirk. The atmosphere of the book (and of the island) can be recalled best by citing the familiar description of Crusoe's discovery of the footprint in the sand:

"It happened one day, about noon, going towards my boat, I was exceedingly surprised with the print of a man's naked foot on the shore, which was very plain to be seen on the sand. I stood like one thunderstruck or as if I had seen an apparition. I listened, I looked around me, but I could hear nothing, nor see anything; I went up to a rising ground, to look farther; I went up the shore, and down the shore, but it was all one; I could see no other impression but that one. I went to it again to see if there were any more, and to observe if it might not be my fancy; but there was no room for that, for there was exactly the print of a foot — toes, heel, and every part of a foot. How it came thither I knew not, nor could I in the least imagine; but after innumerable fluttering thoughts, like a man perfectly confused and out of myself, I came home to my fortification, not feeling, as we say, the ground I went on, but terrified to the last degree, looking behind me at every two or three steps, mistaking every bush and tree, and fancying every stump at a distance to be a man. Nor is it possible to describe how many various shapes my affrighted imagination represented things to me in, how many wild ideas were found every moment in my fancy, and what strange unaccountable whimsies came into my thoughts by the way.

"When I came to my castle (for so I think I called it ever after this), I fled into it like one pursued. Whether I went over by the ladder, as first contrived, or went in at the hole in the rock, which I had called a door, I cannot remember; no, nor could I remember the next morning, for never frightened hare fled to cover, or fox to earth, with more terror of mind than I to this retreat".

Then, the symbol of mystery: Easter Island lies 2,000 miles west of the Chilean coast. It lies almost alone in the vast expanse of the Pacific; its area is only forty-five square miles; its inhabitants are few. It is famous for its vast platforms and strange images. What race of men made them? Where did the labor come from for these mighty monuments? Is this the necropolis of a vanished people? The *Encyclopedia Britannica* says:

"The present inhabitants of Easter Island know nothing of the construction of these remarkable works; and the entire subject of their existence in this small and remote island is a mystery".

Romance and mystery moot the traveler everywhere in Chile. Physical obstacles challenge the daring of men. Miles of deserts in the north; tangled forests, lakes, and remote archipelagoes in the south; almost impossible mountain ranges — these surroundings are calls to adventure and to speculation about the unknown.

Arica

Arica, the capital of the department of the same name,¹ is a simple town under the shadow of the rocky promontory called the Morro. The quietness of its little plaza, over a large part of which runs like a sheltering canopy, enormous bougainvillea vines, suggests a contrast with the political conflict which centered there, for the Tacna-Arica dispute was a struggle for the port of Arica. Arica gets its economic importance from the La Paz railroad; to the Chileans it has a strategic aspect; to the Peruvians, and in a less degree, to the Chileans, it has sentimental value. But to the generality of mankind, Arica will always recall a quarrel which, although local and remote, epitomized the issues, real and imaginary, over which nations fight. Perhaps Arica may also recall the peaceful settlement of that dispute which is to be commemorated by a monument on the Morro.

Nitrates

Arica lies in the desert which stretches through Peru down to the La Serena valley in Chile. Just back of the town is a little irrigated valley which, in spite of its canals, always looks thirsty. The Department of Africa is poor in mineral resources — only some sulphur and borax.

To the south of it is the rich Department of Tarapacá which, with the two departments adjoining on the south — Antofagasta and Atacama — is the region of Chilean nitrates. Until these great deposits were discovered the desert was not regarded as worth claiming, but once discovered three nations disputed its ownership and the War of the Pacific was the result.²

Flying over the desert I have looked down from 7,000 and 8,000 feet upon the oficinas or nitrate plants which dot the pampas. Until the World War, Chile had a monopoly of this essential material. No incentive existed from competition to improve methods of production. The so-called Shanks process was used. The war brought competition from the synthetic product and forced Chile to seek improved processes. The Guggenheim Brothers entered the field with their process. They transferred to the nitrate pampas the organizing ability of American business (already

¹ By a recent decree the Department of Arica is annexed to the Province of Tarapacá.

² The map in the front of the *History of Chile* by J. Ignatius Molina (English translation 1809) shows the desert of Atacama as part of Peru. (Compare footnote 8. p. 237 — RS).

there in the copper mines). The "Maria Elena" plant was built inland from Tocopilla. From this seaport the road cuts through the coast range and mounts to the pampas.

The "Maria Elena" plant and the even more modern plant for the Latauro Company, being built nearby, have large-scale facilities for mining the caliche³ which lies just under the surface and for transporting it in great quantities to the leaching vats, and machinery for recovering the nitrate of soda and preparing it for use in agriculture or industry. The significance of this process is that by lowering the cost of production, it will enable Chile to continue as an important factor in the nitrate markets of the world.

Chuquicamata

Continuing on from "Maria Elena" toward the Cordillera the road takes us up to an altitude of 10,000 feet to the great copper mine called Chuquicamata. Here again is evidence of American business genius. The existence there of a mountain of low grade copper ore has been known for years. Its exploitation awaited the arrival of American engineers and the patience of investors in the United States who were willing to wait a dozen years for dividends. Surface mining is employed — the mountain is gradually being blasted and hauled away to the great leaching vats, and from the resulting liquid the copper is recovered by electricity.

Across the Desert of Atacama

My best idea of the Atacama Desert came from a trip over that railroad called the Longitudinal — which Chile has built north and south through her narrow territory. The road is said to have been built chiefly for strategic purposes although it serves in the north many nitrate oficinas or factories which add a bit of life to the seemingly endless stretches of vegetationless land. Traffic on this railroad is very limited and the trains are therefore few and far between. At Baquedano where the Longitudinal crosses the railroad which runs from Antofagasta to La

³ Properly: *caliche*. "*Caliche — mezcla de sales y sustancias insolubles en agua, en la que predomina el nitrato de sodio mezclado con cloruros y sulfatos, de la que se extrae el salitre; se presenta cementada en mantos o capas horizontales. Calichera — yacimiento en donde hay y se establece la extracción del caliche.*" *Vocablos Salitreros*, Santiago 1934. (RS).

Paz, it was pointed out to me with a touch of humor, that at that place at one time a once-a-week train ran into a once-a-month train, resulting in the establishment of stop signals and a special guardhouse!

It is perhaps unnecessary for me to say that I did not wait for the "regular" train. A friend, Mr. Kuchs, had provided his Hudson automobile, which had been ingeniously adapted for running on the railroad. Well supplied with food and water we started southward across the desert, running about 35 miles an hour. We left Las Torres (near the Guggenheim plant of Maria Elena), about 11:30 A. M., we arrived at the great copper mine managed by Mr. Kuchs at 1:00 A. M. the next morning after a marvelous trip of 375 miles through country which God forgot.

During the flight of 1,800 miles from Santiago to Lima which I took last October, I looked down, as it were, upon a vast relief map; now I was in direct touch with all the weird, discouraging, hopeless surroundings of the desert. Our car ran on and on at a steady speed; we seemed never to get anywhere; it was like running through emptiness toward nothing. "Did you ever see the like of this?", I asked Mr. Kuchs, pointing on my side of the car to the pampa covered with flint, slag and volcanic dust and to the hills with all their fantastic shapes. "Yes", he answered. "Where?" I asked with an impatient curiosity. "On this side of the car", he said, pointing out of his window.

The railroad, I was told, had been built on the plans of a transcontinental railroad of the United States. These plans had provided for water tanks and stockyards at every town. Apparently without any reference to the local conditions on the desert these plans were followed in detail. There on the desert the "towns" are only little stations with on rare occasions, another building; usually one family, a forlorn dog or two, a few chickens covered with little more than pinfeathers and a metal receptacle in which the occasional passing train left all the water which the people used. Only occasionally do any of the stations boast a local water supply and even then it is often brackish. Cattle or even goats could not live for a day on the surrounding square miles of sand and stone. Nevertheless at many of the stations which we whirled past I saw the standard water tank and stockyards of our western American towns. In some cases, it is true, the latter had been discovered useless and had been broken up and carried away.

These straggling sparks of human life on the desert — these stations — and the varying character of the surface of the desert, sometimes sand, sometimes volcanic ash, sometimes flint and slag, recalled to my mind a trip which I took over the Arabian desert in 1926 from Amman southward to Petra. In the latter case the little station buildings on that

railroad to Hejaz showed the effect of the shell fire of the World War. There on the Atacama desert as I went along there came back to me the same emotions that I had had when I looked out into the terrifying distance of the desert of Arabia.

The altitude of the part of the Longitudinal railroad over which we were running varied from 3,500 to 7,000 feet. Our car swept up and down the long pampas, through shallow cuts and skirted along hills which, when seen from a distance, reminded me of the pyramids of Gizeh as seen from the road between Cairo and old Memphis. To the west rose the coast range; to the east, the first hills of the Andes (back of which from time to time we could catch glimpses of the high cordillera which at times reaches over 20,000 feet.

But ahead of us, if my eyes do not deceive me, I see a lake fringed with reeds where duck shooting must be good. Never could anything seem more real. Little islands rise in the lake and an object is moving across the surface which surely must be a boat. This is not a barren pampa; we are about to come to water. But, alas, the mirage. We are approaching the salina "El Miraje". The water proves an illusion; the islands are more hills whose bases are shrouded in the mirage; the boat is a truck going to a nitrate factory which happened to pass over the seemingly enchanted place. I felt a genuine disappointment. What must the first travelers over these pampas have felt when the seeming reality of things vanished before their advance? It was after this experience that I cynically remarked that I would like to find in one of the "towns" through which we passed an American soda fountain. Pointing to the nitrate fields nearby, my friend suggested a nitrate of soda fountain.

The sun began to drop toward the west and the shadows began to play over the desert. Even after the sun had disappeared and silhouetted the coast range on the west, it colored the higher mountains to the east with rich tints of rose, red and purple. Such colorings contribute to the making of a desert the splendid inspiration which it is and which it has been in all ages. The weirdness and hopelessness of the desert leave deep impressions on the mind. No wonder the great religions of the world have come from lands which are associated with desert conditions.

Night fell. It became very dark. The clearness of the atmosphere opened the paths to the stars. They were magnificent, — one constellation was particularly brilliant; it was the Southern Cross which is not visible to the northern hemisphere. Through the darkness we were soon able to see on the mountain side up 10,000 feet, the gleam of the hundreds of electric lights in the American Copper mine at Potrerillos. It was almost sixty miles away. Finally the moon, three-quarters full, topped the high Andes and flooded the mountains and the pampas with a yellow light.

At Pueblo Hundido we turned eastward and began to climb. The moon revealed the cañons and the mountains which lie along the road to the American mining camp.

The desert of Atacama, once thought to be a worthless waste, has proved a source of enormous mineral wealth. The occasional salt stream and the "salinas" (dry dead seas) suggest one of the forms of wealth — the sodium nitrate beds, to which I have already referred. Just under the pampas are deposits of nitrate of soda often five or six feet in thickness. Rains would have leached out this deposit. The dryness of the centuries, however, has preserved it to become a compensation to modern Chile for the fruitlessness of the desert's surface.

Potrерillos

The mountainous eastern side of the desert is also a source of other minerals — today chiefly copper. Chile is indebted to American capital and skill for the development and building in these barren desolated regions, plants which can reclaim at a profit the metal from low grade copper ores. Potrerillos is one of these mines. Located many miles away from even the smallest desert town, almost eighty miles from the coast and about 10,000 feet in altitude, this "mining camp" reveals what American engineers and business men can do starting with nothing except a mountain of low grade ore. They have built roads and a railroad along the side of the quebradas and through mountains; they have brought water from the distant eastern mountains; they have tunneled the copper mine at various levels and organized the mining of the ore so that it is moved by gravity downward to the waiting trains; they have built up-to-date modern plants with machinery brought from the United States for reclaiming copper by both the oxide and the sulphide processes; they have built a town with comfortable houses and barracks, a bakery and stores, a hospital (fully equipped), schools, a football field and a golf course. Here live about 1,750 workmen at the mine and about 2,000 workmen at the plants and in addition over a hundred Americans (in some cases with their families) who hold engineering and executive positions. The average amount of copper ore handled in a day is 25,000 metric tons. All the power used comes over transmission lines from the Company's power plant on the coast.

I realize that a mere recital of the facts will not convey an adequate impression of what I saw about me there. I could look out across miles upon miles of absolutely desolate mountains and valleys — no water, no life, the devil's own country, and then I could look at my immediate surroundings — comfortable American homes, modern playground equip-

ment at the American school, American children playing about, all the things which go to make up a self-sufficient community and which keep the people contented.

The life of this community is not that which we often associate with a "mining camp". Drunkenness is rare, for a "dry" regime is maintained. The American men and women whom I met are typical of our western life in the United States. They are in Chile to save their money; they are well-read; they can even enjoy a card game without having to bet on its outcome.

But after all it is the desert. Man can master nature if he has the incentive but thirty years from now the ore in that mountain will be exhausted.⁴ Both Chileans and Americans will have profited from that vast business venture. The workmen will seek employment elsewhere and the American engineers and executives will turn their efforts to other enterprises, very possibly in Chile for there are other low grade deposits awaiting exploitation. The abandoned galleries in the mine will fall in; the remains of the dismantled plant will fall in ruin; the walls of the homes will crumble and finally the last lingering scavenger on "the camp" will depart and there will be left — the desert of Atacama.

Beginnings of Agriculture

The Department of Coquimbo is, like the departments to the north, rich in minerals, e.g., the big iron mine of the Bethlehem Steel Corporation is at El Tofo. But here also agriculture begins, since during a part of the year rain falls and irrigation is developing to supply moisture during the rest of the time. Coquimbo is, as it were.

*"[...] the strip of Herbage strown
that just divides the desert from the sown".⁵*

Onward to the south the amount of rain-fall increases until in southern Chile rains are excessive.

Agriculture, of course, is not wholly absent even from the deserts of the north. Here and there a stream from the snow mountains brightens with a strip of green a little valley. And it is probable that irrigation projects may, during the coming decades, reclaim a large part of the desert. The salt and nitrate pampas are of course sterile, but there are large areas of sweet land which need only water to make them fruitful. This water is being found (with some success) in large dams across the streams of the Cordilleras and in artesian wells. Chile may some day have sub-tropical agricultural districts of considerable importance.

⁴ This prognosis was to come true. (RS).

⁵ See Introduction. (RS).

La Serena

La Serena and the surrounding country preserve more than elsewhere the traditions and atmosphere of the colonial days of Chile. La Serena, the second city founded in Chile (1544) owes its origin to Pedro de Valdivia. The old families of the region have in many cases little left but run-down properties, exhausted mines, and their pride. They have some old colonial furniture which, under the proper protocol, they will sell. Mr. Jaramillo, the Minister of Hacienda, purchased from them the furniture for the President's new house at Viña del Mar.

Strolling about La Serena on my last visit, I came to the Santo Domingo church. I fell into conversation with the priest who told with pride, the story of the pillaging of the church by Sir Francis Drake. Drake is said to have attended church on a Sunday. He saw the ornaments of silver and gold. On Monday he sent his men for them.⁶ I am attaching to this despatch (Enclosure No. 1), a description taken from the Voyages of Sir Francis Drake.⁷ It refers humorously to some of his exploits in Chile and Peru.

The region of La Serena cherishes many stories of other pirates who often visited the coast during the 16th and 17th centuries. Charles Darwin speaks of one which he heard when he visited Coquimbo. He says (*Voyage of the Beagle*, Chapter 16):

"To this day they relate the atrocious actions of the bucaniers; and especially of one man, who took away the figure of the Virgin Mary, and returned the year after for that of St. Joseph, saying it was a pity the lady should not have a husband".

The Virgin has unusual prestige in this part of Chile. Some thirty odd miles from La Serena is the most famous shrine in Chile — the Virgin of the Rosary in the Sanctuary of Andacollo. A lady high in Santiago society assured me recently that a request for a miracle at this shrine is certain of success. The time for a general pilgrimage to the Virgin is just after Christmas; then thousands gather to join in the ecstasy of religious excitement. Departing from the Sanctuary they chant:

"Adios, Virgen de Andacollo,
Adios, hermoso lucero.
Volveremos a tu templo
Para el año venidero.

⁶ The priest produced a copy of J. J. Anderson, *A Grammar School History of the United States* (1878), which had once been used at Phillis Academy, Andover, Massachusetts.

⁷ Not printed. (RS).

*Madre Virgen, de su gracia
Dadnos todos el consuelo
De volvernos a tu fiesta,
Nuestro único anhelo".*

South of Santiago

Passing Santiago for the time being we travel through the picturesque central valley. Here we pass the irrigated fields, pastures and vineyards. Marking the boundaries of fields or courses of irrigation ditches are rows of tall poplars which give to every landscape a friendly aspect.

The first town to arrest attention is Rancagua, which has several claims to recognition. At Rancagua the Spanish royalists defeated the Chilean patriots in October 1814 and Chile returned for several years to the tyranny of Spain. On that occasion Bernardo O'Higgins and his followers made their dramatic escape through the enemies lines. Of him a Chilean history says:

"Pocos hombres han demostrado en la guerra el valor con que O'Higgins peleó en Rancagua. Esto sólo bastaría para que los chilenos tuviesen el mayor respeto por su memoria. La estatua que se le ha erigido en Santiago le representa en el momento de salir Rancagua; por eso su caballo salta una palizada y pisotea a un soldado español que se opone a su paso".⁸

Also at Rancagua the railroad from the copper mine at Sewell connects with the main line.

El Teniente Mine

Leaving Rancagua in September 1834, Charles Darwin recounts his experience: (*Voyage of the Beagle*, Ch. 12).

"The next day we turned up the valley of the Rio Cachapual, in which the hot-baths of Cauquenes, long celebrated for their medicinal properties, are situated. The suspension bridges, in the less frequented parts, are generally taken down during the winter when the rivers are low. Such was the case in this valley, and we were therefore obliged to cross the stream on horseback. This is rather disagreeable, for the foaming water, though not deep, rushes so quickly over the bed of large rounded stones, that one's head becomes quite confused, and it is difficult even to perceive whether the horse is moving onward or standing still. In summer, when the snow melts, the torrents are quite impassable; their strength and fury is then extremely great, as might be plainly seen by the marks which they

⁸ See Introduction. (RS).

had left. We reached the baths in the evening and stayed there five days, being confined the two last by heavy rain. The buildings consist of a square of miserable little hovels, each with a single table and bench. They are situated in a narrow deep valley just without the central Cordillera. It is a quiet, solitary spot, with a good deal of wild beauty.

"The mineral springs of Cauquenes burst forth on a line of dislocation, crossing a mass of stratified rock, the whole of which betrays the action of heat. A considerable quantity of gas is continually escaping from the same orifices with the water.

"One day I rode up the valley to the farthest inhabited spot. Shortly above that point, the Cachapual divides into two deep tremendous ravines, which penetrate directly into the great range. I scrambled up a peaked mountain, probably more than six thousand feet high. Here, as indeed everywhere else, scenes of the highest interest presented themselves".

I followed the same route only going much further into the mountains. Passing the baths at Cauquenes, which offer accommodations only a little better than in Darwin's day, our car on the narrow gauge railroad of the copper company traveled rapidly over ravines and along precipices, always climbing. We soon left the vegetation of the valley behind and about us rose the rugged sides of the Andes and far below rushed the mountain torrent. Back of us the sun began to drop behind the foothills but even after it had disappeared, continued to throw its golden glow on the higher mountains ahead. It became dark. Then, on rounding a curve, we were thrilled by the thousands of electric lights of the Sewell mining camp built literally on the steep side of the mountain. There, live about 10,000 people. Through the darkness the town looked like a giant Christmas tree with thousands of twinkling candles!

The mine is another triumph of American engineering and business genius. It is organized to use the power of gravitation. We reached the top of the mine through a shaft which rises over 1,000 feet through the heart of the copper mountain. In the passage ways of the mine the fall of the ore — the whole mountain of ore gradually caving in — is controlled by great supports of Araucanian pine. The ore is pulled out and falls into carts which roll to a shaft through which the ore is dumped, falling down into bins from which it is poured into cars. These cars roll down — always by gravity — and their contents are dumped into the crushers. Falling and being ground the ore finally emerges below in the concentration plant, from which flows out at one place the waste (tailings) and at another the concentrates. These concentrates continue down the valley in buckets on a continuous trolley. For miles they travel — still pulled by gravity — till they are dumped into the smelter at Calientes. Passing through the roasters and furnaces the pure copper bars are finally recovered and continue on down the valley on cars until they reach Rancagua.

Concepción

Talca is remembered for its recent earthquake and Chillán for its baths, but the next city toward the south of special interest is Concepción. It is a sort of Wisconsin in Chile — independent and aggressive in its politics. It is the only city in Chile which has resisted the centralizing influence of Santiago.

The good harbor of Talcahuano which shelters a well-developed naval base and the coal mines at Lota and Coronel contribute to the present economic and strategic importance of Concepción. The dry docks and naval schools at Talcahuano, I must say, impressed me as creditable achievements as far as they go. Of course, the British Naval Mission has guided the development.

The University of Concepción is an important influence in Chile. Unhampered by the State, as is the University of Chile, or by the Church, as is the Catholic University, it has made interesting contributions in several lines of scholarship. Its professors and students are likely to do more than their share of Chile's thinking during the coming decades.

The University is supported by the only lottery operated in Chile. (Neither lotteries or bull-fights have cursed the Chileans). If the suggestion is made that lotteries are hardly in keeping with the ideals of higher education, the reply is made that several prominent American universities once obtained support from them.

Darwin arrived at Talcahuano March 4, 1835 — just after the terrible earthquake of that year. He was deeply impressed. After a detailed account of the destruction, he says: (*Voyage of the Beagle*, Ch. 14):

"I have not attempted to give any detailed description of the appearance of Concepción, for I feel that it is quite impossible to convey the mingled feelings which I experienced. Several of the officers visited it before me, but their strongest language failed to give a just idea of the scene of desolation. It is a bitter and humiliating thing to see works, which have cost man so much time and labour, overthrown in one minute; yet compassion for the inhabitants was almost instantly banished, by the surprise in seeing a state of things produced in a moment of time, which one was accustomed to attribute to a succession of ages. In my opinion, we have scarcely beheld, since leaving England, any sight so deeply interesting".

The effect of earthquakes on the Chilean mentality must always be taken into account. It is a mistake to say that people become accustomed to these terrifying events. Small trembles are frequent in Chile and the great shocks are all too frequent. They sober any mind that contemplates its experiences.

"The earthquake", Darwin says (Ch. 21), "must be to every one a most impressive event: the earth, considered from our earliest childhood as the type of solidity, has oscillated like a thin crust beneath our feet; and in seeing the laboured works of man in a moment overthrown, we feel the insignificance of his boasted power".⁹

Temuco

South of the Bo-Bo river we find new prospects opening to us. It is the land of forests and rivers. Fishing is excellent and many sportsmen find quiet and happy days at the foot of the volcano, Villarica. Temuco — the first important town — recalls to me three things: (1) the Chilean national flower, the copihue; (2) Araucanian Indians; (3) missionaries.

Here the wax-like, bell-shaped copihue hangs everywhere in the woods from the vines which run over the trees. Although occasionally grown, it does not flourish either to the north or to the south. It is the first of those products of nature which make the South of Chile a land of pleasant surprises.

Chile was fortunate in its aborigines. No doubt the early colonists would not agree to this, since for many years the Araucanians waged an even fight with the whites. But when subdued, they contributed a vital element to the Chilean population. Lautaro, Galvarino, and Caupolicán are heroes not only to the Araucanians, but also to the Chilean people. One suspects that the attention devoted to them in school histories is due to the large number of students in the schools who have Indian blood in their veins.

Molina (cf. Ch. VIII, Vol. 2, p. 110), speaks of the pride of the Araucanians in these words:

"Although the Araucanians have long since emerged from a savage state, they nevertheless preserve, in many respects, the prejudices and the peculiar character of that early period. Proud of their valour and unbounded liberty, they believe themselves the only people in the world that deserve the name of men. From hence it is that, besides the appellation of 'auca', or free, which they value so highly, they give themselves metonymically the names of 'che', or the nation; of

⁹ The following curious reference to Chilean earthquakes is taken from the *Geographical, Natural and Civil History of Chile*, translated from the original Italian of The Abbe don J. Ignatius Molina (Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, Paternoster-Row, 1809): "The quantity of inflammable substances with which the soil of Chile abounds, rendered active by the electric fluid, may be considered as one of the principal causes of the earthquakes, the only scourge that afflicts this favoured country. Another, however, not less capable in my opinion, of producing this terrible phenomenon, is the elasticity of the air contained in the bowels of the earth, in consequence of the water which, insinuating itself by subterranean passages from the sea, becomes changed into vapour." (Book 1, Ch. 1, Sec. 9).

'reche' pure or undegenerated nation; and of 'huentu', men; a word of similar signification with the 'vir' of the Latins, and as the latter is the root of the word 'virtus' so from the former is derived 'huentugen', which signifies the same thing.

"From this ridiculous pride proceeds the contempt with which they regard all other nations".

For some reason I associate Temuco with missionaries — and missionaries of the fundamentalist type. They have a school in Temuco and at least one agricultural school nearby. They have a central office for propagating their work in Southern Chile. I met one of them on a little steamer between Aysén and Chiloé; to think irked him; Bryan (because of his religious views) was his hero. In spite of their limitations, perhaps because of them, these missionaries have done some creditable work in education among the under-privileged peoples.

Valdivia

The reaction in Germany after the revolution of 1848 forced a migration to foreign lands of many of the most liberal and intelligent Germans. Many of them came to the United States and became important factors in our life. Others came to Chile and settled in and around Valdivia. In the United States they have been absorbed by the vigor of American civilization; in Chile they settled far away from the center of Chilean life and they have therefore remained German in culture, (although they have become Chilean in loyalty).

During my entire visit to Valdivia (during the winter) it rained torrentially. This is as it should be! I was warned not to visit that part of Chile in the winter because of the rains. "But", I argued, "people live there", "Yes", was the reply, "and fish live in water also". The implication of this remark is justified. In the course of ages a species living at Valdivia might evolve amphibian characteristics! The day I spent with some Chilean acquaintances in a small enclosed boat on the Valdivia River represents in the body of my experience what the days in the Ark must have represented to Noah.

Judged from American standards, manufacturing in Valdivia has not progressed very far; but for Chile, it has made a substantial beginning. The industries include: beer (of course), lumber, shoes, etc.

The Lakes

The much advertised, perhaps over-advertised, part of Chile is the lake region which is most easily approached from Osorno and Puerto Varas. The lakes are justly praised for their natural beauty and for the

mountains including a number of active volcanos which form for them a background. The most important of these lakes are Puyehue, Rupanco, Lanquihue, and Todos los Santos. The Chilean Government has made a special effort to encourage tourists to visit this part of Chile. It seems not to realize that scenery exists in great variety in many places much nearer the centers of population, as for example in the United States and in Europe, and that relatively few people will travel as far as southern Chile for the purpose of seeing beautiful lakes and mountains. Furthermore, the facilities offered the tourist in the lake region of Chile are extremely primitive. The little boats on the lakes are slow and without adequate accommodations and the hotels, although clean, would hardly rank as second-class in Europe. If a traveler has exhausted the opportunities for outdoor sight-seeing in the United States and Europe and if he is willing to submit to the absence of many ordinary comforts, he would find a visit through the lake region of Chile worth while, or the traveler around South America, if he passes Chile in the months of December, January or February and has the time to spare, would find the trip through the Chilean lakes into the Argentine a pleasant variation from the tiresome, tedious trip on the Transandine railroad.

Osorno is a prosperous and pleasant town lying in the midst of a very good agricultural district. Traveling east on a good road recently constructed, I soon passed beyond the better farms and came to those which are being reclaimed from the forests. Many fields still are spotted with the stumps of trees. One of the sights often spoken of in connection with the Chilean lake district is the Falls of Pilmaiquén. These falls are beautiful but hardly more beautiful than the Great Falls of the Potomac just above Washington. I crossed Lake Puyehue and spent the night at the Termas de Puyehue. At that point hot mineral springs issue from the earth and afford a desirable locality for the erection of a summer hotel whose facilities are so far as I know the best of any similar resort in Chile.

Continuing south of Osorno I came to the town on Lake Lanquihue known as Puerto Varas. I took there a little lake steamer which consumed over three hours to cover the forty kilometres to the other side of the lake. The volcanos Osorno and Calbuco were shrouded in clouds and the sky as is frequently the case in that part of Chile was overcast. The lake itself is attractive and agriculture characterizes its shores. From Enseñada on the other side of the lake we followed the river Petrohue to the shores of Lake Todos los Santos. The scenery became more rugged, the sides of the lakes being precipitous and covered with heavy vegetation, tangled bushes, and numerous trees strange to the more northern latitudes. In the locality a story is told of the discovery of this lake. It

is said that a priest set out at one time to look in the mountains for a lost city told of in a legend — a city with gold and precious stones. He did not find the city but he discovered this lake. As if to justify this legend of hidden treasure in these parts a rainbow appeared across the eastern end of the lake as we approached Peulla.

The next morning I left Peulla on my way to the Argentine frontier, making part of the trip in a bus and the other part on horse back as far as the little lake known as Laguna Frías. The woods through which we passed showed the result of too much rain; everywhere there were mosses and lichens and a deep thick undergrowth which seemed to hinder the full development of the larger trees which might be used for lumber. The frontier is marked by a large steel shaft with a plate bearing "Chile" on the west side and "Argentina" on the east. Laguna Frías proved to be a precious spot. Tronador, snow-capped at one end, another snow mountain at the other; the lake itself between walls of rock covered with luxuriant trees and bushes.

I went only to Puerto Blest at the western end of Lake Nahuel Huapi.

Among the forms of vegetation which I noted on this part of my trip are the following:

1. Ulmo.

Its evergreen leaves and white flowers
make this a delightful tree to look upon.

2. Avellano.

A tree with red nut-like fruit.

3. Coihüe.

Whole sections of the forests are made up
of this tree. Small leaves and deciduous.

4. Canelo.

A tree with glossy leaves and flowers.

5. Pelú (tree)

6. Chilico.

This is the name of the wild native
fuchsia which grows luxuriantly.

7. Luma.

A tree whose wood is heavy and extremely
hard.

8. Pangué.

Plant like rhubarb. Its large leaves
characterize the road sides.

9. Cypres.

10. Alerce.

A light wood. Used even for musical instruments. Fine and expensive.

11. Ciruehillo.

Used for furniture.

12. Colihue.

A sort of bamboo which grows on the mountains. Used by the Araucanians and the Chilean army for lances.

Returning to Puerto Varas I had on that day the pleasure of looking back across the lake region through vistas unimpeded by clouds and of seeing Osorno, Calbuco, Tronador, and Yates all spread out before me across Lake Llanquihue like a gorgeous panorama bathed in the gold of an evening sunset.

Last year Calbuco was active. Osorno, however, has not erupted recently, but the lava at its base indicates that not many decades ago it was active. Darwin recalling a view from Chiloé in January 1835 said:

"On the night of the 19th the volcano of Osorno was in action. At midnight the sentry observed something like a large star, which gradually increased in size till about three o'clock, when it presented a very magnificent spectacle. By the aid of a glass, dark objects in constant succession were seen, in the midst of a great glare of red light, to be thrown up and to fall down. The light was sufficient to cast on the water a long bright reflection. Large masses of molten matter seem very commonly to be cast out of the craters in this part of the Cordillera. I was assured that when the Corcovado is in eruption, great masses are projected upwards and are seen to burst in the air, assuming many fantastical forms, such as trees: their size must be immense, for they can be distinguished from the high land behind S. Carlos, which is no less than ninety-three miles from the Corcovado. In the morning the volcano became tranquil".

Chiloé, the Archipelagos and Aysén ¹⁰

From Puerto Varas I traveled by automobile to Puerto Montt and dined there with the Intendente and now I shall use in description an even more direct style taken with some revision from my contemporary notes.

I got on this little steamer which is bearing me away, God only knows where. No one in Santiago knew anything about it except that it left Puerto Montt and presumably went somewhere, probably to Aysén. That is about all the information I now have. I have made some crazy trips in my life. This promises to be the craziest.

¹⁰ Aisén. (RS).

It is the 5th of March — the end of the summer in this part of the world. My cabin on this "plug" of the sea, called the "Santa Elena",¹¹ seemed reasonably clean. I went below deck for a moment last evening, and, oh, the cockroaches! Of course, cockroaches are all right from the point of view of the cockroach world and they are regular passengers on almost all steamers. But this ship has more than its share.

Our first stop after Puerto Montt at about seven this morning was at the island of Mechuque. We then crossed to the point on the main island of Chiloé called Punte Tenaun. I did not go ashore. The town looked lonesome through the mist. The mainland and the large islands are cultivated.

I have borrowed the Captain's map of this region. On the mainland east and south of Chiloé there are a number of regions marked "inesplorado". Why doesn't some gentleman-adventurer, like Halliburton,¹² try his enthusiasm on these areas? However, this class has no use for real adventure. Imagination for them takes the place of courage!

These many islands thrown here and there about the sea recall in their general appearance the Greek islands in the Aegean.

Dalcahue (Chiloé) lies on a very attractive channel. I went ashore and was received by the chief citizen, Sr. Bajo of an old Spanish family. We walked along the only "street". The houses along the sea are on stilts and the tide when in, is just under the floors. At the church the priest was hearing confessions. There was not much evidence of industry. Perhaps the incentives are few. The railroad is about nine kilometers in the interior and beyond it, Sr. Bajo says, there are practically no inhabitants. Around Dalcahue there are no large fundos or estates; the land is very much sub-divided. Products are potatoes, wheat, wood, etc. The island Quinchao which lies opposite is said to be well cultivated. We stopped off the coast of this island at Curaco de Véllez and took on potatoes for Aysén.

One gets the impression of isolation among these islands. This little steamer makes more or less regular calls at certain ports, but some of these islands are visited only occasionally by a much smaller steamer. My guess is (knowing this people and country), that the steamer often doesn't arrive at all.

Wind and rain and cold make this an inhospitable country in winter. Sr. Bajo said that it frequently rained for a whole month.

¹¹ The steamer was owned by the Alonso y Cía. "Santa Elena" was at the time one of the four steamers linking Aysén and Puerto Montt; Fernando Sepúlveda, *La provincia de Aysén*, Santiago 1932, p. 117. (RS).

¹² Richard Halliburton (1900—1939?) — cf. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*, 1965, p. 343. (RS).

Aldachildo is a sort of port on the north shore of Isla Lemuy. We stopped there to leave a cargo of wine. The houses in sight are few. The quota of wine per person must be large!

Then, on the same island we came to Puqueldon and left there some flour and sugar.

The channel leading up to Castro is delightfully beautiful, at least today in the bright sunshine.

At Castro there came out to meet me, the Governor, the Alcalde, and the Captain of the port. I was told that there are no automobiles to take me about (if there were, they might encounter difficulties on the streets). We therefore did the town on foot. To say the least, what man has done in town does not have the same aesthetic effect as that which God did in the country! One of the special products of the locality is the very colorful rug called "choapino".

Castro was founded in 1576 by Ruiz de Gamboa and used to be the capital of the archipelago, (now Ancud). Darwin's description of Castro should not be omitted. He was there in the year Castro ceased to be the capital. He says (Chapter 13):

"Early on Sunday morning we reached Castro, the ancient capital of Chiloe, but now a most forlorn and deserted place. The usual quadrangular arrangement of Spanish towns could be traced, but the streets and plaza were coated with fine green turf, on which sheep were browsing. The church, which stands in the middle, is entirely built of plank, and has a picturesque and venerable appearance. The poverty of the place may be conceived from the fact that, although containing some hundreds of inhabitants, one of our party was unable anywhere to purchase either a pound of sugar or an ordinary knife. No individual possessed either a watch or a clock; and an old man, who was supposed to have a good idea of time, was employed to strike the church bell by guess".

We have on this little steamer a boy who in the language of the sea might be called the "Chief Steward". He does it all. He runs the bar which consists of a locker on the deck containing bottles of wine, beer, etc. He serves all the meals and takes care of all the cabins. He is a sort of half-witted-appearing fellow but not so bad.

The country is full of priests. Everywhere the church and monastery intrude. At Castro the men with me joked about the number of churches there. One thought that the town is very wicked to require so many churches; another thought that all the inhabitants would go to heaven because there are many churches.

I was awakened last night by the voice of the Captain counting on to the deck of the steamer, pieces of firewood which is the fuel used in the engine. We were at the island of Tranqui. The two officers on this craft apparently seldom sleep. It certainly is one hell of a life. My share of the "hell of it" will do me for the rest of my life.

Early this morning we left behind the island San Pedro and struck across the "Golfo Corcovado". There the unabated winds of the Pacific caught us and we bobbed about like a cork.

We passed the rocks called the Island of Queitao and then on the left (inside of course) of the group "Islas Guaitecas". We are running along the coast off the mainland from which the mountains rise abruptly. The high peaks are covered with clouds. Only a few people live on these wind-swept islands. There are forests. But something about the landscape leaves the impression of hopelessness. The rude forces of Nature are obviously in control. I feel here when I am vouchsafed a bit of sunshine or a bright view of distant mountains that it is a concession, a sort of gift of the gods.

Such frontiers men can conquer if it is worth while. If minerals or other forms of wealth are found here, men will become master of the environment. And this speculation recalls that for many years there was a belief that beyond those mountains yonder existed a hidden city rich in treasure. It was called the "City of the Caesars", (not the Caesars of ancient Rome). Expeditions sought it; books were written about it. It eluded all seekers. But who knows but that these wild inhospitable regions may yet be the source of mineral wealth which will rival the dreams of the many disappointed searchers for the phantom city?

After leaving the Gulf of Corcovado we entered the main channel — called Moraleda — which is the path of the ships to Aysen and to Magallanes. On the left going south is the Cordillera; on the right, first, the archipelago de los Guaitecas and then the archipelago de los Chonos. The latter are unexplored, — the map is sketchy and lacks many details. It is clear that the government map-maker was guessing much of the time. The islands near which we passed — Mulchey and El Gorr — have heavy vegetation but I could not judge from the steamer whether the trees have value.

The Hades of the Classical World was a cold and forbidding place; it might have been located here. And I can imagine the gods standing on the Cordillera throwing out vast rocks which became these thousands of islands!

This afternoon we passed a Chilean gunboat — the only vessel we have seen since leaving Puerto Montt.

A rainbow has just formed over against the Cordillera. The sky is an everchanging panorama of clouds, shadows, streaks of sunshine. I have seen a few gulls, but the sea looks lifeless.

As the sun set we were opposite the Island Transito with the small island Tuap just ahead.

About nine o'clock last evening (March 6, 1930), the little steamer dropped anchor in the Estuary of Aysen and lay there until about five o'clock this morning. The conditions of the river navigations are dangerous at night and when the tide is out. We reached the dock of Aysen about seven. An assistant of the Intendente met me and after a short drive we went to the Intendente's house for breakfast.

Aysén is new.¹³ There was little or nothing here a year and a half ago, — only bodegas of companies in the interior. Now the aspect is that of a frontier town, new hastily constructed buildings, houses, etc., unpaved streets, embryo plazas and parks, many rude hotels, and eager active, boosting population, too many government employees, many men without wives, few women.

I walked over the little Cerro (a miniature Santa Lucia) which is to be the park. Then, to the little experimental farm (or garden) of the government. Agriculture is non-existent here and these experiments begin at first principles, i.e., to determine whether a vegetable, grain or tree will grow in this climate at all. I imagine that it will require much trying to find the vegetation adapted to this chilly wet land. The mountains about here are even now covered with snow, but I am told that the snow does not stay in the valley even in winter.

During the morning I drove with the Intendente as far as "Kilometre 32" on the road to the Argentine (Patagonia). It rained intermittently but that is a characteristic of the country — a part of the show we pay to see! We followed the river Aysén which has a considerable amount of land on either side that can be reclaimed for agriculture. Quite a number of colonists are already struggling with the primitive surroundings. I had been told that Aysén raises nothing, but each little house had its garden, with potatoes, cabbage, beans, peas, etc., and even flowers growing. True, these are pittance beginnings but they are beginnings.

We came to a saw-mill run by a Swede married to a Chilean who speaks English. The mill is a primitive affair but a vital industry. In spite of the forests much of the lumber — almost all of it — for the construction of Aysén has been and is brought from Puerto Montt. The mill cuts the logs and the green lumber is canted off for building. I asked the Swede about the quantity of timber available, for my impression was that the supply is limited. He confirmed my impression. Mountain sides have been burned off and the accessible timber is soon out. What is left would not go far before an American lumber company.

We met wool and sheepskins moving toward Aysén. They are brought over the divide in two-wheeled carts drawn by oxen to "Kilometre 32"

¹³ The region of Aysén (one part of the Patagonia Occidental) was proclaimed the Territorio by the Decree 8582 of December 30, 1927. (RS).

and trans-shipped there to trucks. The scene at "Kilometre 32" is like what I imagine to have been the conditions at an early trans-shipment point in our old west.

The wool comes from the other side of the Cordillera over a pass only 300 meters high. It is produced by certain small herdsmen and on three large concessions granted by the government: (1) *Compania Ganadera Aysén*; (2) *Compania Ganadera Cisnes*; (3) *Compania Ganadera Backer*. For the first ten years these companies pay a rent of one peso per hectare per year; then the rent rises to two pesos to the end of twenty years.

Beyond the Cordillera rain almost ceases and the conditions merge in those of Patagonia.

Thus Aysén has economic importance (1) as a place for settlers who may carry on simple agriculture, a limited lumbering, and fishing. But no exaggerated idea should get abroad as to the possibilities of this development; its limitations stare one in the face everywhere I look; (2) in the second place, Aysén has some importance as an avenue of communication between the Pacific and the interior of Patagonia. The extent of this development is problematical.¹⁴

There is a movement of laborers here which interests me. The native of Chiloé sows his small field in the Spring; then, leaving his crop to be cared for by his family, he goes to Patagonia and even to Magallanes as a shearer of sheep. In increasing numbers, perhaps 5,000 per year, they pass through Aysén en route. They earn a considerable sum of money; then they return over the same route, making purchases of the things they need and arrive in Chiloé in time to assist with the harvesting of their crops.

After luncheon I went with the Intendente, Alcade and several others in a motor-launch (American-made) up the "Río de los Palos". In spite of the light rain it was a precious series of vistas and views. Dense vegetation caressed the water on either side. The outstanding tree was the *Arrayan*; its trunk and limbs appear to have no bark; its leaves are small and it has a white flower which gives the tree a glorious appearance. The *Arrayan* is perhaps not as attractive as the *ulmo* of the lake region but it deserves to be spoken of on a parity. Many of them marked the river bank and in between was the wild fuchsia and the bamboo called *colihue*. Through the vegetation appeared numerous huts of the settlers; we passed some of the settlers rowing their boats. They may not suffer from the social disease "poverty", but they certainly are about as poor as humans can be and still exist.

¹⁴ Cf. Adolfo Ibañez Santa María, "La incorporación de Aysén a la vida nacional," 1902—1936, en: *Historia*, vol. 11, 1972—1973, pp. 339—348. (RS).

The Intendente tells me that in this region they are given the land gratis under these conditions: (1) If a man comes with sufficient capital — horses, cattle, tools to build a house, etc. — he is given the title to 600 hectares as head of a family and 50 hectares more for each child. I gather from what was said that such colonists are usually Chileans who have been living in Argentina. (2) A family that can build a house is given land for that and for a garden. (3) In addition there are laborers who work by the day or gather firewood, fish, etc. (See enclosure No. 2 for further data about Aysén).¹⁵

We left Aysén in the very early morning of March 8, 1930. When I got up we were taking on wood for the engine at a little place called Chelles, at the mouth of the Aysén Estuary. The men who brought the firewood in row-boats looked amphibian. It rained but they were oblivious to it; on the bank the trees and low vegetation come down to the shore and are dripping with moisture; there is where these men live. They are barefooted and lightly clad. Cold and wet must be to them a natural habitat.

On this return voyage we have new passengers. Among them are horses, cows, pigs, sheep, and dogs. Down below it gets as noisy as a barn-yard once in a while. The second-class passengers are down there. Also the kitchen!

There are numerous wooded islands in the Moraleda Channel, just after leaving the Aysén Estuary. They are the most picturesque I have seen on the trip. I feel confident that many of them have not been charted. They are virtually uninhabited. Very little bird life is visible — a few gulls and a few divers.

Several of the Chilean cholos on board are returning to Chiloé from Patagonia. They have been away a couple of years. They have had no word from their families since they left. They have their horses, saddles, etc., and some money.

There is on board also an American missionary who has been distributing New Testaments in the interior. He said that there was no opposition to his work there but that in Chiloé "Protestant" missionaries had made no headway.

Chiloé was the last stand of the Spanish against the Chilean patriots. There are old Spanish families who live on pride in their past, but the general run of people have Indian blood — I can't make out what type of Indian. They are not like the Indian of Temuco.¹⁶

¹⁵ Not printed. (RS).

¹⁶ Cf. N. Tangel, *Chiloé, archipiélago mágico*, vol. 1, Santiago 1972, pp. 14—15, 63—65. (RS).

I have with me a little history of Chile by Francisco Valdes Vergara. I find this reference to Chiloé (P. 218):

"El archipiélago de Chiloé, donde los realistas reclutaron sus mayores tropas para hacer la guerra a los patriotas, permaneció en poder de España después de la batalla de Maipú. Sus habitantes se mantuvieron fieles al Rey, porque no había llegado hasta ellos el contagio de las ideas revolucionarias, ni sentían aspiración alguna a la Independencia. Separados por una enorme distancia del centro de las operaciones militares, no tenían noticia exacta del objeto, ni de los resultados de la contienda. Además el dominio español no tuvo para ellos los caracteres de violencia y crueldad que le hicieron tan odioso en el resto del país. Allí no hubo guerra para someter a los indígenas, que apenas formaban una que otra tribu de indefensos pescadores. En vez del despotismo de los militares castellanos, se hizo sentir en Chiloé, durante la colonia, la pacífica influencia de los sacerdotes encargados de predicar el cristianismo. La sumisión al Rey no fué impuesta por la fuerza de las armas, sino enseñada como un dogma de la iglesia, por los frailes dominicos y franciscanos que establecieron sus conventos en la isla. Esta predicación religiosa, exenta de crueldades y violencias, hizo de los humildes isleños los súbditos más leales de España. Así se explica que, lejos de servir a la Independencia, la resistieran, hasta que el Gobierno mandó un ejército para establecer allí el dominio de la República".

A book published in 1791 thus refers to the Spaniards in Chiloé:

"The Spaniards, both men and women go barefoot, except a few of the principal families, who sacrifice convenience to pride; for in a country so continually wet, it is safer to expose the feet than to cover them".¹⁷

Such is still the case.

I went ashore this morning (March 9), at Chonchi. It rained. Everything is terribly primitive — houses of light wood unpainted, a church altogether too large for the wealth (or poverty) of the place, streets of course without improvements of any kind, no automobiles, horses and carts for the slow transportation, population barefooted. The country has a good aspect and is divided into small farms, but agriculture is very backward. Potatoes seem to be the chief crop. No wheat is exported. In my walk I came to a primitive thresher for wheat. It was in a building. It consisted of a hand-mill, operated by four men and fed by the women. I suppose it was mechanically an advance over the flail and the treading by animals; but in results it was less effective. The wheat-sheaves were wet and the effort of the four men turning the mills suggested the very large amount of human energy represented by a bushel of wheat in Chonchi. No roads worthy of the name run to the interior or to Castro. Communication with the outside world is by sea.

This little steamer, as I have said, burns wood. The back-deck is piled with it. We took it on twice going south, twice coming north. Much

¹⁷ See Introduction. (RS).

time is thus lost, but it is the cheapest fuel, and not very cheap at that. It costs 35.00 Pesos per 1,000 sticks and the engine consumes 1,000 sticks every two hours. The wood is luma.

We took on firewood at Mechuque. It was raining. Several of the amphibian-like inhabitants came aboard to sell Chepones (sucker or shoot). What are they? Well, I am not sure, even after seeing and eating them. Darwin noticed the plant. Speaking of a rocky hill in Chiloé he said (Chapter 14):

"It is covered by a plant allied, I believe, to Bromelia, and called by the inhabitants Chepones. In scrambling through the beds, our hands were very much scratched. I was amused by observing the precaution our Indian guide took, in turning up his trousers, thinking that they were more delicate than his own hard skin. The plant bears a fruit, in shape like an artichoke, in which a number of seed-vessels are packed: these contain a pleasant sweet pulp, here much esteemed".

Just immediately south of the island Mechuque is the island Aníhué. There we took on some cattle. They were forced to swim out from the shore in tow of a row-boat; then a rope was put around their horns and they were lifted by the steamer's derrick from the water and let down into the hold. This barbarous practice, I believe, is prohibited by law, but who cares down here?

Some of the boats used here are dug-outs — large and well-formed. There are also many of the boats which are sewed together, — a good model of which is found in the National Museum in Santiago. Referring in this connection to the people of Chiloé Molina says (Vol. 2, pp. 215—6):

"The necessity they are under of often going from one island to another, where the sea is far from deserving the name of the Pacific, renders the Chilotes excellent sailors. Their pirogues are composed of three or five large planks sewed together and caulked with a species of moss that grows on a shrub. These are in great numbers throughout the whole of the Archipelago, and are managed with sails and cars, and in these frail skiffs the natives will frequently venture as far as Concepción".

A school of porpoises was playing between the two islands as we pulled out for Puerto Montt, six hours away.

We arrived about midnight. It had been raining all evening. The old "capitan" and the "contador" have done their damn best to make me comfortable and the trip pleasant and they have succeeded rather well. The "Santa Elena" is a miserable little craft but what can one expect along these coasts? I salute the men who guide her through these stormy seas. They are deserving of the attention of a Joseph Conrad.¹⁸

¹⁸ Cf. M. Segall Rosenman, "Joseph Conrad, más grande novelista sobre América Latina," en: *Estudios Latinoamericanos*, no. 6, parte II, 1980, pp. 213—227. (RS).

This trip from Puerto Montt to Aysén touched three regions — each full of interest but little known. (1) The history of Chiloé has little more than local importance, but the island and its people offer an interesting and profitable field for the student of sociology, anthropology, and religious superstitions and practices. (Cf. Francisco J. Cava da, *Chiloé y los Chilotes*).¹⁹ (2) The wind-swept, rain-drenched islands of the Guaitecas and the Chonos. (3) Patagonia can be reached from Aysén. In fact, the most irritating contacts between Chile and Argentina are in that region. In the Chilean territory on the eastern side of the mountains the government has, as I have indicated, granted concessions for sheep ranches. Moreover, the population in the adjoining Argentina territory is referred to as "little Chile". The problems of this region have been and continue to be a source of trouble between Santiago and Buenos Aires.

The Straits of Magellan

Concerning Magallanes I cannot speak from personal observation. I have been only as far as Aysén. Chile extends on southward from there not merely to Cape Horn but fifty miles farther toward the antarctic to the islands of Diego Ramirez. The Peninsula de Taitao, just south of Aysén, prevents vessels from continuing to use the inner channels. Opposite the Aysén Estuary, ships must go out into the open and stormy Pacific and cross the Gulf of Pain or Sorrow (Golfo de Penas), before re-entering the channels sheltered by the islands. The approaches to Puerto Natales are said to offer grand views of mountains and glaciers. From Puerto Natales the trip to Magallanes (Punta Arenas) can be made either by sea through the Straits or overland by automobile. In 1832, Charles Darwin was in Tierra del Fuego. He speaks of his experience ashore in these words: (*Voyage of the Beagle*, Chapter 10):

"Finding it nearly hopeless to push my way through the wood, I followed the course of a mountain torrent. At first, from the waterfalls and number of dead trees, I could hardly crawl along; but the bed of the stream soon became a little more open, from the floods having swept the sides. I continued slowly to advance for an hour along the broken and rocky banks, and was amply repaid by the grandeur of the scene. The gloomy depth of the ravine well accorded with the universal signs of violence. On every side were lying irregular masses of rock and torn-up trees; other trees, though still erect, were decayed to the heart and ready to fall. The entangled mass of the thriving and the fallen reminded me of the forests within the tropics — yet there was a difference: for in these solitudes, Death, instead of Life, seemed the predominant spirit".

¹⁹ Cf. Ph. Grenir, *Chiloé et les Chilotes. Marginalité et dépendance en Patagonie chilienne*, La Calade 1984 (RS).

Death, however, is hardly an accurate motto for this far southern land. For centuries it has been a land of adventure not only for the great explorers but for those more obscure. In November, 1877, for example, the convicts in the criminal colony at Magallanes revolted. A United States steamer was in that port at the time and its commander lent his aid. The Chilean Minister for Foreign Affairs addressed the following letter to the American Minister at Santiago (*Foreign Relations of the United States 1878*, pp. 82—83):

"Mr. Alfonso to Mr. Osborn.

Santiago, December 19, 1877.

"Sir: The governor of Magellan has informed my government of the important and disinterested services which the United States Steamer Adams rendered our colony of Sandy Point (Punta Arenas) on the occasion of the deplorable occurrences which took place there during the middle part of November last. Mr. Rodgers, commander of that vessel, not only attended with benevolent solicitude the inhabitants of the colony who sought his protection, but, yielding to his humanitarian sentiments, sent from his vessel all those articles which in the distressing circumstances could contribute to relieve in some degree the abandoned condition in which numerous families had been left.

"My government has not informed itself of these facts without experiencing a strong sentiment of sympathy and acknowledgement toward the commander of the United States Steamer Adams, whose noble conduct has entitled him to the gratitude of the people of Chili.

"I request that your excellency will please make known to Commander Rodgers the expression of these sentiments, and that your excellency accept once more the considerations of the high esteem with which I am.

Your excellency's obedient servant,
Jose Alfonso

Minister of Foreign Relations

Hon. Thomas A. Osborn,

Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary
of the United States in Chili".

Then, too, the pastures have proved a source of life and wealth. The sheep industry has had a phenomenal growth.

The Cordillera

Chile has an abundance of scenery — from the deserts of the north to the frozen mountains of Tierra del Fuego; I have remarked at times that Chile gives me scenic indigestion. But — returning to the Central Valley — I never get tired of the view of the Andes from Santiago or the closer views of the great snow-covered ranges, with their mighty peaks and glaciers, which can be seen to advantage from Maitenes or from the heights above Las Condes. Darwin — to refer to him once again

— approached the Cordillera by the Valle del Yeso and crossed the Pequeñes. Of the view from the crest he said (Chapter 15):

"The atmosphere resplendently clear; the sky an intense blue; the profound valleys; the wild broken forms; the heaps of ruins, piled up during the lapse of ages; the bright-coloured rocks, contrasted with the quiet mountains of snow; all these together produced a scene no one could have imagined. Neither plant nor bird, excepting a few condors wheeling around the higher pinnacles, distracted my attention from the inanimate mass. I felt glad that I was alone: it was like watching a thunderstorm, or hearing in full orchestra a chorus of the Messiah".

Darwin returned by the Uspallata Pass on which stands today the famous statue of the Christ of the Andes. I have twice visited this wind-swept crest. There is, after all, no trip in Chile which gives a better idea of the Andes than the trip along the valley from the Pass to the town of Los Andes. One feels there the overshadowing influence of that mighty mountain — Aconcagua.

Santiago

Molina thus describes the founding of Santiago by Pedro de Valdivia (Volume 2, page 38—39):

"Valdivia, who had endeavoured to penetrate as far as possible into the country, in order to render it difficult for his soldiers to return to Peru, determined to make a settlement in this province; which, from its natural advantages, and its remoteness, appeared to him more suitable than any other for the centre of his conquests. With this view, having selected a convenient situation on the left shore of the Mapocho, on the 24th of February 1541, he laid the foundations of the capital of the kingdom, to which, in honour of that apostle, he gave the name of St. Jago. In laying out the city he divided the ground into plats or squares, each containing 4,096 toises, a fourth of which he allowed to every citizen, a plan that has been pursued in the foundation of all the other cities. One of these plats, lying upon the great square, he destined for the cathedral, and the bishop's palace, which he intended to build there, and the one opposite for that of the government. He likewise appointed a magistracy, according to the forms of Spain, from such of his army as were the best qualified; and to protect the settlement in case of an attack, he constructed a fort upon a hill in the centre of the city, which has since received the name of St. Lucia".

Wherever you are in Chile you will find the roads leading back to Santiago. Whatever variation of Chilean life you find in the provinces you will find the standard in Santiago; you will find there in fact the synthesis of all those ideals, prejudices, and hopes that make up the Chilean character.

You will feel this synthesis on Santa Lucia, in the Plaza de Armas, on the Alameda de las Delicias; you will feel it in the attractive court

of the Moneda; you will feel it especially in the rather musty parlors and straggly patios of the Chilean families, (if you are so fortunate after a long time to be admitted to such secluded spots).

No one ever forgets that he has been in Santiago. His recollections are not always pleasant — ranging from unheated chilly houses in winter and names hard to pronounce and harder to remember to a remoteness of the "best families" and suspicion and dislike of the foreigner. But these latter impressions — never entirely lost — are softened and pushed into the background by the fine qualities of hundreds of Chileans whom one comes gradually to know and by their polite and friendly attentions.

Until the World War life was easy in Chile — for the upper classes. The country was governed and exploited by the aristocracy influenced deeply by the church. Taxation was light, because the export tax on nitrate — paid by the foreign consumer — gave an abundant and ready income for the government. To a very large extent this money was not used for public works or to make permanent improvement for the people. It was wasted at worst in corruption or at best in freeing the propertied class from paying for the ordinary advantage of law and order in an organized society. The aristocracy lived in their fine houses in Santiago in the winter and on their fundos in the summer.

This class, as a class, has lost political power. A new group — just as narrow, more nationalistic, more honest in government — rules the country. The influence of the Army is dominant. It is believed by some that the "military committee" still secretly functions. It is difficult to explain some of the acts of President Ibanez except on the theory that he is influenced by some such force. Free masonry is more influential in the government than the church. Ibañez is a Mason and those interested in getting results from officials arrange to know the "Grand Master".

Government is extending its privileges to the ordinary citizen. The Chileans are flocking to the American "talkies" — they like the music and are eager to learn the English (or American, as our British friends grumble). New buildings are going up. Not only economic but cultural ties are drawing Santiago more and more away from Europe toward the United States.

But as we survey the new forces and manifestations in Chilean life, let us not be misled. The old forces are still here. The old aristocracy and the church will continue to play an important role (not necessarily hostile to the United States). Past mistakes in our diplomacy are not forgotten and will be used by those who wish to stir up prejudice against us. The unthinking people — and that means the greater part of the population — will continue to harbor suspicion and fear of us. Our diplomacy in Santiago can never be without its perplexing problems.

I approached Chile by the avenues of romance and mystery. I have haphazardly glanced into corners of her landscape, her history and her life. I am conscious that I have written only a preface. But I am sure that if and when I extend this survey, I will follow the same trail of romance and in the end be as far away as I am now from the solution of the mystery of the Chilean people and their life.

I have the honor to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. S. Culbertson²⁰

Enclosures — 2.²¹

- 1 — *From a Complete Collection of Voyages and Travels by John Harris, DD. etc., London, 1764.*
- 2 — Translation of article from *La Nación*, Santiago, April 11, 1930, "Puerto Aysén".

Signed (RS).

²¹ Not printed. (RS).