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Giovanni Ignazio Molina

Excerpt

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THE
NATURAL HISTORY
OF
CHILI.

CHAPTER I.

Situation, Climate, and Natural Phenomena.

CHILI, a country of South America, is situated upon the South Sea or Pacific Ocean, between the 24th and 45th degrees of south latitude, and the 304th and 308th degrees of longitude from the meridian of Ferro.

Its length is estimated at 1260 geographical miles, but it varies in breadth as the great range of mountains, called the Cordilleras or the Andes, approach or recede from the sea; or, to speak with more precision, as the sea approaches or retires from those mountains. Between the 24th and 32d degrees of latitude, the distance of the sea from the mountains is about 210 miles; from the 32d to the 37th it is but 120; and in the broadest part of Chili, near the Archipelago of

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Chiloé, it is little less than 300 miles. In calculating from these various extents, the surface of Chili may be estimated at 378,000 square miles.

SECT. I. *Limits.*—Chili is bounded upon the west by the Pacific Ocean, on the north by Peru, on the east by Tucuman, Cujo, and Patagonia, and on the south by the land of Magellan. It is separated from all these countries by the Cordilleras, which form an insurmountable barrier on the land side, while the sea renders it secure upon that quarter. The few roads which lead to Chili from the neighbouring provinces are impassable, except in summer, and are so narrow and dangerous that a man on horseback can with difficulty pass them.*

* There are about eight or nine roads which cross the Cordilleras of Chili, of which that leading from the province of Aconcagua to Cujo is the most travelled. This road, which cannot be passed in less than eight days, is bordered on one side by the deep beds which the Chile and the Mendoza, two considerable rivers, have worn there; on the other side, by very lofty and perpendicular mountains. It is so narrow and incommodious, that, in many places, travellers are obliged to quit their mules, the only animal that can be employed, and to proceed on foot; nor does there a year pass when some loaded mules are not precipitated from these roads into the rivers. These precipices, however, do not follow the whole course of the road; for occasionally it passes over very agreeable and pleasant plains, where travellers halt to refresh themselves. In these places the Incas, when they conquered Cusco and the northern provinces of Chili, caused some stone

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The extent which modern geographers assign to Chili is much greater than that which the inhabitants allow it; the former usually comprehend within it, Cujo, Patagonia, and the land of Magellan. But these countries are not only separated from it by natural limits, but their climate and productions differ; their inhabitants have countenances totally unlike the Chilians, and their language and customs have no resemblance.*

SECT. II. *Name*.—The writers upon America have given various derivations of the name of Chili, which are either wholly false, or founded on absurd conjectures. It is certain, however, that it was known by its present name long before the arrival of the Spaniards. The inhabitants derive the name from certain birds of the thrush kind, that are very common in the country, and

houses to be constructed for the accommodation of their officers: one of which has been ruined, but the others still remain entire. The Spaniards have built some more, for the greater convenience of travellers.

* Although the principal mountain of the Cordilleras is the natural termination of Chili to the east, I comprehend within its confines not only the western valleys of that mountain, as necessarily attached to it, but also the eastern; as, though not comprised within its natural limits, having been occupied by Chilian colonies from time immemorial.

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whose note has some resemblance to the word Chili. And it is not improbable, that the first tribes, who settled there, considered this note as a good omen, and named the country accordingly.*

SECT. III. *Natural Divisions.*—Chili naturally divides itself into three parts, the first comprehending the islands; the second, Chili properly called; and the third, the Andes, or the country occupied by that range of mountains. The islands that belong to Chili are: the three Coquimbanes, Mugillon, Totoral, and Pajaro. These islands are desert; and are said to be six or eight miles in circumference.

The two islands of Juan Fernandez; one of these known by the name of Isola di Terra (the shore-island) from its being the nearest to the continent, is about 42 miles in circumference. Lord Anson, who remained there some time, describes it as a terrestrial paradise; it is at pre-

* The colonists who went from the southern part of Chili to settle the Archipelago of Chiloé, an emigration that took place some ages prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, called those islands Chil-hue, which signifies a district or province of Chili, influenced, undoubtedly, by the desire of preserving the memory of their original country; and all the Chilians, those who have continued free as well as the subjugated, call their country Chili-mapu, that is, the land of Chili, and its language Chili-dugu, the language of Chili.

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sent inhabited by the Spaniards. The other, which bears the name of Masafuera, (*the more distant*) is smaller, and although its appearance is as beautiful and inviting as that of the Isola di Terra, it has remained till the present time uncultivated and uninhabited.

The island of Carama. This is rather a rock than an island capable of cultivation. Quiriquina, at the entrance of the harbour of Conception, and Talca or Santa Maria, are two islands of about four miles in length; and are the property of two wealthy inhabitants of Conception.

Mocha. This island, which is more than 60 miles in circumference, is handsome and fertile. It was in the last century inhabited by the Spaniards, but is at present deserted.

The Archipelago of Chiloé, with that of the Chones, which is dependant upon it, comprehends eighty-two islands that are inhabited by some Spaniards and Indians. The largest of these islands, which has given its name to the Archipelago, is Chiloé; it is about 150 miles in length; the capital of it is Castro.

All these islands are near the coast, except those of Juan Fernandez, the first of which is 330, and the second 420 miles distant.*

* In the same sea, but very remote, are situated the little islands of St. Ambrosio, St. Felix, and that of Pasqua, (or

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Chili properly called, or that part which is situated between the Andes and the sea, is at least 120 miles in breadth : It is commonly divided into two equal parts, that is, the maritime country, and the midland country ; the maritime country is intersected by three chains of mountains, running parallel to the Andes, between which are numerous valleys watered by delight-

Easter Island) much celebrated for the great number of statues which the natives have erected in various parts of it, either as ornaments, or, what is more probable, as tutelary divinities. The two first, which are desert, are distant 200 leagues from the coast of Chili, and are situated in 26 deg. 27 min. south latitude; but that of Pasqua, which is probably the same with Davis's land, and is in 27 deg. and 5 min. south latitude, and about the 268th deg. of longitude, is 600 leagues distant from that coast. This island is but a little more than five leagues in extent, and its inhabitants, who do not exceed 800, are whiter than most of the Indians, and permit their beards to grow. The statues that are met with throughout the island are very numerous, and of various sizes ; some of them being 27 feet in height, and others not exceeding that of a man. To the sight and touch they appear like stone ; but as they are all of a single piece, and there are no quarries on the island capable of furnishing stones of that size, it is probable that they are formed of some kind of plaster or cement that, when dry, assumes the consistency and colour of stone. The Dutch admiral, Roggewein, who was the first that visited this island, in the year 1722, says, that these statues were wrought with much skill. Don Philip Gonzalez, commander of the ship of war Rosalia, who was there in the year 1770, and Captain Cook, in March, 1774, both agree with Roggewein as respects the number and size of these statues.

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ful rivers. The midland country is almost flat; a few insolated hills only are to be seen, that diversify and render the appearance of it more pleasing.

The Andes, which are considered as the loftiest mountains in the world, cross the whole continent of America, in a direction from south to north; for I consider the mountains in North America, as only a continuation of the Cordilleras. The part that appertains to Chili may be 120 miles in breadth; it consists of a great number of mountains, all of them of a prodigious height, which appear to be chained to each other; and where nature displays all the beauties and all the horrors of the most picturesque situations. Although it abounds with frightful precipices, many agreeable valleys and fertile pastures are to be found there; and the rivers that derive their sources from the mountains,* often ex-

* The highest mountains of the Cordilleras of Chili are the Manfios, in 28 deg. 45 min. the Tupungato, in 33. 24. the Descabezado, in 35 deg. the Blanquillo, in 35. 4. the Longavi, in 35. 30. the Chillan, in 36. and the Corcobado, in 43. I had no opportunity, while in the country, to measure the height of these mountains, which naturalists assert are more than 20,000 feet above the level of the sea. Buffon asserts, that the highest mountains of the earth are to be found under the equator; but having seen and particularly noticed both those of Peru and of Chili, I doubt much the correctness of this axiom, and am more inclined to adopt the opinion of M. Bertrand, who, in his Memoirs upon the Structure of the Earth,

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hibit the most pleasing as well as the most terrifying features. That portion of the Cordilleras which is situated between the 24th and 33d degrees of latitude, is wholly desert; but the remainder, as far as the 45th degree, is inhabited by some colonies of Chilians, who are called Chiquillanes, Pehuenches, Puelches, and Huilliches, but are more generally known by the name of Patagonians.

SECT. IV. *Political Divisions.*—The political divisions of Chili consist of the part occupied by the Spaniards, and that which is inhabited by the Indians. The Spanish part is situated between the 24th and 37th degrees of south latitude, and is divided into thirteen provinces, to wit: Copiapo, Coquimbo, Quillota, Aconcagua, Melipilla, and St. Jago, (which contains the capital city of the country of the same name) Rancagua, Calchagua, Maúle, Ytata, Chillan, Puchacay, and Huilquilemu.* The division of

says, “It is not true that the highest mountains are found under the equator, since the Andes increase in height in proportion as they recede from it.” The Cordilleras are lower at Copiapo, notwithstanding it is nearer the tropic, than in the other parts of Chili.

* I have thought proper in this place to give a short account of the situation and extent of all these provinces, with their capitals, ports, and principal rivers. I should also have given

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these provinces is very irregular, and imperfectly designated: there are some of them which ex-

a statement of their population, but was not able to obtain an estimate which satisfied me.

Copiapo—extending from the Andes to the sea, is 100 leagues in length, and 70 in breadth. Its capital—Copiapo, situate in 26 deg. 50 min. south latitude. Ports—Copiapo and Guasco. Rivers—the Salado, Copiapo, Totoral, Quebrada, Guasco, and Chollay.

Coquimbo—extending from the Andes to the sea; in length 45 leagues; in breadth 70. Its capital—Coquimbo, in 29 deg. 54 min. Ports—Coquimbo and Tongoy. Rivers—Coquimbo, Tongoy, Limari, and Chuapa.

Quillota—situated on the sea-coast, in length 25 leagues, in breadth 21. Its capital—Quillota, in 32 deg. 56 min. Ports—Papúdo, Herradura, Quintéro, and Valparaiso, in 33 deg. 2 min. Rivers—Longotoma, Ligua, Chile, and Limache.

Aconcagua—in the vicinity of the Andes; 25 leagues in length, and of equal width. Its capital—Aconcagua, in 32 deg. 48 min. Rivers—Longotoma, Ligua, and Chile.

Melipilla—on the sea-coast; 11 leagues in length, in breadth 23. Its capital—Melipilla, in 33 deg. 32 min. Port—St. Antonio. Rivers—Maypo, Maypoche, and Poangue.

Santiago—near the Andes; 11 leagues in length, in breadth 20. Its capital—Santiago, in 33 deg. 31 min. Rivers—Colina, Lampa, Mapoche, and Maypo.

Rancagua—from the Andes to the sea; in length 13 leagues, in breadth 40. Its capital—Rancagua, in 34 deg. Rivers—Maypo, Codelgüa, Chocalan, and Cachapoal.

Colchagua—from the Andes to the sea; 15 leagues in length, and 43 in breadth. Its capital—St. Fernando, in 34 deg. 18 min. Ports—Topocalma and Navidad. Rivers—Rio-Clarillo, Tingiririca, Chimbarrongo, Nilahue, and Teno.

Mañe—from the Andes to the sea; 44 leagues long and

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tend from the sea to the Andes ; others occupy but the half of that space, and are situated near the mountains or upon the coast. Their extent is also very various, some of them being six or seven times larger than others. These provinces were formerly inhabited by the Copiapins, Coquimbranes, Quillotanes, Mapochinins, Promaucians, Cures, Cauques, and Penquons. At present there exist but few remains of any of these nations.

The Indian country is situated between the river Bio-bio and the Archipelago of Chiloé, or the 36th and 41st degrees of latitude. It is inhabited by three different nations : the Arauca-

48 broad. Its capital—Talca, in 34 deg. 33 min. Port—Astillero. Rivers—Mataquito, Rioclaro, Lircay, Maúle, Putagan, Achihuenu, Liguay, Longavi, Loncomilla, and Purapél.

Itata—on the sea-coast ; 11 leagues in length and 23 in breadth. Its capital—Coulemu, in 36 deg. 2 min. Rivers—Lonquen and Itata.

Chillan—near the Andes ; in length 12 leagues, in breadth 25. Its capital—Chillan, in 36 deg. Rivers—Catillo, Cato, Nuble, and Chillam.

Puchacay—on the sea-coast ; 12 leagues long and 25 broad. Its capital—Gualqui, in 36 deg. 42 min. Rivers—Lirquen, Andalién, and Bio-bio.

Huilquilemu—near the Andes ; 12 leagues long and 25 broad. Its capital—Huilquilemu, in 36 deg. 42 min. Rivers—Itata, Claro, and Laxa.

The Spaniards likewise possess the port and town of Valdivia with its territory, situated upon the south shore of the river of the same name, in 39 deg. 55 min. south latitude.