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Giovanni Ignazio Molina

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The Geographical, Natural, and Civil History of Chili

Juan Ignacio Molina (1740–1829) was a Jesuit priest born in Chile but forced to flee to Europe after his religious order was expelled from the Spanish Empire in 1767. He settled in Bologna, Italy, and began to write a natural history of his homeland, which was first published in Italian in 1782 (he is also known as Giovanni Ignazio Molina). He completed a second volume on the history of the people of Chile in 1786, and a version of the book was in the library of HMS *Beagle*. This two-volume English translation was published in 1809, and also includes notes from other explorers, including a 1791 account of Chile by Pedro González de Agüeros (1768–93) and a 1774 description of Patagonia by Thomas Falkner (1707–84). Volume 1 covers the natural history of Chile, including the territory's diverse climate, geology, plants, and wildlife.

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VOLUME 1:

THE NATURAL HISTORY OF CHILI

GIOVANNI IGNAZIO MOLINA



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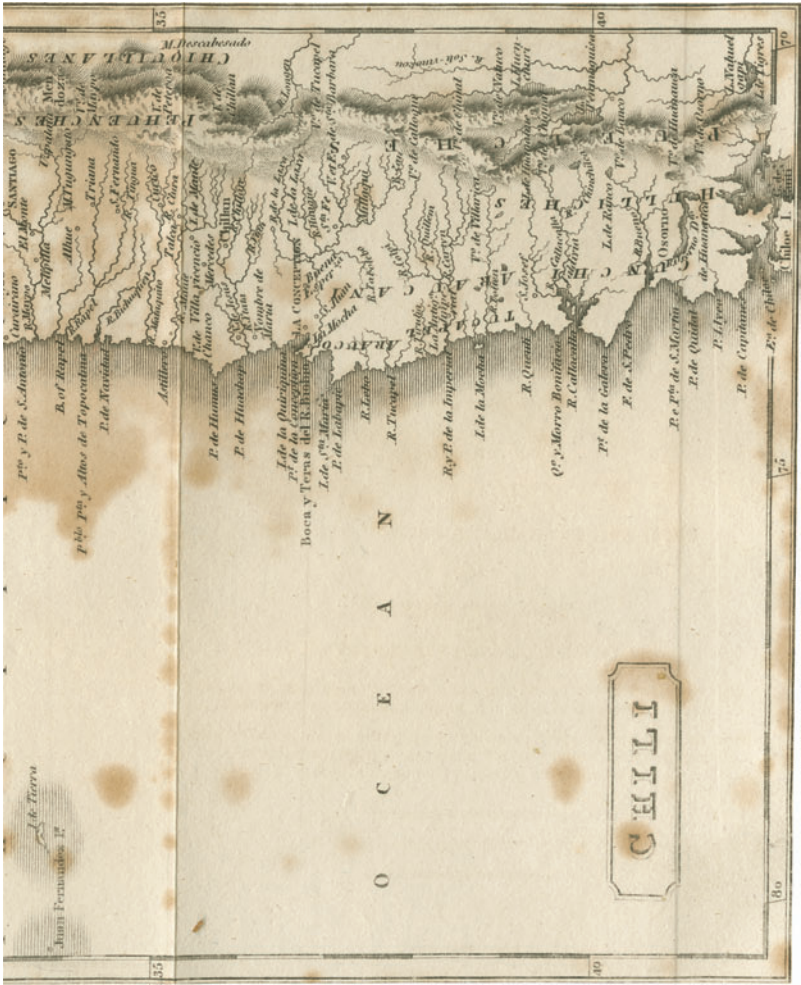
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THE
G E O G R A P H I C A L,
N A T U R A L, A N D C I V I L
H I S T O R Y O F C H I L I.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL ITALIAN OF

THE ABBE DON J. IGNATIUS MOLINA.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED,

NOTES

FROM THE SPANISH AND FRENCH VERSIONS,

AND

TWO APPENDIXES,

BY THE ENGLISH EDITOR;

THE FIRST, AN ACCOUNT OF THE ARCHIPELAGO OF CHILOE, FROM THE DESCRIPCION HISTORIAL OF P. F. PEDRO GONZALEZ DE AGUEROS;

THE SECOND, AN ACCOUNT OF THE NATIVE TRIBES WHO INHABIT THE SOUTHERN EXTREMITY OF SOUTH AMERICA, EXTRACTED CHIEFLY FROM FALKNER'S DESCRIPTION OF PATAGONIA.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE.

IMPORTANT and interesting as has ever been the History of the Spanish settlements in America, particularly to the inhabitants of the same continent, that importance and interest is at the present period greatly increased, by the occurrence of events of such magnitude, as will most probably be attended with the total severance of those colonies from Europe, and the establishment of a new empire in the west. Of these settlements, Chili is in many respects one of the most important. Blest with a soil fertile beyond description, a climate mild and salubrious in the highest degree, productive of every convenience and most of the luxuries of life, and rich in the precious metals, Nature appears to have been delighted in lavishing its bounties upon this favoured portion of the globe. In its minerals, its plants, and its animals, the naturalist will find an interesting and copious field of research; and the character of its natives fur-

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nishes a subject no less curious and interesting to the moralist. The proud and invincible Araucanian exhibits some characteristic traits altogether new in the aborigines of this continent, and scarcely to be paralleled in any nation of the old. The long and successful resistance of this brave people to the arms of Spain, even in the meridian of its military glory, is a wonderful instance of what a nation can perform when animated by a spirit of liberty, and determined upon freedom or death. The Araucanians, it is true, to their high sense of independence and unyielding courage, had the good fortune of uniting a system of tactics so excellent as even to excite the admiration of their enemies, and to this in a great measure may be ascribed their successfully opposing, with far inferior arms, a powerful and disciplined foe.

Whether the peculiar character of the Araucanians proceed from the influence of climate combining with moral causes, or is wholly derived from their institutions and free form of government; whether, with the Chilians in general, they are of foreign origin, and a distinct race from the other natives of America, the remains, as the author supposes, of a great and powerful people, who had attained a high degree of civilization, and possessed a polished and copious language; or whether their agricultural knowledge, military skill, and the cultivation of their

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idiom, are owing merely to fortuitous circumstances, are points of curious inquiry, and such as will afford an ample field for conjecture.

The author of the present work, **Don Juan Ignatius Molina**, was a native of Chili, distinguished for his literary acquirements, and particularly his knowledge of natural history, large collections in which he had made during his residence in that country. On the dissolution of the celebrated order of the Jesuits, of which he was a member, he shared the general fate of that community, in being expelled from the territories of Spain, and was, at the same time, deprived not only of his collections in natural history, but also of his manuscripts. The most important of the latter, relative to Chili, he had, however, the good fortune to regain by accident, some time after his residence in Bologna, in Italy, whither he had gone on his arrival in Europe.

Furnished with these materials, he applied himself to writing the history of that country, which was published at two different periods; the first part, comprising the Natural History, in the year 1787, and the second, containing the Civil, for reasons mentioned in his Preface, not until some years after. This work, which was written in Italian, has obtained a very high reputation on the continent of Europe, where it has been translated into the French, German, and Spanish languages. The celebrated Abbe

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Clavigero, in his *History of Mexico*, in referring in a note to that of Chili, mentions it in the most respectable terms, and calls the author his learned friend.

In rendering this work into English, reference has been had both to the French and Spanish versions, which contain some valuable additional notes. Through the politeness of a gentleman of his acquaintance, the translator has also been furnished with an anonymous compendium of the *History of Chili*, printed in Bologna, in 1776, from which the supplementary notes to this volume are taken.

In addition to what is said above, the English Editor has to state, that he has, from documents in his possession, added a few occasional Notes, which are distinguished by the letters *E. E.* He has also subjoined, from Falkner's *Description of Patagonia*, a further elucidation of the language of the Auracanos; and two Appendixes, the first containing an Account of the Archipelago of Chiloé, from the *Descripcion Historial* of that Province, by P. F. Pedro Gonzalez de Agueros, printed at Madrid, in 1791; and the second, an Account of the Native Tribes who inhabit the Southern Extremity of South America, extracted chiefly from Falkner's work.

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PREFACE

TO THE

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THE attention of Europe is at this time more than ever directed to America. We are desirous of obtaining information of its climate, its natural productions, and its inhabitants; in short, every thing that is worthy of notice in that part of the world is now a subject of interest to the most enlightened nations.

Chili is acknowledged, by all who have written upon America, to be one of its provinces meriting the most attention. This country is distinguished, not so much by its extent, as by the mildness of its climate; and it may be said to enjoy all the advantages of the most favoured countries without their inconveniences.

In my opinion, it may, with propriety, be compared to Italy; as this is called the garden of Europe, that, with more justice, may be styled the garden of South America. The climate of the two countries is nearly the same,

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and they are situated under nearly similar parallels of latitude. They likewise resemble each other in the circumstance of their being of much greater extent in length than in breadth, and that they are both divided by a chain of mountains. The Cordilleras or the Andes are to Chili, what the Appennines are to Italy, the source of almost all the rivers that water the country, and diffuse over it fertility and abundance. This chain of mountains has as sensible an influence on the salubrity of the air of Chili, as the Apennines have upon that of Italy; and so firmly are the inhabitants convinced of this fact, that, whenever they attempt to account for any change in the state of the atmosphere, they attribute it to the effect of these mountains, which they consider as powerful and infallible agents.

A country so remarkable, both for its natural productions, and its political state, certainly merits to be well known; yet the accounts that we have of it are merely superficial, and little is to be found, respecting its natural productions, in writers upon natural history. Of the language and the customs of the inhabitants we are equally ignorant, and scarcely any thing is known of the exertions which the Chilians have made, even in our days, to defend their liberties.

A few well-informed travellers, who have been in the country, have published some valuable accounts, but too concise to furnish a

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competent idea of it. Father Louis Feuillé, a French Minim friar, has given a scientific description of the plants that he found upon the coast, to which he has added an account of several animals that he noticed there. This is a work of great merit; the descriptions are precise, and perfectly correct; but as it was published by the order and at the expense of the king, the copies of it have become very scarce, and are in the possession of but few.

A number of Spanish authors have treated of this country. The last century produced several, not to mention those of the present; but few of their writings, however, have been published, for reasons which I shall hereafter assign. Of the latter, the first in point of merit are those of Don Pedro de Figueroa, and the Abbés Michael de Olivarez and Philip Vidaurre. The two former treat of the political history of the country, from the arrival of the Spaniards to the present time. That of the Abbe Olivarez merits particular attention, from the great number of interesting facts relative to the long wars between the Spaniards and Araucanians, which he has collected with no less judgment than industry. The work of the Abbé Vidaurre is principally employed upon the natural production and customs of Chili, and displays much intelligence and acuteness of research.

Besides the histories, or, more properly speak-

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ing, the accounts that have been written of this country, there are four poems that have for their subject the Araucanian wars ; also an anonymous abridgement in Italian of the Geographical and Natural History of Chili, published in 1776, which, in some respects, particularly with regard to geography and natural history, furnishes a more complete account of Chili than we have had. But as that compendium is much too concise, I presume I shall render an important service to those who feel an interest in what respects America, by presenting them with this essay, in which I have dwelt more fully and precisely upon the natural productions of Chili, as well as upon the most conspicuous events that have occurred in that country.

At an early period of life, I began to turn my attention both to the natural and political history of Chili, with the view of publishing, at some future time, the result of my inquiries. Some untoward circumstances, however, interrupted my progress, and I had even relinquished the hope of having it in my power to carry my plan into effect, when a fortunate accident put me into possession of the requisite materials, and enabled me to offer the present work to the public ; to which, in a short time, I proposed adding another essay or compendium of the civil and political history of the same country.

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The method that I have adopted in arranging this work, has been to divide it into four chapters: The first, after a succinct geographical account of Chili, which may serve as an introduction, treats of the seasons, winds, meteors, volcanoes, earthquakes, and state of the climate. The other three I have devoted to a description of natural objects, proceeding from the simplest to the most complex, that is, from the mineral to the vegetable and animal kingdoms; and, in the last, have added some conjectures of my own respecting the inhabitants of Chili and the Patagonians, or pretended giants, whom I consider as the mountaineers of that country.

I have referred, as far as was in my power, the various objects noticed to the genera of Linnæus, but in some instances where I have not been able to reduce them to those that are known, I have invented new, in conformity to his system. That author's mode of classification I have not, however, pursued, as it appeared to me incompatible with the plan of my work. Though I have followed the system of that celebrated Swedish naturalist, it is not from a conviction of its superiority to that of any other, but because it has been of late so generally adopted; for, great as is the respect which I feel for that learned writer, I cannot always approve of his nomenclature, and should have preferred pursuing the system of Wallerius and Bomare in mineralogy, that of

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Tournefort in botany, and of Brisson in zoology, as I think them to be more simple and better known to the world in general.

In describing objects of natural history, I have avoided the use of technical terms, as being difficult to be understood by those not conversant with that study; but for the gratification of such as are familiar with that science, I have given, at the bottom of the page, the Linnæan characters in Latin, both of the known species, and of those that are new, which I have discovered*. My descriptions will, for the most part, be found to be short, and such as merely furnish the essential character of the species. The common characteristics of the genus I have passed over intentionally, and it will be found that the same brevity prevails throughout the work, which is written in a plain and unaffected manner, without bewildering myself with vague conjectures and hazardous hypotheses, which would have been deviating altogether from the limits that I had prescribed to myself.

I have frequently quoted those authors who have written upon Chili, and have judged this precaution the more necessary, as, in treating of a country so remote and so little known, I could

* *It has been thought advisable in this version to make some variation in this respect, and, conformably thereto, the technical descriptions will be found at the end of the volume, arranged under their respective heads....*Amer. Trans.

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not expect to be believed on my own unsupported assertion ; but the passages that I have selected will evince that I have not exaggerated in my accounts of the salubrity of the climate, and the excellence of the soil, and that I might have been justified in saying still more.

With respect to this work, it is no more than a compendium, or an abridged history of many of the natural productions of Chili. The reflecting reader will not look in it for a complete natural history of that country ; such a work would have required much greater means than I possess, and such assistance as I have not been able to procure.

Those acquainted with M. de Pauw's philosophical inquiries respecting the Americans, will perhaps be surprised to find in my work some remarks which do not correspond with what that author has said respecting America in general. But whatever I have asserted respecting Chili is founded upon personal experience and attentive observation during a residence of many years in that country ; and, in support of what I have advanced, I have cited the authority of several respectable authors, who were eye-witnesses, and not hear-say relaters, of what they have written. M. de Pauw, on the contrary, not only never saw the country that he has undertaken to characterize, but even appears not to have been solicitous to consult those authors who

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have written upon it ; for, although he frequently mentions Frazier and Ulloa, he cites their opinions only as far as they tend to confirm his theory. Both those authors speak of Chili as very fertile, but M. de Pauw has not thought proper to insert those passages, but only observes, in general terms, that wheat cannot be raised except in some of the North American provinces.

Led away by inferences drawn from an ideal system of his own invention, he has carried his visionary notions so far that his work partakes more of the nature of a romance than a philosophical disquisition. It is sufficient for his purpose to find, in the vast extent of America, some small district or unimportant island labouring under the disadvantages of an unfavourable climate or unproductive soil, to attribute these circumstances as general to all the provinces of that country. A wretched tribe of the most obscure savages serves as his model of character for all the Americans. Such is the logic of M' de Pauw : It would be an endless task were I to endeavour to confute the numerous erroneous opinions that he has advanced respecting America ; upon that subject he has deduced his conclusions from the most unfounded premises, and employed a mode of reasoning that might, with equal propriety, be applied to the prejudice of any other portion of the globe ; a proceeding that can be justified neither by reason nor philosophy In

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short, De Pauw has made use of as much freedom with regard to America as if he had been writing upon the moon and its inhabitants. But to appreciate properly the observations of this author, I shall refer the reader to the opinions of many learned men who have visited that country, and have fully refuted his assertions. Among those who merit particular attention on this subject, is Count Juan Reynaldes Carli, so well known by his various literary productions, particularly his *American Letters**, in which, with much critical and philosophical investigation, he has comprised whatever may serve to convey a clear and correct idea of America.

N. B. The reader is informed that the mile made use of in this work is the geographical mile of sixty to a degree, the foot the French foot, and the pound that of Italy, of twelve ounces.

* Those literati who are desirous of becoming perfectly acquainted with America, will do well to consult this work, which consists of three volumes....*Sp. Trans.*

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