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Giovanni Ignazio Molina

Excerpt

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THE
CIVIL HISTORY
OF
CHILI.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

*Of the Origin, Appearance, and Language of
the Chilians.*

THE origin of the primitive inhabitants of Chili, like that of the other American nations, is involved in impenetrable obscurity; nor have they any records, or monuments of antiquity, that can serve to elucidate so interesting an inquiry. Upon the arrival of the Spaniards they were entirely unacquainted with the art of writing, and their traditionary accounts are so crude and imperfect, that they afford not the least degree of rational information to the inquisitive mind. Many of the inhabitants suppose that they are indigenous to the country, while others derive their origin from a foreign stock, and at

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one time say that their ancestors came from the north, and at another time, from the west.

It is a general opinion that America was settled from the north-eastern part of Asia, from the supposed easy communication between them, in consequence of the vicinity of these countries. But the opinion entertained by the Chilians, that their country was peopled from the west, is not so extravagant as at first sight it may appear. The discoveries of the English navigators in the South Sea have ascertained that between America and the southern point of Asia there is a chain of innumerable islands, the probable remains of some vast tract of land which, in that quarter, once united the two continents, and rendered the communication between Asia and the opposite shore of America easy. From whence it is very possible that, while North America has been peopled from the north-west, the south has received its inhabitants from the southern parts of Asia, the natives of this part of the new world being of a mild character, much resembling that of the southern Asiatics, and little tinctured with the ferocity of the Tartars. Like the languages of the Oriental Indians, theirs is also harmonious, and abounds in vowels. The influence of climate may undoubtedly affect language so far as to modify it, but can never produce a complete change in its primitive structure.

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The Chilians call their first progenitors *Pegni Epatun*, which signifies the brothers *Epatun*, but of these patriarchs nothing but the name is known. They also call them *glyce*, primitive men, or men from the beginning, and in their assemblies invoke them, together with their deities, crying out with a loud voice, *Pom, pum, pum, mari, mari, Epunamun, Amimalguen, Peni Epatum*. The signification of the three first words is uncertain, and they might be considered as interjections, did not the word *pum*, by which the Chinese call the first created man, or the one saved from the waters, induce a suspicion, from its similarity, that these have a similar signification. The lamas, or priests of Thibet, from the accounts of the natives of Indostan, are accustomed to repeat on their rosaries, the syllables *hom, ha, hum, or om, am, um*, which in some measure corresponds with what we have mentioned of the Chilians.

That Chili was originally peopled by one nation appears probable, as all the aborigines inhabiting it, however independent of each other, speak the same language, and have a similar appearance. Those that dwell in the plains are of good stature, but those that live in the valleys of the Andes, generally surpass the usual height of man. The purer air which they respire, and the continual exercise to which they are accustomed among their mountains, may perhaps be

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the cause of this difference, by imparting greater vigour to their frames. The features of both are regular, and neither of them have ever discovered that capricious whim, so common to savages of both the old and new world, of attempting to improve nature by disfiguring their faces, with a view of rendering themselves more beautiful or more formidable. Of course, M. Buffon has been led into an error in asserting, in his treatise on man, that the Chilians are accustomed to enlarge their ears.

Their complexion, like that of the other American nations, is of a reddish brown, but it is of a clearer hue, and readily changes to white. A tribe who dwell in the province of Baroa are of a clear white and red, without any intermixture of the copper colour. As they differ in no other respect from the other Chilians, this variety may be owing to some peculiar influence of their climate, or to the greater degree of civilization which they possess; it is, however, attributed by the Spanish writers to the prisoners of that nation, who were confined in this province during the unfortunate war in the sixteenth century. But as the Spanish prisoners were equally distributed among the other provinces of their conquerors, none of whose inhabitants are white, this opinion would seem to be unfounded. Besides, as the first Spaniards who came to Chili were all from the southern provinces of Spain,

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where the ruddy complexion is rare, their posterity would not have exhibited so great a difference.

On examining the harmony and richness of their language, we are naturally led to conclude that the Chilians must have, in former times, possessed a much greater degree of civilization than at present; or, at least, that they are the remains of a great and illustrious nation, ruined by some of those physical or moral revolutions so common to our globe. The improvement and perfection of language constantly follow the steps of civilization; nor can it be easily conceived how a nation that has never emerged from a savage state, that has neither been polished by laws, by commerce, nor by arts, can possess an elegant, expressive, and copious dialect. The number of words in a language presupposes a correspondent number of ideas in the persons who speak it, and these among a rude people are, and, necessarily must be, very limited.

So copious is the Chilian language, that, in the opinion of those well acquainted with it, a complete dictionary thereof would require more than one large volume; for, besides the radical words, which are very numerous, so great is the use of compounds, that, it may almost be said, in this consists the very genius of the language. Each verb, either derivatively or conjunctively, becomes the root of numerous other verbs and

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nouns, as well adjectives as substantives, which in their turn re-produce others that are secondary, modifying themselves in a hundred different ways.

Nor is there any part of speech, from which an appropriate verb cannot be formed by the addition of a final *n*. Even from the most simple particles various verbs are derived, that give great precision and strength to conversation. But what is truly surprising in this language is that it contains no irregular verb or noun. Every thing in it may be said to be regulated with a geometrical precision, and displays much art with great simplicity, and a connection so well ordered and unvarying in its grammatical rules, which always make the subsequent depend upon its antecedent, that the theory of the language is easy, and may be readily learned in a few days.

This close analogy and regularity, may at a slight view induce an opinion little favourable to the capacity of those who formed or polished this dialect, as the original languages, it is well known, were regular in their rude and primitive state. But a very different conclusion will be drawn by those who examine its structure, and attend to the extent and complexity of ideas necessary to have formed it, and to have modified the words in so many different ways, without embarrassing the particular rules.

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The same language also abounds with harmonious and sonorous syllables, which give it much sweetness and variety ; this is, however, injured by the frequent recurrence of the *u*, a defect from which the Latin is by no means exempt. In this respect the latter has, however, been fortunately corrected in its derivatives, particularly the Italian, which has studied to avoid, especially in the finals, the unpleasant sound resulting from the use of that vowel.

The Chilian differs from every other American language, not less in its words than its construction, with the exception of from eighteen to twenty of Peruvian origin, which, considering the contiguity of the two countries, is not to be wondered at.

But what may appear much more singular is, that it contains words apparently of Greek and Latin derivation, and of a similar signification in both languages ;* I am inclined, however, to think this merely an accidental resemblance.

** If this is not, as our author supposes, merely a casual resemblance of a few words, which frequently occurs in languages radically different, it certainly affords much ground for curious speculation ; and we may, perhaps, be led to consider the tradition of a Phenician or Carthaginian colony in America, as not altogether so destitute of probability, especially as the language of the Chilians, so different from that of any other of the American tribes, appears to indicate a different origin.—Amer. Trans.*

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CHAP. II.

Conquest of the Peruvians in Chili.

THE history of the Chilians does not precede the middle of the fifteenth century of our era ; before that period, for want of records, it is lost in the obscurity of time. The first accounts of them are contained in the Peruvian annals ; that nation, as they were more civilized, being more careful to preserve the memory of remarkable events.

About that time the Peruvians had extended their dominion from the equator to the tropic of Capricorn. Chili, bordering upon that tropic, was too important an acquisition not to attract the ambitious views of those conquerors. This country, which extends for 1260 miles upon the Pacific Ocean, enjoys a delightful and salutary climate. The vast chain of the Cordilleras bordering it upon the east, supplies it with an abundance of rivers, which increase its natural fertility. The face of the country, which is mountainous towards the sea, and level near the Andes, is well suited to every kind of vegetable production, and abounds with mines of gold, silver, and other useful metals.

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Favoured by the pleasantness of the country and salubrity of the climate, the population at this period may be readily imagined to have been very numerous. The inhabitants were divided into fifteen tribes, or communities, independent of each other, but subject to certain chiefs, called Ulmenes. These tribes, beginning at the north and proceeding to the south, were called Copiapins, Coquimbans, Quillotanes, Mapochinians, Promaucians, Curés, Cauques, Pencones, Araucanians, Cunches, Chilotes, Chiquilianians, Pehuenches, Puelches, and Huilliches.

The Inca Yupanqui, who reigned in Peru about the year 1450, being informed of the natural advantages possessed by Chili, resolved to attempt the conquest of it. With this intent he marched with a powerful army to the frontiers of that kingdom; but, either through apprehension of his personal safety, or with the view of being in a more favourable situation to furnish the means of effecting his designs, he established himself with his court in the neighbouring province of Atracama, and entrusted the command of the expedition to Sinchiruca, a prince of the blood royal.

Preceded, according to the specious custom of the Peruvians, by several ambassadors, and followed by a large body of troops, this general subjected to the Peruvian government, more by persuasion than by force, the Copiapins, Coquim-

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banes, Quillotanes, and Mapochinians. After this, having passed the river Rapel, he proceeded to attack the Promaucians, who could not be induced by the persuasions of the ambassadors to submit themselves. This nation, whose name signifies the free dancers, from their being much attached to that diversion, inhabited the delightful country lying between the rivers Rapel and Maúle, and were distinguished from all the other tribes by their fondness for every species of amusement. The love of pleasure had not, however, rendered them effeminate: they opposed the Peruvian army with the most heroic valour, and entirely defeated it in a battle, which, according to Garcilasso the historian, was continued for three days in succession, in consequence of the continued reinforcements of both parties.

The Inca, on learning the ill success of his arms, and the invincible valour of the Promaucians, gave orders, that in future the river Rapel should serve as the boundary of his dominion on that side. Garcilasso says, that it was the river Maúle, but it is by no means probable, that the conquerors should be comprehended within the territories of the vanquished. In fact, not far from the river Cachapoal, which, together with the Tinguiririca, forms the Rapel, are still to be seen upon a steep hill, the remains of a fort of Peruvian construction, which was