

THE DESERET WEEKLY.

Truth and Liberty.

No. 19.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, OCTOBER 22, 1898.

VOL. LVII.

THE BACK WOODS OF CHILE.

Concepcion, Chile, Sept. 20, 1898.—I have just returned from a trip through the back woods of Chile, a region which travelers seldom visit and of which many who have visited this part of the world would doubt the existence. Northern Chile is a desert. For one thousand miles south of the Peruvian frontier there are not enough trees to furnish switches for the public schools. I rode hundreds of miles south of Santiago through irrigated farms where the only trees to be seen were those planted along the borders of the ditches, and it was only in the neighborhood of Concepcion that I found woods of any size. From here I have gone a day's ride by train to what is known as the frontier. I passed many vast farms cut out of the forest, where the stump-filled fields reminded me of the newly settled regions of our wooded northwest. South Chile is covered with forest. It contains some of the best land in the country, and it has so much rain that the farms do not require irrigation. This country has been a wilderness until within recent years. Now the government is opening up to settlement. The railroads are being steadily extended further south, and new towns and villages are springing up along them.

These frontier towns remind one of the new settlements of the United States. Take Temuco, for instance, where I spent some days last week. It is twelve years old and has 10,000 people. It covers about as much space as an American city of the same size. Its streets are wide and filled with black mud, and its one and two-story houses which line them are wooden. They have ridge roofs, and many of them are mere shanties. Every house has a flag staff, and although the climate here is about as cold as that of Washington, not a house has a chimney. The people generally believe that fires are unhealthy, and like the Chinese rely upon their clothes to keep them warm. The Temuco streets cross one another at right angles, and in the center of the town there is a park or plaza of about an acre, where the military band plays and where the people walk about on Sunday afternoon and stare at each other.

It has a club, where you find the latest English, German and Chilean papers. It has three hotels, two French and one German, all of which are better than the hotels of towns of the same size in the states. It has plenty of saloons, where raw alcohol is sold to the peons or laborers and the Indians, but fewer than an American town of its character where the liquors are drunk on the spot. It has Catholic churches, and already our own Methodist Episcopal people, who have done so much for education in Chile, have established a missionary church and a school here. The street scenes of Temuco are different from those of our frontier. There are more queer costumes. There are dark-faced Indians, Germans and well-dressed Spanish Chileans. Men with ponchos over their shoulders, dark faces

and the air of brigands, drive the ox-carts which lumber through them. Each man carries a boad fifteen feet long, and directs the oxen by striking them on this side and that. Now and then you see teams of six and eight of these beasts. The oxen are the only draught animals, excepting the six ragged horses which haul the two cabs between the railroad station and the hotel. It is in ox-carts that the thousands of bushels of wheat raised near by are brought to the markets. Oxen everywhere do the plowing, the hauling of lumber, the draying and everything that heavy horses or mules do with us. The method of yoking the oxen is the same here as all over Chile. The yoke rests on the neck just back of the horns, and all of the pushing or pulling of the cart or plow must be done with his head. The yoke is a heavy piece of wood, so fastened that one ox cannot move without the other, and so that it is impossible to swing it from side to side. The tongue of the frontier cart is as big as a telegraph pole. It is a part of the cart itself, and as the oxen work they have the weight of this resting on their horns. It seems cruel in the extreme, and the oxen seem to me to move painfully along, with protruding eyes, as they drag their heavy loads.

In company with Don Augustine Balza, the government inspector of colonization, I made a trip into the wilderness over the thirty kilometers of new railroad, which is almost finished, but not yet ready for traffic. The road is being built by the state to open up new lands, and it is part of a system which will extend from one end of agricultural Chile to the other. The road is well built with 60-pound English rails and the English 4 feet 8 gauge. It will cost excluding the bridges, about \$12,000 gold per mile. The rolling stock will be American, and it was in a Baldwin engine and on American hand cars that we made a part of our journey over the line. The steel bridges, and there are two, each of which cost more than a hundred thousand dollars, were bought from France, although why America did not get the contract I do not know, a large number of the best of the present railroad bridges having been imported from the United States. The stations were built and a wide space fenced in about each of them. There are as yet no towns about the stations. The government regulates such settlements. It lays out the town lots, giving them at low prices to actual settlers. The railroad town boomer thus has no chance along the new state lines of Chile. The other government lands are sold in large lots and at auctions which are held in different parts of the country once of twice a year. Just now money is scarce here and valuable lands go very cheap. The land is usually sold in pieces of 1,500 acres, but one purchaser can buy at each sale up to 5,000 acres, and if he wants more he can, of course, purchase the additional amount through a third party or under another name. At such sales a quarter of a million acres are sold at a

time. The land brings from \$1.75 to \$33 gold per acre, according to its position and character, and the buyers must pay only one-third cash and the remainder without interest in ten equal installments running through ten years. Many of the rich men of Chile have become so by buying these lands. They rapidly increase in value, and the only provision required by the government is that the purchaser put a fence about the property he buys.

Chile has been very anxious to have immigration, and she has in the past offered extraordinary inducements to colonists. Each male immigrant was given 100 acres of land, a team of oxen, a cart and a barrel of nails and 300 boards to build him a house. He was also loaned money for his passage from Europe to Chile, and was paid \$15 a month for the first year of his residence on the farm. He received in addition 50 acres more land for each son over ten years of age, but was expected to pay back all advances, the whole amounting to about \$600, except the land, within eight years from his arrival. These terms have, I believe, been discontinued. Under them great numbers of Germans came into Chile, and today parts of the New South Chile are largely German settlements. The cities of Valdivia and Puerto Montt, situated at harbors on the south coast, are almost German cities, and the most of the property there belongs to the Germans. They own great wheat farms about Angol and Traiguén, which are also large towns in the region south of here, and they have established tanneries and breweries in a number of places. The trees of South Chile furnish excellent tan bark, and great quantities of sole leather is made at Valdivia, and shipped thence via Hamburg to Russia. There is a great deal of good land here, and it can be bought very cheap, but I would not advise any but those prepared to farm in a large way to come to Chile. Labor is cheap, and the ordinary American cannot compete with the Chilean roto in prices. There is room for our people only as proprietors and managers. Such men with a capital of ten thousand dollars and upward—better fifty thousand dollars or a hundred thousand dollars than ten—can make money here in farming and land speculation.

The papers of Santiago, Valparaiso and Concepcion are full of mortgage foreclosures, and at forced sale some of the best of the big estates are being sacrificed. Owing to the extravagance of the people, the probability of war with the Argentine, the fall of silver and the money complications of the country, times were never so hard here as they are now. I am told that estates which paid as high as 20 per cent on a valuation of \$300,000 a few years ago, can be now bought for \$100,000 and less. Many of these farms are irrigated. Two big estates near this city are to be sold within the next six months. One contains 40,000 acres and the other 24,000 acres. They will not bring more than one-fourth their actual value, and will, I am told, pay a