

Social and Commercial Activities in Chile

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SANTIAGO, Chile.—Chile is having hard times and the European war adds to its woes. The people have been living beyond their means. Many of them are loaded with debt, and the foreign obligations of the nation now amount to more than \$300 for every family in the republic. The internal debt is over \$30,000,000 and the Chilean dollar is 30 per cent below par. Business is not good and at the same time the cost of living has jumped out of sight. Beef, which has always been cheap, has risen until some cuts now sell for 30 cents and more a pound, and bread, milk, vegetables and fruits are higher than they have ever been in the past. House rents are rising. Here in Santiago ordinary dwellings are bringing from \$30 to \$200 a month, and nearly every one is denouncing the greed of his landlord.

The most of the common people live in what we would call two-family houses. The buildings are low on account of the earthquakes and many of them have only two floors. The first story apartments bring the most money, as from such apartments one can get out the quicker. There are no big flat buildings here. The highest houses have only four or five stories, and skyscrapers are yet to be built.

The very poor live in what are called *cities*. These are little tenements of one story, built in blocks. Each tenement has two rooms, one at the front and the other at the back. The only window is at the front. There are no heating or bathing arrangements, and the water has to be carried in from outside. Such an apartment will rent for from \$5 to \$7 per month, and if it is in a good location and of a little better construction it may bring \$15 or \$20. Many such buildings are owned by the church, and others by rich Chileans, who get most of their incomes from these rents. The capitalists like these small houses because the rent is always paid in advance, and the interest on the investment is high. The church is one of the great real estate owners of Santiago. It has all kinds of property, from tenements to palaces, and from individual stores to great business blocks. A large part of the property on the Plaza de Armas, in the very heart of Santiago, belongs to it, and it owns buildings of all kinds scattered here and there through the city.

Labor Prices Rising. The prices of labor in Chile are rising, but they are still far below those of the United States. The average salary of a clerk in a store is equal to from \$30 to \$50 of our money. Bookkeepers get about \$80 a month, stenographers \$40 or \$50, and if they are foreigners they may receive as high as \$100. In this case they must be able to speak and write Spanish, and also be expert with the typewriter and in reading their notes.

In this connection, I would say that there is no chance here for young Americans without money who have no special experience or skill of one kind or another. If they are mechanical or mining engineers, or experts in farming or fruit raising, there may be some openings; but for pure brains and pure muscle the country has an ample supply of its own, and that at wages which would not be tempting to the American.

As it is now, the native labor supply of Chile is being largely increased by the employment of women. They are making their way into the government offices. They clerk in the postoffices, they act as cashiers in the mercantile establishments, and they sell goods to the large department stores that have recently been established in Santiago. In the latter places female clerks are paid salaries of \$20 a month with a commission on their sales, which in some cases runs the salary to as high as \$100 per month. The chief objection to such positions is that the holder loses caste among her friends by taking them. Women have been so secluded in Chile that the people have not yet become accustomed to their fighting the battle of life for themselves. Nice girls never go out alone in the evenings, and even in the daytime those of the better classes are seldom seen on the street without some older woman with them. When a young girl goes to school she is usually accompanied by a servant or by her father or mother, and some are sent to bring her back home. The positions of secretary and cashier rank higher than those of the clerks, but most classes of the people look askance at the girl who works for a living.

Working Girls Not Extra Safe. I doubt whether the young business woman is as safe in Chile as she is in our country. The fact that she works out at all subjects her to the danger of liberties on the part of the other sex. The white slave trade exists to an even greater extent than in the United States, and I am told that there is a large class of girls who are by no means as good as they should be. The social evil is increased in the cities, and everything is supposed to be under a rigid inspection. The Spanish custom of preventing the boys and girls from having anything to do with one another on the social level of purity and virtue drives the young men to the demimonde for their social companions, and it defeats the end it hopes to gain.

Moreover, if a young man calls upon a young woman a half a dozen times, and spends the evening with her in the presence of the family, he is thought to have serious intentions of marriage, and the father, uncle or aunt straightway demands how soon he expects to propose. If he then says that he does not want to get married, he is told that his further visits are not desired. The bear act, which means the standing out on the streets in front of your sweetheart's house and casting sheep's-eyes at her as she looks down from the balcony, is fast going out of use, although it is still the custom in some other of the Latin-American countries, and notably in Mexico and Central America. Nevertheless, in the aristocratic class a family would have to be in financial straits before it would think of allowing its daughter to clerk in a store. For this reason the female clerks are sometimes sneered at as "rotos" by the others of their sex, who prefer to starve at home.

Country One of Classes. In order to understand the social conditions here it must be remembered that the country is one of classes. Chile has always had its aristocrats, its middle class and its common people. The last does the work of the country, and it is generally known by the term *Inquilinos*. The aristocrats are the descendants of the Spaniards and more especially of the patriots among them, that had to do with freeing Chile from the yoke of Spain. These men are the controlling influences of the country. They have the fat offices, and own nearly all of the property. Some have stock in the nitrate and other mines, and not a few are engaged in the various



The Chilean Tango

industries. Many of them are rich farmers, and it is from them that come the heads of universities and the chief doctors and lawyers. The most of the aristocrats are men of fine education. They are the progressive element of the country. They are proud of Chile and are intensely patriotic. They are not afraid to fight for their rights, and they will not submit to injustice either as individuals or as a nation.

The middle classes are merchants and small land holders. Among them are many pure whites, and many who have more or less Indian blood mixed with that which comes down from the Spanish.

The lower class are known as the *Inquilinos*, or, erroneously, as *rotos*. The word *roto* is one of contempt. It conveys the idea of a drunken, good-for-nothing character. This is not the nature of the *Inquilino*, the Chilean peasant. He is a good, hard-working, honest man as a rule and anything but a loafer. He is a descendant of the peasant class of north Spain and of the Araucanian Indians. He is intelligent and quick to learn anything that requires handiness and craft. He can do all kinds of work, and is skilled in the handling of stock. He is hardy and vigorous, and noted for his endurance and patience. At the same time, he is brave, he is very quick tempered and will fight upon slight provocation. He seems to care nothing for life, and very little for pain.

Foolish in Character. Indeed, the *Inquilino* will do all sorts of foolish things rather than be despised by his friends. The other day several peons were drinking together with a crowd of their fellows, when one man charged another with being a coward. "You think so?" was the reply. "Well, I will prove that I am not." Would a coward do this? And thereupon he pulled out his knife and plunged it into his bowels again and again, before the admiring eyes of the crowd. "I will show you that I also am not a coward," rejoined the first speaker, and he began to stab himself. The two men would have committed suicide, had not a young priest rushed in and torn the knives from their hands, and called in the police to take the men to the hospital. These men were drunk, but even so, no drunken man but a Chilean would think of proving his courage in such a way.

Speaking of drunkenness, this is the crying evil among the Chilean peasantry. The *Inquilinos* drink to excess in both city and country. Their chief end seems to be to get drunk, and the majority have a spree once a week. Monday is called the *rota's* holiday, for he is often drunk Sunday that he has to take Monday to recover. The liquor used is the vilest of alcohol, being often made of potatoes and rotten grapes. It would, as one of the employes says, kill the ordinary man at a thousand yards. The stuff is gulped down in great quantities, not because it is liked, but because it makes the drunk come. There are many saloons, and a recent census showed 6,000 places in Santiago where liquor was sold, and in Valparaiso the average was one saloon for every twenty-four men. There are drinking places in all the Chilean villages, and every small town and hacienda store keeps liquors for sale. Of late, there have been some movements toward temperance, but so far but little has been accomplished.

Mortality is Great. As a result of these excesses and of the poor food and unsanitary conditions of the houses, the mortality among the *Inquilinos* is great. They breed like Australian rabbits, and their babies die like flies. It is only the strong children who live, and for this reason perhaps the people, as a class, are as tough and strong as any people of the world. I have seen them carrying nitrate bags weighing 300 pounds each and tossing them about like bags of feathers. Four of them will lift a piano and carry it along the roadway, and in the mines a peon will tote a bag of ore, weighing 150 pounds, up the notched stick that serves as a ladder all day long.

As to the homes of the peons, they are often little better than pigpens. Some of the large haciendas have recently been erecting model dwellings, but the most of the tenant houses are still shanties of adobe brick or huts made of reeds and sticks, woven together and plastered with mud. They are thatched with straw. The doors are rude and the windows are small. The ground is often the floor, and the furniture consists of little more than a table covered with cloth, a few rough chairs and a bed. These people have large families, and a hut fifteen or twenty feet square is often the home of six or eight people.

The *Inquilinos* pay no rent for such houses, and they have in addition small tracts of ground which they can cultivate, as well as pasture for a certain number of cattle. In return they have to provide labor for the proprietor whenever it is required, and that at wages that are often half the current rates of the neighborhood. The hacienda has the right to discharge the *Inquilino*, and the *Inquilino*



Houses of adobe brick

has the right to leave when he pleases. As a rule the haciendas try to hold their men, and the men, if at all well treated, are not likely to move. On some of the farms there is a general store run by the landlord for his servants, and there the *Inquilino* makes the most of his purchases. He is supposed to give one man's work in exchange for his rent, and this means that he gets his house and garden for from \$2 to \$5 per week. I am told that the *Inquilinos* love their masters, and I know that the masters are fond of the men who work for them. The master occupies somewhat the position of a feudal lord, and the men treat him with a great deal of respect.

Army Civilizing Them. The service in the army, which is now universal, is having civilizing influence upon the lower classes. Every young man, when he arrives at the age of twenty, is supposed to spend one year in the military establishment, during which time he is whipped into shape, taught to obey and made into a soldier. The military system is that of Germany, and education is combined with the training. There are German professors in all the military academies, and the cadets who aid in handling the troops are usually well educated. The *Inquilino* is broadened by this service, and it tends to make him leave the farm for the city and to engage in labor there.

Another influence toward civilizing and elevating the *Inquilino* is the labor organizations. They are slowly making their way into the various countries of South America. The railway employes are organized and so are the stevedores, as well as the members of some of the mechanical trades. The labor element is beginning to take part in politics, and it has now two representatives in the Chilean congress. The departments of police and of the state railways are under the civil service, and positions there are in great demand among the common people, especially as the wages are high.

The Chilean policeman receives about \$20 a month and one meal a day. He is under military training and patrols the streets with his knapsack on his back. In time of war he will probably go into the

army. It seems strange to see a policeman marching up and down the street in the heat of the afternoon with a great knapsack on his back.

Speaking of the police, they have the custom here, common to all South American cities, of whistling every half hour or so throughout the night. They have shrill whistles, which they blow loud and long, waking the light sleeper and warning the burglar or thief as to just where they are.

Much of the mercantile business of Chile is done by foreigners. The full-blooded Spaniard looks down upon trade, and he is content to have the half-breed and the man from outside do his merchandising for him. The big business is mainly in the hands of foreigners, and some of the largest fortunes of the country are held by families with European names. The Chilean minister to Great Britain is Augustus Edwards. He owns the *Mercurio*, the leading newspaper of the country, and has millions in farms and stocks of one kind and another. Among other prominent names are the Foeters, the Walkers and Rogers. One of the great patriots and heroes of Chile was named O'Higgins, another was Cochrane and another Arturo Prat. The city of Valparaiso today is largely European, and its chief business establishments are English or German. There is a great deal of English, Irish and American blood in some of the best families of Santiago, and the southern part of the country is given over to the Germans.

FRANK G. CARPENTER.

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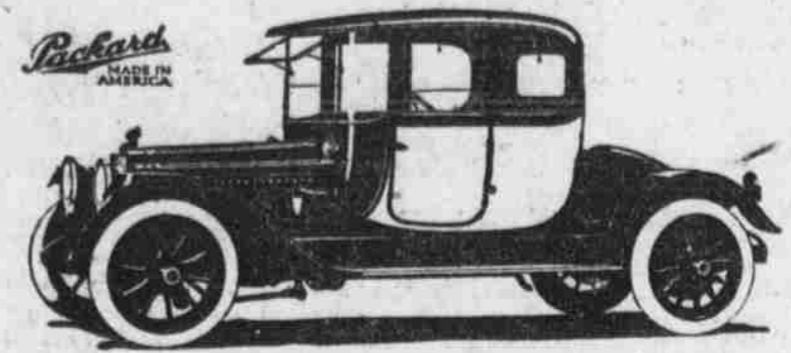
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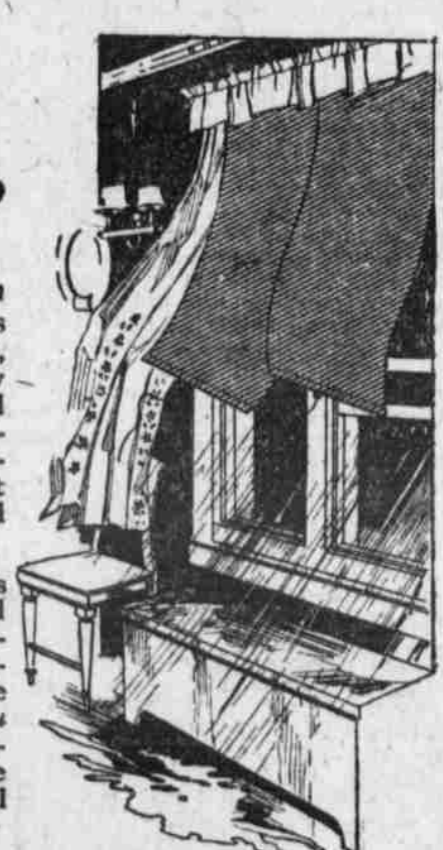


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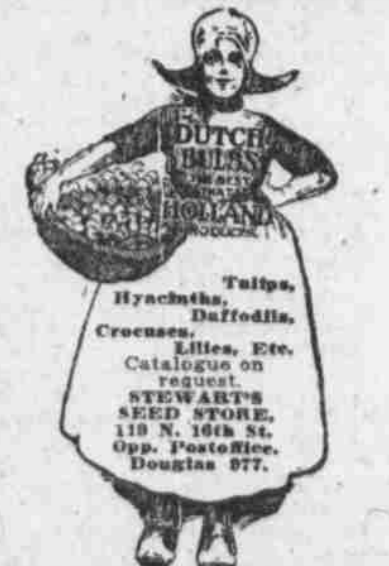


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