

and above this Guasco Alto, a horticultural village, famous for its dried fruit. On a clear day the view up the valley is very fine; the straight opening terminates in the far-distant snowy Cordillera; on each side an infinity of crossing lines are blended together in a beautiful haze. The foreground is singular from the number of parallel and step-formed terraces; and the included strip of green valley, with its willow-bushes, is contrasted on both hands with the naked hills. That the surrounding country was most barren will be readily believed, when it is known that a shower of rain had not fallen during the last thirteen months. The inhabitants heard with the greatest envy of the rain at Coquimbo; from the appearance of the sky they had hopes of equally good fortune, which, a fortnight afterward, were realized. I was at Copiapó at the time; and there the people, with equal envy, talked of the abundant rain at Guasco. After two or three very dry years, perhaps with not more than one shower during the whole time, a rainy year generally follows; and this does more harm than even the drought. The rivers swell, and cover with gravel and sand the narrow strips of ground which alone are fit for cultivation. The floods also injure the irrigating ditches. Great devastation had thus been caused three years ago.

June 8th.—We rode on to Ballenar, which takes its name from Ballenagh in Ireland, the birthplace of the family of O'Higgins, who, under the Spanish government, were presidents and generals in Chile. As the rocky mountains on each hand were concealed by clouds, the terrace-like plains gave to the valley an appearance like that of Santa Cruz in Patagonia. After spending one day at Ballenar, I set out, on the 10th, for the upper part of the valley of Copiapó. We rode all day over an uninteresting country. I am tired of repeating the epithets barren and sterile. These words, however, as commonly used, are comparative; I have always applied them to the plains of Patagonia, which can boast of spiny bushes and some tufts of grass; and this is absolute fertility, as compared with northern Chile. Here again, there