

A CHILEAN VINEYARD

BY

ROBERT S. PLATT

University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois

ABSTRACT

The Viña Conchalí is in the heart of Chile in the Central Valley. The district is semiarid and development depends largely on water for irrigation provided by streams from the high Andes. A share of the water diverted from the Río Mapocho above Santiago and carried in a canal along the valley side is delivered to the Viña Conchalí at the upper edge of the property and thence distributed in a carefully laid out system of ditches reaching every field.

The size of the property is 275 acres, of which 100 acres are in steep slopes of the mountain foot and 175 acres are in the valley plain.

In this setting the owners have developed a high grade wine vineyard. The valley land of alluvial silt, deep and fertile, well drained and well watered, is divided by ditches and roads into 40 fields, practically all occupied by vines. The slope land is unimportant, being given over mainly to unilled pasture. In addition there are small patches of subsistence crops distributed along the base of the slope and along the main road near laborer's dwellings.

There are 26 small houses in which live the fixed inhabitants of the estate, Chileans of mixed white and Indian blood. The Chilean proprietors of the vineyard do not live on the property. The principal house is occupied by the manager, a Frenchman skilled in wine production.

The wine making establishment is at the main transportation focus of the estate, a location reflecting the need for immediate treatment of the perishable crop and also the incentive to nearby reduction of the bulky fruit to a more compact product. After a period of seasoning in storage vats the product is transported by truck to a warehouse in Santiago whence it is distributed to the Chilean market. The functioning of the whole establishment moves in the annual cycle of grapes and wine.

The Viña Conchalí is typical of one sort of development in central Chile. In addition there are grain farms, livestock farms and fruit orchards. These all are in contrast with rural establishments in other parts of Chile—unirrigated farms of the forest region a little farther south and subtropical oases few and far between in the desert regions to the north.