

THE BRITISH COMMUNITY IN CHILE BEFORE
THE NITRATE AGE

I

During the nineteenth century Chile was one of the most politically stable of the Latin American republics, and similarly the country enjoyed greater economic development (meaning simply that production grew more rapidly than population) than most of its neighbours. The process of development took place in conjunction with Chile's entry into the expanding world economy, which was then dominated by the countries of the North Atlantic, particularly Britain. The size of Chile's trade with this country can be seen in Table I.

TABLE I CHILEAN TRADE WITH GREAT BRITAIN
(figures are percentages)

Year	1850	1860	1870	1880
Exports to Britain	32.0	75.3	60.4	77.7
Imports from Britain	34.6	33.5	45.1	45.3

Source: M. J. Mamalakis, *The Growth and Structure of the Chilean Economy* (New Haven, 1976), p. 32.

British merchants had begun to penetrate Latin America well before the independence era. Following the end of the Spanish Empire, British penetration of the new markets expanded greatly, partly because the new republics opened their ports to trade by removing the colonial restrictions, but principally because the Industrial Revolution had given Britain huge competitive advantages over its rivals. A result of this expanding commercial intercourse was the establishment of British communities in the major centres of trade, whether in Asia, Africa,

or Latin America, to mediate the trade. This paper aims to examine the British community in Chile as a community, apart from its economic role, to see exactly what its influence upon its hosts was.

The role of foreign elements in helping to bring change to Latin America in the nineteenth century is generally acknowledged. Culture, politics, economy, all felt the impact of external and specifically western European or north American stimuli. This was particularly the case in the field of economics, for foreign investment, skills, and technology could all be exploited, it seemed, without endangering traditional social structures or offending cultural or religious *mores*. And when a country offered security of life and property, marketable resources, and opportunities for investment, then foreigners were happy to oblige. Chile was the first Spanish American country to qualify, and throughout the nineteenth century achieved such visible economic development that the republic was held up by such critical observers as Horace Rumbold, British minister in the 1870s, as an example of what could be achieved, but usually was not, by the Latin American republics.

Until Chile acquired the nitrate provinces of Peru and Bolivia, where unique circumstances prevailed, Chileans controlled – and managed – the country's natural resources. Land remained a domestic monopoly, and Chileans owned most of the mining industry, either individually or through shares in companies. Foreign banks came late to Chile, at least in part because the domestic ones were established and appeared well-run, and even in insurance, domestic companies competed with foreign ones. Yet nobody, then or since, denied the importance of foreign elements in enabling Chile to achieve its progress, and after the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), foreigners became highly visible as owners of Chile's principal export staples, first nitrates, then copper. However, before the War, the period covered in this paper, this aspect of foreign penetration was small, but the fact of Chile's integration into the process of 'dependent development' cannot be denied¹. Foreigners, and especially Britons, contributed to this process.

Britons came to Chile as soon as the break-up of the Spanish Empire made this possible. Before the middle of the Century, it may be argued that domestic conditions in the republic affected economic development there as much, or more, than external factors. This was because investment and production were still governed in large part

¹ See Donald Denoon, *Settler Capitalism: The Dynamics of Dependent Development in the Southern Hemisphere* (Oxford, 1983), for a stimulating comparative study of this concept.

by local expectations. However, with the stimuli offered to the agricultural sector by the Californian and Australian gold rushes, and the demand from industrial Europe for copper, after about 1850 the growth of the economy moved in step with external needs rather than domestic ones. In particular, it followed the progress of Great Britain's 'the modern Rome':

Is England at peace? Then Chile is also tranquil...

Is England at war? The Chilean market immediately suffers the bad effects of the monetary and commercial disturbances of this vast mart of credit and riches.

Does the Bank of England raise the rate of discount?

Amongst us, exchange immediately falls.

Is the rate of interest lowered?

Then, not only the government but private firms of good standing have facilities afforded them of raising loans remunerative and well guaranteed.

This is the manner in which we have been enabled to lay down nearly all our railways, both public and private; have worked by means of associations, powerful mines; given stability to our banks, joining them by means of exchange to English capital, and conserving our honour and credit as debtors by paying by means of this combination of circumstances with 'English punctuality' that which we owe to the English².

So wrote Benjamin Vicuña Mackenna in Valparaíso's English language newspaper, *The Chilean Times*, in 1880.

This was true of other Latin American republic then, though perhaps not all would have celebrated the condition so openly (even in an English-language newspaper). Britain's position in the international economy did confer on that country great influence in the economic affairs of others, whether or not this was supported by the presence of an active British community. However, in Chile there did exist a significant because concentrated, skilled, and monied, British community whose contribution to Chile's economy and society was rather more than the concept of 'hora inglesa'. Yet neither was

² *Chilean Times*, 15 May, 1880.

the republic dragged kicking and screaming into the nineteenth century: Chileans, or those who ran the country, knew where they wanted to go, and considered and accepted suggestions, from outsiders only when they wanted to.

The obvious immediate source of advice was the resident foreign community, and in the circumstances of the nineteenth century, in particular the British. Their country was Chile's largest single trading partner, provider of capital, and source of expertise. So did British community created and then direct this relationship? What, in fact, was the effect of its existence in Chile on Chileans?

II

The community was not large. An estimate of 1824 put it at between 1000 and 3000 for Valparaiso alone, but this seems likely to be considerable exaggeration³. Certainly for the period concentrated upon here, mid-century to the War of the Pacific, the total for the whole country only reached the estimate's upper figure in 1865. Table II gives the relevant figures. The increase between 1875 and 1885 is entirely accounted for by the residents in the new nitrate provinces of Antofagasta and Tarapacá. It was a predominantly male community, the number of females remaining steady at between a quarter and a fifth of the total. When the number of seamen is deducted from the total, it is clear that it was certainly not numbers that gave the British their influence. Rather, it was skills: In 1865, the principal occupations of employed Britons, other than seamen, were: merchant, carpenter, miner, engineer, artisan, and smelter⁴, and qualitative evidence suggest that in each case they were at the skilled end of the spectrum.

They lived where skills secured jobs, that is, in the principal port and the mining provinces. In Valparaiso and in the small towns and mines of the *norte chico* groups of Britons established themselves and occasionally their families, exploiting the opportunities their skills and the local economy provided. The vast majority worked directly in the import-export sector, buying and selling, providing services, and producing, particularly in the mining sector. Though agriculture was an important export industry, it failed to attract Britons. The good lands

³ R. A. Humphreys (ed.) *British Consular Reports on the Trade and Politics of Latin America 1824-1826* (London, 1940), p. 91, n. 1.

⁴ *Censo jeneral de la republica de Chile 1865* (Santiago, 1866), pp. 376-377.

TABLE II BRITONS IN CHILE

Year	Total Population	Britons	Naturalised Britons	Principal Centres					Principal Occupations	
				Val.	Ata.	Coq.	Con.	San.	Sea.	Mer.
1854	1,439,120	1934	—	708	485	213	287	130	245	230
1865	1,819,223	3092	125	1206	604	541	322	192	688	220
1875	2,075,871	4109	158	1800	530	679	320	382	1056	372
1885	2,527,320	5184	116	1528	469	845	296	236	1699	437

Source: Censo Jeneral de la República de Chile, 1854, 1865, 1875, 18885.

NOTE: Val.: Valparaíso; Ata.: Atacama; Coq.: Coquimbo; Con.: Concepción; San.: Santiago; Sea.: Seamen; Mer.: Merchants.

of the central valley were all taken up, and the areas where the Chilean governments hoped to settle immigrants, for example in the province of Llanquihue were uninviting. One of the few British settlers, John Christie, warned his countrymen:

that they must put their shoulders
to the wheel for they will have a dense
forest to face and some hardships, unless,
indeed, they have capital and can purchase
a place already improved . . .⁵.

But Britons with capital did not come to Chile. Rather, they came because they had none, and believed they had a good chance of making some, certainly better than at home. However, the fact that so many were male indicates that they did not intend to settle, rather the aim was to make their fortunes and then return to the United Kingdom. Most did not realise this dream, but the fact that they believed they could was of great importance in determining how they lived while in Chile, and consequently on the nature of their influence on and in the country.

Naturally and inevitably, this impact was largely the result of the 'demonstration effect', rather than of conscious efforts to push the British way of life. For one thing, Britons secured no privileges from being British; indeed the Chilean government in its contracts with its own British employees required that they renounce their "rights as a British subject whilst . . . in the service of Chile in all matters which are in relation with the obligations . . . [of] this Agreement . . . submit in all that pertains to the Laws and Governmental arrangements which are in force in Chile in regard to public employees"⁶. Furthermore, the widespread belief that their sojourn in Chile was to be brief also meant that individuals were uninterested in Chile outside that part involved with their jobs, which meant that they looked to their own compatriots for recreation, and generally for social intercourse outside working hours. So the conscious communities came into existence.

In practice, most Britons stayed far longer than their initial contracts suggested. Only the seamen could expect to see 'home' with any frequency, let alone regularity. Those whose conditions of employment

⁵ *Valparaiso and West Coast Mail*, 26 April 1870.

⁶ Archivo Nacional de Chile, *Ministerio de Hacienda*, vol. 263, contract of employment, 21 February 1873.

stipulated leave, for example diplomats, found that travel from and return to Chile required more time than their leave entitlement, so they did not travel. The result was that stays of a decade or more were frequent, even for those that did get home. In 1883, the London head of the Gibbs firm, noting that one of his partners in Chile had been there for sixteen years without a break, recommended that "he should have leave so soon as the convenience of the House (i.e. Gibbs) permit"⁷. In this case, the partner did retire home, but often 'the convenience of the House' or other causes dictated a life-long stay.

III

The expectation of a short, or at least fixed-length visit, and the reality of long stays led to the strength, indeed institutionalization, of the community. Determined to keep in touch with distant "home", Britons moved to create a reasonable facsimile of what they regarded as characteristic of the life they had left behind them. Circumstances helped, for they possessed the same sort of skills, were concentrated in the import-export sector and often worked for each other. Those who could afford to also lived together, so much so that Cerro Alegre in Valparaiso was sometimes called the "English" hill. In 1847, a writer called attention to the "tranquil colony" of Britons on the hill, and described its connection with Chile: "powerful and multifarious commercial interests unite it with the city that seethes at the foot of its mountain"⁸.

Of course, most Britons could not afford to live the lives of the merchants with their families on the Hill, but these men were the natural leaders of the community. Commission houses often found accommodation and provided messes for their young clerks, partly to keep an avuncular eye on them (and many of the junior staff were in fact relatives, or the sons of friends at home, and for whom a conscientious merchant would feel real responsibility) and partly because it made commercial sense to live "in the business". It was the enterprise of the merchants and their firms that allowed the *Valparaiso Mercantile Reporter* to remark in 1851

⁷ Gibbs Papers MS 11042/2 H.H. Gibbs to B.A. Miller, Private, 12 October 1883.

⁸ Max Radiguet, *Valparaiso y la sociedad chilena en 1847* in S. Haigh, A. Caldclough, M. Radiguet, *Viajeros en Chile 1817-1847* (Santiago, n.d.), p. 210.

English enterprise has established, among other things a good public library, which together with the public reading room affords sufficient reading matter for all who are disposed to improve their leisure time in a profitable manner⁹.

The community for which the library catered was a multifarious one. Skilled artisans as a group, containing many trades, made up one of the two principal classes of resident Britons, the other being the merchants. Catering to them, and to interested Chileans, was another group of people in miscellaneous occupations: doctors, clergymen, teachers, dressmakers, artists, gardeners, the barber, the newspaper reporter and so on¹⁰. But in no case did Britons have a monopoly of occupation or skill; what made the community was a conscious acceptance of one's British-ness, based upon language, Protestantism, common outlook and common objectives.

Certainly there was nothing in Chilean policy to force Britons together. Though the occasional diplomat might decry the Chilean body politic and plead the necessity for some form of extra-territoriality, the British community was generally well content with conditions in Chile, and the equality before the law everywhere accorded individual Britons¹¹. In economic matters, Chile offered large opportunities, and Chileans were eager to acquire or make use of the skills, goods and services offered by the British community. Both sides cheerfully accepted as preordained and entirely natural the operation of the laws of comparative advantage. Rather it was in matters social, that the British community operated communally. The result was to enhance its exclusivity, and consequently to direct—and limit—its influence on society.

Religion and education point this up. Though some Britons were Catholic or became so, usually through marriage, generally the community was solidly Protestant. Chile was even more unitedly Catholic, and article five of the constitution made Catholicism the established church of the country, and the only one that could hold public services. In 1851 *The Neighbour* (edited by the minister of the Union Church, David Trumbull) noted that Protestants could meet only in private

⁹ *Valparaiso Mercantile Reporter*, 25 April 1851.

¹⁰ Detailed figures for occupations may be found in the following *Censos*: 1865, pp. 223-225; 1875, pp. 459-460, 1885, II, pp. 294-295.

¹¹ On official British attitudes to Chile in this period, see J. Mayo, *British Merchants and Chilean Development 1851-1886* (Boulder, 1987), ch. III.

dwelling: "This is the utmost of toleration to which the republic of Chile hath attained as yet, during forty years of independence"¹².

This situation divided the community. Official policy, as represented by Consul H. W. Rouse in Valparaiso, was cautious; in 1856, when Anglicans decided to build a church, he warned them that they might be reading too much into the treaty of friendship between the two countries, and in 1858 he warned members of the church to worship "in a quiet and unostentatious manner"¹³. This attitude was highly acceptable to some among the British community, who were prepared to accept limitations on religious observance: "The only kind of influence wh. (sic). I think it is legitimate for foreign clergy to exert in a Roman Catholic country is that of example", wrote G. L. M. Gibbs, of the long established Gibbs firms¹⁴.

The other point of view was forcibly expressed by Stephen Williamson of Williamson, Duncan & Co, (later Williamson, Balfour), a member of the much more evangelical Union Church. His interpretation of the Treaty of Friendship differed markedly from the official one: "they [Chile] have made a bargain we are not to be 'molested' and we have nothing to do with their Constitutions"¹⁵. Holding these views, he, and those who felt like him, engaged in vigorous debates in the press when opportunity offered. In 1858, the subject was Protestant bibles, and Williamson the Protestant champion, in 1863 the subject was mixed marriages and Trumbull of the Union Church the advocate¹⁶.

Perhaps luckily for Anglo-Chilean relations—and trade—parts of the Protestant case were accepted, even actively supported, by Chileans, many of whose cultural and political elite were influenced by prevailing European liberal ideas, for pragmatic or ideological reasons. For example, *El Mercurio* wrote that religious toleration was necessary, for without it "we would not have an intelligent and numerous immigration"¹⁷. The movement in Chilean opinion was demonstrated in 1865, when Congress passed a law allowing non-Catholics to worship

¹² *Neighbour*, 24 March 1851.

¹³ F.O. 16/98, N° 7, Rouse to Secretary of State, 16 September 1856; *Williamson Letterbooks*, I, S. Williamson to R. Peddie, 20 March 1858.

¹⁴ *Gibbs Papers* MS 1 1037/2, G.L.M. Gibbs to - Henry, 28 February 1865.

¹⁵ *Williamson Letterbooks* I, S. Williamson to G. Hanson, 1 February 1859.

¹⁶ See *Mercurio* 29 May 1858, and 5, 6, 7, May 1863.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 14 February 1863; Williamson had put forward this view on 6 February 1863.

in privately-owned buildings, and to establish denominational schools¹⁸. So article five of the constitution was interpreted to give the Protestants what they wanted, though by making 'black to be white' as Williamson put it, rather than by constitutional amendment¹⁹.

For the British community, the law allowed the open institutionalising of one of the principal bases of its existence, a common religious belief. However, its passage was not a demonstration of community power; prominent Chileans appear to have been indifferent to the British view, if Antonio Varas was in any way representative²⁰. After all, foreigners and the tiny Chilean community of dissenters had been worshipping openly, if discreetly, for years. Rather, the law was a victory for the growing strength of liberal opinion in the republic, and was in fact a step in the course of implementing selected liberal ideas by the political elite. The essential irrelevance of community pressures to this process is demonstrated by the fact that thereafter liberal measures continued to be implemented, while the British consciously ignored Chilean politics (in the sense of attempting to make policy) and devoted themselves to business and their own affairs. Indeed, the lack of interest in Chile's domestic affairs was so marked that the *Valparaiso and West Coast Mail* in 1867 urged 'those of the Anglo-Saxon race residing in Chile' to respect the republic's Independence Day celebrations, and not regard them 'simply as a vexatious break in the routine of business, and the cessation for a time of the pursuit of money-getting'²¹.

Religious issues briefly made the British community, or some of its leaders, active participants in Chile's —and the community's— politics, but the result was to leave intact, even enhance, its exclusivity. So was the British attitude to educating its members, but this was an entirely in-house matter, and one that was taken up early in the community's existence. Apparently, successful merchants brought out tutors/nannies for their children almost from the beginnings of the community's existence, but perhaps the earliest English-language school was the one which W. Watkins took over from A. W. Clements in

¹⁸ P. Estelle, *El debate de 1865 sobre la libertad de cultos y de conciencia* (Santiago 1968), p. 217.

¹⁹ Williamson *Letterbooks* III, S. Williamson to A. Balfour, 16 August 1865.

²⁰ See his exchange with Williamson: A.N.C. *Fondos Varios* 836, S. Williamson to A. Varas, 15 June 1865, A. Varas to S. Williamson, 18 June 1865.

²¹ *Valparaiso & West Coast Mail*, 17 September 1867.

1839, and ran until 1852²². Thereafter, individuals and partnerships created a succession of schools to educate expatriate Britons of both sexes in their own language and in subjects useful both to Chile and 'at home'. Such schools charged fees, which meant that they were effectively closed to the offspring of Britons of the artisan class. This was noted with concern by the more consciously altruistic of the English speaking community, members of the British Benevolent Society or the Union Church, or both. The result was the Artisans' School. A public meeting of interested people in Valparaiso's Philharmonic Hall, under the chairmanship of John Evans of Heatley, Evans & Co., a leading British firm, raised some 15000 pesos, and the school opened in February 1858, with Peter Mackay M.A., a Scot, as headmaster²³. By July of the same year it had sixty two pupils, amongst whom were the children of 'some of our first English families', but the majority were the children of 'artisans, builders, captains etc.' who paid twelve shillings a month as against the thirty shillings charged by 'first class private academics'²⁴. The school clearly met a real need, for in 1873 average attendance reached 307, of whom between sixty and seventy received their education free, paid for by subscriptions from the British community²⁵.

Though this school was a British institution, fulfilling a real function, and dependent at least partly upon the direct generosity of the individual Britons, it also demonstrated what may be termed the fragility of community spirit. In 1877, after nearly twenty years as head master, Mackay and two teachers left, after a dispute with school's board of directors, which then included such luminaries of the community as the British consul at Valparaiso, the British chaplain, the minister of the Union Church (an American, but 'blood was thicker than water' among English speakers), and representatives of William Gibbs & Co., the senior and largest British firm on the coast, and Williamson, Balfour & Co., also large, and philanthropically inclined since its foundation in 1851. The dispute arose because the directors insisted that all teachers attend the religious service that began the school day, which, however, Mackay regarded as a private matter of

²² 'Quien Sabe', *'Old Timers' British and Americans in Chile* (Santiago n.d.) p. 390.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 397; *Chilean Times*, 19 June 1880.

²⁴ *Williamson Letterbooks I*, S. Williamson to A. Balfour, 15 July 1858, and to Miss Barclay, 18 October 1838.

²⁵ *Chilean Times*, 19 June 1880.

conscience, and consequently had given two teachers permission to absent themselves. When the crisis came, Mackay and the teachers concerned resigned, and went off to found their own school, which though nearly twice as expensive as the Artisans' School was to flourish²⁶.

It was never explained why the directors chose to act as they did. The *Chilean Times* commented on the affair that it was very regrettable

that while the foreign members are strenuously endeavouring to obtain free secular education for their children, exempt from compulsory religious teaching, they should themselves show such a poor spirit of toleration to their peoples' opinions. The inconsistency will not fail to be observed by the dominant priesthood, and remembered for future use...²⁷.

So Britons worked together, worshipped together and learnt together. They also played together. The principal club, the Union, received high praise from a visiting tourist in the 1870s: 'Speaking as an Englishman, I am bound to say that the draught beer was admirable, and the cold roastbeef was as good as could be found in London itself'²⁸. There, members could read recent (several months old) newspapers from home, play billiards and enjoy the meals, all without the distractions of females or children. Such an institution obviously did not cater to all tastes, but, significantly, when an anonymous letter writer drew attention to the plight of young clerks, he tried to get the situation remedied within the community, appealing to 'the monied part of the English residents' to put up money for an 'English Atheneum'. 'A Merchant' responded, tartly suggesting that if the clerks did something for themselves, then they would get help from the 'monied'²⁹.

Though Valparaíso never boasted an English Atheneum, (a Junior Club did come into existence) the British community gave spasmodic

²⁶ *Chilean Times* 15 September 1877, 6 October 1877.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28 April 1877.

²⁸ T. W. Hinchcliff *Over the Sea and Far Away*, p. 78, (London 1876).

²⁹ *Valparaíso & West Coast Mail*, 21, 24, 28 November 1873.

support to the Valparaíso Literary and Scientific Society. At its inception in the 1880s the society aroused some Chilean interest, but it eventually became an appendage of the YMCA, and the topics it discussed, for example, 'ants', or 'Is the present Liberal Ministry in England worthy of support' (when the Anglican chaplain took the negative side)³⁰ ensured that it became an exclusively British affair, and a minority one at that.

The British community was not intellectually inclined. Few were well educated in academic terms, though most were literate and possessed a trade. Furthermore, they worked long hours and observed a Protestant Sunday, which left little time for recreation. Business consumed most of their time, with family (if present) and the company of friends, in or out of clubs, filling what little time remained. Occasionally, true to the English reputation, they indulged in outside activities. Fox hunting attracted considerable numbers³¹. So did horse racing: for the Spring Meeting in 1873, 'Business was entirely suspended here, all the banks and business houses being closed for the day'. Such meetings were patronised by Chileans in large numbers, as well as the foreign community³². The same was not true of cricket, though the Valparaíso Cricket Club came into existence at least as early as the 1860s and the English-language press often carried scores.

Perhaps significantly, the principal Chilean institution Britons joined enthusiastically was one in which team spirit and outdoor activity were happily combined. This was the volunteer fire brigade, the *bomberos*. This was not just altruism, for Britons as the largest importers and exporters always had large quantities of goods at risk, and they were also the largest insurers. It is not surprising, then, that when the *bomberos* were formed in 1851, Britons subscribed 1,400 pesos out of the 4,200 raised³³. However, many of the members of the British company of the *bomberos* (the French, Germans and Italians also had a company each, and there were Chilean ones) had no such pecuniary interest in joining; rather, they enjoyed the companionship and team spirit of the institution.

Of course, one must not over-emphasise the separateness of the community. Business was integrated, and skills and capital, not nation-

³⁰ *The Record*, 22 March 1884.

³¹ *El Mercurio*, 1 June 1858, *Valparaíso & West Coast Mail*, 17 June 1868.

³² *Valparaíso & West Coast Mail*, 17 October 1873, *Chilean Times*, 7 October 1876.

³³ *El Mercurio*, 2 May 1851.

ality, determined position and reward. The fact that Britons were able to be so self centred was in fact a demonstration of the confidence they had in living in Chile. As the *Chilean Times* put it: Chile had 'an attraction not to be found in any other country of South America for not Englishmen only, but for most of the natives of Europe, especially those of the freer states'³⁴. One aspect of this attractiveness was an easy tolerance of a British presence and behaviour that led many foreigners to comment, not necessarily favourably, on the 'English' aspect of Valparaíso³⁵. But what did this 'Englishness' actually mean?

IV

Basically it demonstrated Britain's economic power. On this, the British community was utterly dependent, whatever the wealth or position of individual members. It is significant that few Britons in Chile made what we might term 'metropolitan' fortunes, that it fortunes that placed them amongst the wealthy at home. Indeed, few made large peso fortunes, and none possessed wealth to match that of an Urmeneta or Agustín Edwards. The people who did realise large sums from ventures in, or perhaps to is more accurate, Chile in this period, were the London or Liverpool -based partners in the commission houses that organised Chile's trade and services associated with it. Final decisions were made in Britain not Chile in this business, and the Britons in Chile could only influence these decisions. This influence could be great, even decisive in particular cases, for example in whether to buy into local businesses, or to continue particular lines of goods, but ultimately it remained only influence, not power.

This, then, was the position of the British community in Chile: influential, but not powerful. And if it was dependent on the one hand on Britain's economic might, it was dependent, too, upon Chile, for protection. From the independence of Latin America on, British governments consistently displayed a distaste for entanglements in the new republics that might involve a need for sustained action (or expenditure) in support of British interest. A short, sharp intervention to punish manifest injury to British interests might be embarked upon, but experience in, for example, Rosas' Argentina demonstrated the improfi-

³⁴ *Chilean Times*, 1 July 1876.

³⁵ See W.E. Curtis, *The Capitals of Spanish America* (New York 1888), p. 455.

tability of long drawn out efforts at coercion. The result was that Britons and their possessions in the republics were dependent upon their hosts for security.

This said, by example, by training, in skills in mining, industrial arts, banking, evtn gardening, through the provision of goods and services in all of which they were the dominant suppliers, the British community did posses great influence in Chile's economy, and some social influence. But when Britain's economic dominance began to wane, so too did the community's influence. In the period here discussed, British economic strength was growing, to be capped by the achievement of control of the nitrate industry. But of the two pillars supporting the community's position, Chilean protection proved the more durable, and in the long run, the community's achievement may be compared with the results of the contemporary Protestant missionary endeavour, of which a Chilean commentator wrote 'the fruits they have obtained... may be gathered from the multitude of pieces of paper [from Protestant tracts, portions etc. distributed to the people] that whiten the ground...'³⁶ The British community was not a battering ram to open up the country to British exploitation. Rather it was a reflection of Britain's economic power, and its influence waxed and waned with that power. Sentiment and habit were to help disguise its decline when it came, but the British community was ultimately dependent upon Britain's economic strength.

But though this was the case, the British community in Chile was an asset in Anglo-Chilean relations, by mediating between metropolitan and Chilean interests, as it demonstrated by the fact that trade continued smoothly, at all times, interrupted by economic conditions, not political ones. The relations between Britons and Chileans on the whole were characterised by mutual tolerance and acceptance (if not approval) of the other side's eccentricities. Of course, in the period here considered, British activities in Chile did not involve the employment of large numbers of expatriates in privileged conditions, but Britons were amongst the most comfortably-off residents in the republic. The failure of any real xenophobia to develop, then, is an indication of the construtive, if limited, nature of the British community's participation in the larger Chilean society.

Several conclusions may be drawn from this discussion of the British community's participation in Chilean life. First, the existence

³⁶ *Valparaiso & West Coast Mail*, 26 April 1873, their translation from *El Independiente*.

of a cohesive foreign element, largely made up of conscious transients, is no threat to its host's cultural or political integrity. Nor, of itself, is it a threat to the host's economic life. Though such a community may rank amongst the most economically well off sections in the country, when this position is derived from their own nation's economic strength, influence is derived from this fact, and is ultimately dependent upon it. Once such a community derives its economic strength from its possessions within the host country, it effectively ceases to be foreign. But equally, such communities, by mediating between foreign interests and domestic ones, can exert an enormously constructive influence upon relations between foreigners and nationals, with, of course, special emphasis given to the basic reason for the existence of the relationship. In the case of Britain and Chile, this reason was commerce, and by assiduously plying their trades and remaining actively but unaggressively British, the community played a valuable and profitable role in greasing the wheels of commerce.