

An Unique Railway

By R. Sinclair

THE Antofagasta Railway affords access to some of the finest mountain scenery in South America, and brings the romantic land of the Incas within easy reach of the globe trotter by means of its excellent service, provided with sleeping coaches and restaurant cars, equipped with every luxury. The railway itself is one of the most unique and interesting in the world on account of its narrow gauge, two feet six inches, or a little more than half that of the English railways, and yet its trains run at considerable speeds with a smoothness seldom surpassed, and its sleeping and day coaches would not discredit any broad gauge railway. The main line starts at Antofagasta, a port on the Chilian Coast, a few miles outside the Tropic of Capricorn, and some 684 miles north of Valparaiso.

The fine coast steamers owned by the Pacific Steam Navigation Company and the "Cia Vapores de Sud Americana," leave Valparaiso twice a week and reach Antofagasta in three or four days after touching at several interesting ports on the way; while once a fortnight the direct steamers from Liverpool, some of which are unsurpassed for luxury, continue their voyage up the Coast as far as Callao, and reach Antofagasta two days after leaving Valparaiso.

The through sleeping train-de-luxe leaves Antofagasta every Monday, crosses the frontier early the following afternoon and arrives at Oruro the evening of Wednesday. Here passengers change to the broader gauge carriages of the Bolivia Railway Company, now under the same management, and reach La Paz during the afternoon of the same day in good time to appreciate the views of the magnificent snow-capped Illimani, and the unequalled panorama which un-

folds itself of the City of La Paz when the train leaves the flat table land at the "Alto" station and proceeds down the precipitous incline to the charming old Spanish City so happily placed.

From Antofagasta the railway having to reach an altitude of 13,000 feet in 223 miles loses no time in beginning its climb and at Portezuelo, 26 kilometres (17 1-4 miles) the rail level is already 1,800 feet above the sea, giving an average grade of 1 in 50, but at several places it is as steep as 1 in 30. At O'Higgins, kilometre 35, is the junction of the branch (111 kilometres long) to the Boquete Nitrate fields, which are just beginning to be developed. The end of this branch is some 5,622 feet above the sea. At Prat, kilometre 59, is the junction of the branch to Mejillones, the new port opened recently by the Antofagasta Railway Company, situated some 37 miles to the North of Antofagasta and said to be the finest on the Pacific Coast, as it is capable of holding all the fleets in the world and is so protected from the southwest gales that shipping lying in it can never suffer the smallest inconvenience from bad weather.

At kilometre 116 the main line of the railway enters the principal nitrate district of this part of Chili and leaves it at kilometre 162. In this section are situated some twenty Oficinas (Nitrate factories), and the more modern of them well repay a visit as they are models of organization. After leaving the Nitrate zone we catch our first views of the Andes and soon after cross the river Loa and reach the picturesque little town of Calama, at kilometre 238 from Antofagasta (148 miles). Here the eye is refreshed with its green pasture lands, irrigated by the waters of this river, for till now the line has passed through what to all appearance is a barren desert with-