

OUR MEXICAN BORDER.

Peonage in New-Mexico—Border Defenses.

Correspondence of The Tribune.

Early Pass, Rio Grande, Nov. 1, 1850.

Is it possible that any one denies the existence of *Peonage* in New-Mexico? The actual, absolute existence, at this hour, of this year of 1850, of an enslaved herd of some 50,000 Indians, subject to the lash and obliged by law to toil on through a half starved, untried serfdom, with no door of deliverance but the gate of death, is a fact known to every man on this border—a fact so clear and transparent that it is a sin and a shame for any member of the National Legislature to be ignorant of it—and more a sin and shame if with voice and vote he does not war upon it, until its last rotting thread is broken. It is also a fact that fugitive peons, freemen born, are constantly torn by force from under the very folds of our flag and carried from our soil, bound hand and foot, back to Slavery. This has been to my knowledge while the drums of Fort Duncan—situated in full sight—were loudly beating their martial assurance of protection. Let the officers of any and every post on this frontier deny it, if it is not true, that a hard and grinding servitude exists at this moment in New-Mexico, and that peons, accused of no crime but debt, have been and are weekly entrapped on our soil, and conveyed back to the servitude they have fled from, and that without hindrance from any man. Do not suppose the citizens of character and principle approve this desecration of our territory. They do not, but there is a feeling much too strong and too general for the purity of the American name, that the U. S. Government will not meddle in such matters and that a citizen who attempted to arrest this kidnapping system would not be sustained at Washington.

This is one of the weak points of our exceedingly weak system—or system—would be the better term—of our border defense. There never has been any regular plan in the matter. The goddess of chance—aided, perhaps, now and then by an officer not entirely uninterested in Texas upon certain locations—has scattered at random the military posts and depôts without any apparent connection or fitness between them and their work. If the security of the frontier its early settlement and best preparation for an independent and prosperous self-administration, was the aim, the steps toward it were not very sensible or straightforward. Congress let things stagger along in a blindfold, bewildered fashion, and the former Secretaries of War did very little in the way of disentangling the perplexed threads. The commanding officers if they had the will, lacked the power to mend this inefficiently even if they were here long enough and had their means of inquiry and information fully digested for regular action.

A long river line of frontier was to be defended with a band of wilderness, never less than a hundred miles wide along its whole course with water, grass and timber in precisely the measure to suit the Indians and perplex regular soldiers. Mitts, or thick copses of trees and thickets are scattered at wide intervals over these immense plains near enough to make the hiding places of the wilderness—wise Red Men, whose wary eye would range for miles over the clear spaces and be ready to pounce on parties of the whites long before their inexperience would detect the trail or presence of the lurking savage. Streams and watering places are ten, fifteen and twenty miles apart, and the white stranger ignorant of the "signs" might die of thirst in the dry season, before he found them or find them, only to fall into the ambush of the ever watchful Indian. The Indian on his hardy, alert pony laughs at the slow regularity of the disciplined soldier, and battles in very sport his clumsy endeavors at pursuit. Imagine parties of infantry stationed here and there along this line of frontier and stationed at those points too remote from the sections in the greatest need of defense, and then it is not difficult to understand why the Indians kill so many citizens and so few soldiers, and why the Indians are never caught. After this plain statement of the character of the country, and of the foe that scourges it—and remember, beside, that the wealth of the farms that—widely apart—fringe this border, consists in mules, horses and cattle, which the lightly equipped Indian rider can sweep down upon like an eagle and vanish with in a night—is it not incredible that its protection should be confided to "volunteers"? Is it not almost natural to believe those partisans who tell the Texans that this oversight is an "intentional chastisement for their political sins"?

An Reporter.

C. M.