

hundred miles, transporting its supplies, medical stores, and munitions of war, with a celerity and success almost unexampled in the history of modern warfare; and the day after its arrival at Parras, it was, *in every respect*, in a condition to have resumed its line of march for an equal or still greater distance.\*

Although it may seem foreign to the subject of my duties, I cannot refrain in this connexion from paying what I believe to be a well-merited tribute of respect to our quartermaster's and commissary's departments. Certainly no army in the field was ever better served, the evidence of which is seen in what I have just written. I may also, I trust, be permitted here to say, in the last official communication which I may address to you,† that in the discharge of my arduous and multifarious duties I have experienced from the commanding general nothing but kindness and liberality. Almost every suggestion, in the line of my duty, which I had the honor to make to him, was promptly met, and every possible facility extended for its successful execution. And besides this, I may venture to add that I was a daily witness of the zeal with which he exerted himself for the comfort of his army and the service of his country. It may not be inappropriate here to remark that all the inhabitants on our line of march remained quietly at their homes, in the undisturbed possession of their property: not a house, that I am aware of, was deserted, nor was there an outrage, to my knowledge, perpetrated on any of the people. Everything that was procured from the country, either for the use of the army or for the individual use of officers, was most liberally paid for, and persons and property on all occasions respected.

As I was absent on a reconnaissance towards Durango‡ when the army suddenly moved on Saltillo, I must refer to Lieutenant Sitgreaves, topographical engineers, for a descriptive memoir of that march. I rejoined headquarters at San Juan de la Vaqueria on the third day after the army left Parras, having found my way through the mountain passes.§

In closing this communication, there are many reflections in relation to the social, religious, commercial, and political conditions of the Mexican people, the government, and the character of the country we have recently traversed, which naturally force themselves on the mind; but want of present leisure prevents me from giving expression to them now. I write hurriedly, on board of a steamboat, with scarcely time to read what I have written, and I have therefore done but little more than to give you an almost literal transcript of my journal.

\* The 6th infantry, 1st dragoons, artillery, and Arkansas cavalry, taking their respective points of departure, had marched, up to Parras, nearly two thousand miles.

† Captain Hughes at this time had been detached, and ordered to proceed with General Worth to Vera Cruz.

‡ See memoir in relation to this exploration.

§ I struck the main road to Saltillo at Castañuela; but such had been the admirable manner in which the division had moved, that until I approached within three miles of the infantry camp under Colonel Churchill, there was no sign of troops having marched in that direction, with the exception of the camping grounds—not a broken wagon, or a dead animal, or a straggler was to be seen; and yet the infantry averaged for two days nearly forty miles a day.

MOUTH OF THE RIO GRANDE,  
February 1, 1847.

SIR: Being detained at this place for the want of transports to convey us to our destination, I do not know that I can better employ my time than by attempting to supply, to some extent, the omissions and deficiencies of my previous memoir; but whether I shall accomplish it or not will depend on circumstances over which I can exercise no control.

It seems to me clearly the policy of the government to establish a line of military posts on "Woll's road," from San Antonio de Bexar to the ford on the Rio Grande, near Presidio, for the purpose of extending protection to the settlers and traders against robbers and the predatory Indian tribes. To carry out this plan effectually would require a regiment of mounted men, with its headquarters at San Antonio de Bexar, a port on the Quihi; another on the Leona, and the third on the Rio Grande, at the ford. These ports, with the exception of the one on the Rio Grande, might be withdrawn in a few years, as there can be no question that the protection which they would afford would be the means of rapidly settling the country with a population that would soon be able to defend itself. Beside this consideration, it must be obvious to even the most superficial observer that hostilities with the Comanches and Lipans, the most warlike of the native tribes, are neither remote nor contingent. I regard it as inevitable, and believe that we shall never establish cordial relations with them until they have been severely punished—an affair, by-the-by, not easy of accomplishment. A defeat in a contest with the United States would result in their precipitation upon the northern provinces of Mexico, which they would assuredly desolate—a consequence which we may deplore, but cannot avert.

A reference to my memoir, and accompanying maps, in relation to the march of General Wool's army from San Antonio to Santa Rosa, will show how well Western Texas is watered, and may convey some faint idea of the richness and beauty of the country embraced between the Rio San Antonio and the Nueces; beyond which latter river, until we approach the Rio Grande, it would be no great exaggeration to say that "tis all barren." It is true that there are occasional narrow strips of rich land, but for the whole of that distance (64 miles) we crossed but one stream of running water.

All the rivers between San Antonio and the Nueces may be characterized as beautiful and noble streams of clear and excellent water, and many of them would afford an almost unlimited amount of water power; I particularly refer to the San Antonio, the Medina, the Quihi, (perhaps below the settlement,) and the Leona, (nearly equal to the San Antonio.) The others are objectionable on account of their periodical floods. I know of no country better adapted to manufactures than western Texas, and there is perhaps no region of the world where wool can be grown at so low a rate, or where the necessities of life may be produced so cheaply. The heat of the climate, it might be supposed, would deteriorate the quality of the fleece; but such I am told is not the case. The soil is calcareous, with small angular fragments of flinty pebbles scattered over it, the drift from the mountains deposited by a current flowing from south to north, the traces of which we saw at almost every step from the Guadalupe up to San Antonio; and no doubt they may be found beyond it, leading to their mountain sources. The country may be described as a rolling



prairie, pretty well wooded, and, after leaving the Medina, eminently beautiful and picturesque, covered at most seasons of the year with a luxuriant growth of grass, and abounding with game. At almost every rod we started up herds of deer, and flocks of partridges and wild turkeys. The reverse of the picture is, that it abounds with venomous reptiles, snakes, scorpions, centipedes, and tarantulas. The latter are much dreaded, and regarded with more horror than any of the tribe. They are provided with fangs nearly as large as those of the rattlesnake, while they possess none of his magnanimity, or rather indolence of habit. The principal annoyances to travellers consist of innumerable crowds of *ticks* and *red bugs*, who fasten and prey upon him with instinctive avidity.

It is melancholy, in traversing this rich and beautiful country, so eminently fitted for the support of human life, to find it but one vast solitude, undisturbed save by some wary traveller or trader, who pursues his stealthy course at night, with the hope (often vain) of eluding the crafty savage, who looks out from his mountain home like an eagle from its eyrie, watching for his victim. But it requires only a slight effort of the imagination to fancy it peopled with an industrious and teeming population, its heights crowned with human habitations, its fertile valleys in cultivation, and its plains covered with bleating flocks and lowing herds. It remains but for the government to *will it*, and this picture will be realized. It involves simply the establishment of the line of posts which I have indicated to produce these beneficent results, for the natural advantages of the country could not fail to attract the attention of foreign immigrants, and of our own roving and adventurous countrymen.

The formation of the country is calcareous; the rocks, after rising, near the rivers, in high bluffs and isolated hills, intersected by *trap dikes*. This we particularly noticed on the Rio Frio. Near the Leona\* I observed numerous small holes in the rocks, about one foot in diameter, and perfectly smooth and circular in shape. They were probably formed by the action of water. The country beyond the Rio Grande, between it and the Sabinos, is similar to that already described, but is neither so well wooded nor watered: it is nevertheless well calculated for the rearing of stock, for where the natural flow of water is deficient it may be supplied by wells; and there are large quantities of arable land abandoned for the want of labor, and in consequence of the insecurity of life and property. As we approach Santa Rosa, some ten miles beyond the Sabinos, a change is observed in the geological formation, and we are obviously entering upon a country of igneous origin. The rocks first seen are conglomerate, composed of angular fragmentary limestone, united with a calcareous cement; the whole being probably due to watery discharges from the now extinct volcanic craters.

At Santa Rosa we reach for the first time the *Sierra Gorda*—a subordinate chain of the great "Sierra Madre," or Mother Mountain. This range seems to be a continuation of that through which the Rio Grande bursts its way at the cañon below the mouth of the Rio Cinchos, and which, sweeping in a curvilinear direction northeasterly, passing to the west of Santa Rosa, Monclova, Monterey, and Victoria, terminates near

\* I can scarcely allow myself to speak of the beautiful river, and its rich and lovely valley, for the language of truth, when applied to it, must necessarily assume the appearance of fiction.

the mouth of Limon river, between Tampico and Vera Cruz, on the Gulf of Mexico. At Las Hermanas an inferior range diverges from it in the direction of Candela, and again unites with it near Monterey. It is very difficult, and indeed almost impossible, at present, accurately to define this great mountain chain;\* but when our *ensemble* maps are compiled, we may be able to do so with considerable precision. We skirted its entire base from Santa Rosa to Monclova, at which point our examinations gave us a transverse line of more than one hundred miles through the mountain passes; and we actually crossed it in our march to Parras. Besides this, we have two lines of reconnaissance from Monclova to Monterey, one from Monterey to Saltillo, two from Saltillo to our line of march from Monclova to Parras, two between Parras and Saltillo, and two from Parras to Alamo de Parras. These, in addition to the explorations of topographical engineers with General Taylor's army, of the Rio Grande from its mouth to Camargo, and then to Monterey, from Monterey to Victoria, and thence to Tampico, and perhaps from Matamoras to Victoria, with General Patterson's command, will give us the means of satisfactorily determining the principal geographical features of northern Mexico. I also understand that examinations have recently been made of the Rio Grande from Camargo to a point some thirty miles above Presidio, which encourage the hope that this noble river may become navigable, with slight improvements, at certain seasons of the year, nearly as high up as the Conchos, and render it not improbable that steamboats may at no distant day ascend even to Chihuahua, to Paso del Norte, and to the vicinity of Santa Fe. This, however, is venturing on the field of speculation. The mountain at Santa Rosa is one unbroken chain for many leagues in extent, without one single pass or defile leading over it. The highest peaks rise to an altitude of nearly four thousand feet above the level of the plain, and it must at one time have been covered by the sea, and subsequently been elevated by some internal force. Dr. Long, an intelligent American, who has resided many years in this country, and has pretty thoroughly explored the mountains, informed me that he had found marine shells on the highest points. I regret that my engagements prevented me from examining any considerable portion of this interesting region. Along the base of the mountain, and rising directly from it, may be seen a range of conical hills about five hundred feet high, of a nearly uniform shape and size. It is in these hills that the silver lodes mentioned in a previous memoir are found. Running out nearly perpendicularly from the main range are a series of tabular hills, varying from one hundred to three hundred feet in elevation, presenting to the eye the appearance of a perfect level on the top, with regular sides and truncated extremities. They are constituted generally of basaltic rocks, and are covered with a luxuriant growth of grass; but some less regular in figure are composed of lavas and volcanic ashes. We lose sight of these peculiarities near Hermanas, and the mountains assume the form of vast buttresses separated by narrow defiles, leading high up into and often through them—such as are described in the memoir.

\* The published maps of this portion of Mexico are absolutely *worse than useless*; and we were compelled to guess our way, step by step, as we could obtain no reliable information except by personal observation. Arista's manuscript map (captured at Resaca de la Palma) is tolerably accurate; but we did not obtain a sight of it till after our arrival at Saltillo.



Beyond Monclova the mountains are composed of a mass of white marly altered limestone, showing the action of heat upon it under pressure. The same formation was observed at Monterey and Saltillo. Where the mountain sides have been abraded by the rains, they exhibit the appearance of white stripes from top to bottom. I regret that it is not in my power to communicate more satisfactory information in relation to the geology of this unexplored and almost unknown country; but my official duties greatly interfere with such researches.

The finest agricultural region in Coahuila is in the vicinity of Santa Rosa; but owing to the want of laborers, and to the depredations of the Indians, a very large proportion of the arable land is left uncultivated, and for the same reason the rich silver mines—the most valuable, probably, in Mexico—abandoned. While much of the surface of this State is sterile, and large quantities of it unfit for cultivation, owing to the want of water for purposes of irrigation, (for, in consequence of the long droughts, no land can be tilled without it,) there are extensive tracts of arable soil still in its primitive and virgin condition, which, under a better and more paternal government—one capable and willing to protect life and property—might be rendered highly productive, for in few parts of the world does nature more liberally reward labor judiciously applied.

Nothing can be imagined, in a country pretending to be civilized, so inefficient, despotic, capricious, and oppressive as the government of the (so called) Mexican republic. It matters not who is in power, the result is the same. It not only extends no protection to its citizens, but it absolutely forbids them the use of arms for their own defence, and deprives them of them by unceremonious domiciliary visits; they are forbidden to possess them without a special license; exactions are imposed on them in every form that human ingenuity can invent; and, in one word, the government is known only by its malign influence, and felt only by its oppression. When the inhabitants of Alamo de Parras invoked the interposition, against the depredations of the Indians, of General Ruez, who commanded a large force at San Miguel, he returned them the pious answer, that "he hoped God would protect and bless them, but that he could not move from San Miguel"—a benediction (which if not a cold-blooded mockery) more becoming a bishop than a soldier. It is a fact that the only security which the people of Coahuila had felt for many months was after our arrival, and in the presence of our troops; and it was only during our march and occupation of the country that they could venture to travel a few miles from their own homes with the assurance that the next chaparral did not conceal the lurking savage or the merciless bandit—both alike seeking his life and property.

The system of *peonage*, or domestic slavery, keeps in bondage at least *four-fifths* of northern Mexico. No system of slavery can be more harsh and degrading, for it carries with it none of those kindly sympathies and early associations which so often alleviate it in the United States. Peons are persons sold for debt, and it rarely happens that one is ever redeemed from bondage till old age renders him useless to his owner, who then charitably permits him to beg for the remnant of his life. The only appearance of liberty which he enjoys, is that of selecting a master who may choose to buy him from his owner by paying the claim against him, which, when tendered, (with the consent of the slave,) he is compelled by law to accept as a discharge of the obligation. The poor peon lives in a

miserable mud hovel or reed hut, (sometimes built of cornstalks, thatched with grass.) He is allowed a peck of corn a week for his subsistence, and a small monthly pay for his clothes; but as all his purchases are made from his master, each year generally finds him still deeper in debt, for the payment of which he at last pledges all he possesses—*his children!* and they are bound for the parent till they are legally capable of incurring debts of their own, and become eligible to a state of slavery on their own account. And yet Mexico calls herself a free country!

The State of Coahuila is bounded on the east by Tamaulipas and the Rio Grande, on the north by the Rio Grande and Chihuahua, on the west by Chihuahua, and on the south by Chihuahua, Durango, and New Leon. It contains about 193,000 square miles, with a population of only 125,000, or not quite one and a half to the square mile. Two-thirds of its surface is a level plain, and the remainder consists of mountains and warm, fertile valleys. Its principal rivers are the Rio Grande, the Alamo, the Sabinos, the Salado, and the San Juan, of which the first is alone navigable for any considerable distance. Its chief towns are Santa Rosa, Monclova, Parras, and Saltillo—the latter being the seat of government. It is situated in latitude  $25^{\circ} 25' 30''$  north, and longitude  $101^{\circ} 1' 45''$  west of Greenwich, on one of the numerous tributaries to the San Juan. It contains about 11,000 inhabitants, is a cleanly, well-built, well-paved, and well-watered town, and is the ecclesiastical as well as political capital. The cathedral, facing the main plaza, is a large and imposing stone structure, of a mixed order of architecture, the Arabesque predominating, with a richly ornate façade of cut stone, *painted* with various colors. The plaza is extensive, and the buildings on it generally two stories high, with balconies or porticoes. I think I can recognise in the domestic architecture of the cities an intimate blending of the Mexican, the Moorish, and the Flemish—the two last having been imported by the Spaniards, and engrafted on the original Aztec style. Directly fronting the cathedral is a beautiful and copious fountain, at which the female peons, in their picturesque costumes, may be seen at all hours of the day drawing water, and chatting with the characteristic volubility of the country; for most Mexicans, unlike the Spaniards, are inveterate talkers. Saltillo is a place of considerable trade, and is the seat of the only manufactories of which Coahuila can boast. These establishments are represented to be in a very flourishing condition, paying high wages to the employés, and large dividends to the stockholders. The city is not defensible, being situated in a valley which is commanded on three sides. The true battle field for its defence in front is just beyond the hacienda of San Juan de Buena Vista, about four miles beyond the town. On this approach is a narrow defile occupied by the road, on the right hand of which rises a high bluff hill, and on the left is a wide, deep, and almost impassable arroyo. This pass may be completely swept by a converging fire of artillery, and can be turned only by light infantry on the one hand, while on the other side of the ravine, (in which is a running stream of water,) no troops can pass without exposing their flank to the artillery within point blank range. To occupy the whole valley would demand about 4,000 men of all arms, with powerful batteries of field artillery, and it would probably require some 1,500 more to hold the town, protect the depôts and guard the passes. These forces could defend Saltillo in that direction from overwhelming numbers and superior guns. The true position for the defence of the



city in the rear, from the direction of Monterey, is at *Los Muertos*, thirty miles distant, one of the strongest mountain gorges I have ever seen. It is in fact the portal to the whole interior country. The Mexicans seem to have contemplated making a stand at this place after the termination of the armistice, and had half constructed several strong works which were calculated to command all the approaches within the reach of their guns. Why they should have abandoned this apparently impregnable post is still "a marvel and a mystery," unless we may venture to suppose that the known presence of a large column at Monclova, which might have taken them in reverse, impressed them with the idea that the forward movement of that division would render their position untenable, and jeopard the safety of their army.

More than half of the whole State of Coahuila belongs to the two brothers *Sanchez*, who also own some thirty thousand peons. Several of their vast estates are managed by stewards, while the remainder are rented. Their principal town residence is in Saltillo, but their favorite country seat is the magnificent hacienda of Patos. This powerful family, together with their relations, the Blancos, the Yvarros, and the Zualagos, own nearly the entire State and its population. They have taken no open or active part in the present war, and have preserved friendly and even kindly relations with many of our officers; but the Blancos and Sanchezes are understood to be prepared, under more promising circumstances, to uphold the Mexican government with their wealth and influence.\* Nearly all our expenditures for supplies have found their way directly or indirectly into the coffers of these princely nabobs.

Except for the education of the clergy, there are no seminaries of learning deserving of the name in Coahuila; but there is an ecclesiastical college in Saltillo of some reputation, but the course of instruction sedulously excludes everything approaching to science, and is confined to the classics and to the reading of the Fathers. The consequence of this state of things is, that by far the greater portion of the population are plunged into the most profound ignorance, and can neither read nor write. Many of the better class were formerly sent to the United States to be educated, but for some years this plan has been abandoned, and they are now sent for that purpose to France and to the city of Mexico.

Four-fifths of the population of northern Mexico are of the aboriginal race, (pure, or mixed in different degrees with Spanish blood,) the lineal descendants of the once powerful Aztec monarchy. In habits, costumes, mode of life, wants, and civilization, they have probably changed but little, with the exception of the abandonment of their barbarous sacrificial rites, since the conquest, and they retain even much of their original language. They are a good-looking people, and while one seldom sees a very large man amongst them, they are certainly a well-made, agile, and muscular race, (which we have been in the custom of underrating) of abstemious habits, and of great powers of endurance, on foot or on horseback. They are scarcely equalled as couriers, and are unsurpassed in marching. It may seem a paradox to say that they possess much *bold-*

\* This they have since done. One of the Sanchezes was with Miñon at the capture of Major Gaines, at Encarnacion, and gave him information of that movement. Colonel Blanco raised a large Mexican force of rancheros, and threw himself in the rear of Saltillo to cut off our retreat.

*ness* and little *courage*; they would venture where other men would hesitate, and yet would offer but faint resistance when danger is upon them. Hence it is that they so often fall victims to the Indians.

Fancy to yourself a rather light-colored Indian, dressed in a pair of leather unmentionables, without suspenders, buttoning from the knee downwards, which are usually left open in warm weather for comfort, and to exhibit the white drawers underneath; a common cotton shirt, often wanting; a red sash tied tightly around the waist; a pair of sandals on his feet, and enormous iron spurs on heel; with a heavy conical felt hat (that would almost resist a sabre cut) on head, and a long iron-pointed aspen goad in hand, and you have a perfect picture of the *ranchero*, or rather *vachero*. Mounted on a spirited pony, with a lasso at his saddle-bow, and he is no mean adversary for a single man to encounter. He rides well and fearlessly, and throws the lasso with unerring aim. It is a beautiful sight to see him with his red blanket (worn as a poncho in cold weather) streaming in the wind, his head bent eagerly forward, and lasso whirling in circles high in air, riding down some refractory animal that he seldom fails to catch, at the first throw, by the neck or hind foot, bringing him violently to the ground. The animal thus caught feels that the contest is ended, and quietly submits to his captor. It is amusing to see the young urchins following the example of their elders, and practising on little pigs and tender kids, who by no means appear to enjoy the fun. It verifies the old fable of the "boys and frogs." It may be sport to the one party, but is often death to the other. Every Mexican, whatever his condition may be, is expert with the lasso, and the throwing of it may be regarded as a national amusement. One of our men became intoxicated at the hacienda of Lorenzo, near Parras, and was in the act of raising his carbine to shoot Don Manuel, its amiable and accomplished proprietor, who, quick as thought, threw the noose over him and pinioned him by the arms, when our stalwart Arkansas cavalier became as meek and quiet as a lamb.

The wealthier classes dress very much in the same style, but of richer fabrics, their buttons being usually of silver, and they are particularly ostentatious in their saddles and housings, which are often overloaded with heavy silver ornaments. They are also very curious in the color and patterns of their blankets and the materials of their cloaks.

The women are rather under what we regard as the medium size, slight in figure, well-formed, and graceful; and while few are beautiful, many of them, while young, are good-looking and agreeable; their hands and feet are small, with well turned ankles; they have generally white teeth, good mouths, magnificent black eyes, and glossy black hair, in the dressing of which they daily bestow much pains. They appear to be amiable and kind-hearted, and are said to make good wives and mothers. They are cleanly in their habits; for, most of the towns and haciendas being situated on running streams, they have every advantage for bathing, of which they avail themselves most liberally, without encumbering themselves with much superfluous clothing. Their usual dress consists of thin slippers, without stockings, a cloth petticoat, usually red, and a chemise which exposes more of the person than is in most countries considered to be consistent with a due regard to modesty; but this is the custom of the country, and I am not disposed to criticise it; with a rosary around the neck, and gold ear-rings, and you have the female costume complete.