

THE SHIP IN THE DESERT

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The ship in the desert by Joaquin Miller

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JOAQUIN MILLER

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THE DESERT**

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SHIP IN THE DESERT.

BY
JOAQUIN MILLER,
AUTHOR OF "SONGS OF THE SIERRAS" AND "SONGS OF
THE SUN-LANDS."



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DEDICATED
TO
MY DEAR PARENTS,
ON THE FOOTHILLS OF
THE OREGON SIERRAS.

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PREFACE.



WITH deep reverence I inscribe these lines, my dear parents, to you. I see you now, away beyond the seas, beyond the lands where the sun goes down in the Pacific like some great ship of fire, resting still on the green hills, watching your herds, waiting

"Where rolls the Oregon,
And hears no sound save its own dashing."

Nearly a quarter of a century ago you took me the long and lonesome half-year's journey across the mighty continent, wild, and rent, and broken up, and sown with sand and ashes,

and crossed by tumbling, wooded rivers that ran as if glad to get away, fresh and strange and new as if but half-fashioned from the hand of God.

All the time as I tread this strange land I re-live those scenes, and you are with me. How dark and deep, how sullen, strong, and lion-like the mighty Missouri rolled between his walls of untracked wood and cleft the unknown domain of the middle world before us!

Then the frail and buffeted rafts on the river, the women and children huddled together, the shouts of the brawny men as they swam with the bellowing cattle; the cows in the stormy stream, eddying, whirling, spinning about, calling to their young, their bright horns shining in the sun. . . . The wild men waiting on the other side, painted savages leaning silent on their bows, despising our weakness, opening a way, letting us pass on

to the unknown distances, where they said the sun and moon lay down together and brought forth the stars. . . . The long and winding lines of wagons, the graves by the wayside, the women weeping together as they passed on. Then hills, then plains, parched lands like Syria, dust, and ashes, and alkali, cool streams with woods, camps by night, great wood fires in circles, tents in the centre like Cæsar's battle-camps,* painted men that passed like shadows, showers of arrows, the wild beasts howling from the hill. . . .

You, my dear parents, will pardon the thread of fiction on which I have strung these scenes and descriptions of a mighty land of mystery, and wild and savage grandeur, for the world will have its way, and, like a spoiled child, demands a tale.

" Yes,

We who toil and earn our bread

Still have our masters. . . ."