

THE PASSING OF JOAQUIN MILLER

The Famous Poet of the Sierras and a Pioneer Advocate of World Peace.

(Springfield Republican.)

Joaquin Miller, known as the "Poet of the Sierras," died February 26th at his home in Piedmont foothills, Cal. His daughter, Juanita, and his wife were with him. He had been in failing health for two years.

Cincinnatus Heine Miller was born November 10, 1842, at Liberty, Greening county, Ind. That State was then a half-way house, so to speak, to the Pacific coast of which such fabulous stories were coming from the first pioneers. Cincinnatus was nine years of age when his father was seized by the Oregon fever which followed upon the famous journey of Dr. Marcus Whitman in 1842 and 1843. Oregon was still primeval wilderness when the Miller family, consisting of the father, mother, three sons, and a daughter, set out for the Pacific slope. Arrived at the spot selected for the homestead, all set to work with ax, spade, and plow to clear and till the land and erect a rough habitation. In later years Joaquin Miller once wrote that he had rarely met a man who had done so much work with his hands as had devolved upon him because of this early initiation into frontier life. Yet schooling was by no means neglected, and after a hard day's toil the evenings were given to reading, for the children were fitting themselves to be teachers.

This peaceful and industrious frontier life was interrupted by an insurrection of the Modoc Indians, who had viewed with growing alarm this incursion of white immigrants which had followed Marcus Whitman's ride. From their almost inaccessible retreat, called Castle Rocks, they made raids which struck terror to the settlers, though the actual loss of life was not great. In June, 1855, Joaquin Miller, then 14, had a post at Soda Springs, not far from Castle Rocks, and during his absence his property was destroyed by a party of Indian raiders. When a party of volunteers was formed under the leadership of Reuben P. Gibson, to dislodge the Modocs from their strong position, Joaquin Miller was one of 29 taking part. The attack was a complete victory for the whites, but Miller fell with arrow wounds in his face and neck, and for days his life was in danger. It was to Gibson, become an old man, that Miller in later years addressed his well-known poem, "Old Gib at Castle Rocks," of which these stanzas may serve as an illustration:—

"His eyes are dim," he gropes his way,
His step is doubtful, slow,
And now men pass him by today;
But forty years ago—
Why forty years ago I say
Old Gib was good to know.

Full forty years ago today
This valley lay in flame;
Up yonder pass and far away
Red ruin swept the same;
Two women, with their babes at play,
Were butchered in black shame.

'Twas then with gun and flashing eye
Old Gib loomed like a pine;
'Now will you fight or will you fly?
'I'll take a fight in mine,
Come, let us fight; come, let us die;
'There came just twenty-nine.

Then cried the red chief from his height,
'Now, white man, what would you?
Behold my hundreds for the fight,
But yours so faint and few;
We are as rain, as hail at night,
But you, you are as dew.

'White man, go back; I beg go back,
I will not fight so few;
Yet if I hear one rifle crack,
Be that the doom of you!
Back! down, I say, back down your track,
Back, down! what else to do?

'What else to do? Avenge or die!
Brave men have died before;
And you shall fight, or you shall fly,
You find no women more,
No babes to butcher now; for I
Shall storm your Castle's door!"

Then bang! whiz bang! whiz bang
and ping!
Six thousand feet below
Sweet Sacramento ceased to sing,
But wept and wept, for oh!
'These arrows sting as adders sting,
And they kept stinging so.

Then one man cried: 'Brave men
have died,
And we can die as they;
But ah! my babe, my one year's bride!
And they so far away,
Brave Captain, lead us back—aside,
Must all die here today?

His face, his hands, his body bled:
Yea, no man there that day—
No white man there but turned to red
In that fierce fatal fray;
But Gib with set teeth only said:
'No! we came here to stay!"

They stayed and stayed, and Modocs stayed,

But when the night came on,
No white man there was now afraid.
The last Modoc had gone;
His ghost in Castle Rocks was laid
Till everlasting dawn."

Yet in spite of this early initiation into war, Joaquin Miller came to be an eloquent advocate of peace, and it was this antipathy to war, and no disloyalty to the Union, that made him take ground during the Civil War which seemed to the authorities treasonable, so that in 1864 his paper, the Democratic Register, published at Eugene, Or., was suppressed by the government officials. But to return to the Indian wars, this raid was but the first of three in which Miller fought the Modocs, showing much courage, though his sympathy was on the side of the Indians despoiled of their lands, and when the wars were over he became their friend and helper. When he had recovered from his wounds he entered Columbia College at Eugene, Or., and graduated in 1859, paying his way by teaching during the long vacations. His valedictory class poem, written in 1859, was the first composition of his to be printed. After graduating from college he studied law, and in 1861 was admitted to the bar, but instead of practicing he went to the gold diggings, which were then the craze. He had ill-luck as a miner, and ruined his eyes for life with snow blindness, contracted in a way which a classmate, writing in 1879, thus described:

"For years he was foremost in every desperate enterprise—crossing snow-capped mountains, swollen rivers, and facing hostile Indians. When snow fell 15 feet on Florence mountain, and hundreds were penned in camp without a word from wives, children, and loved ones at home, he said, "Boys, I will bring your letters from Lewiston." Afoot and alone, without a trail, he crossed the mountain tops, the dangerous streams, the wintry desert of Camas prairie, fighting back the hungry mountain wolves and returned bending beneath his load of loving messages from home. One day he was found, in defense of the weak, facing the pistol or bowie-knife of the desperado; and the next day he was washing the clothes and smoothing the pillow of a sick comrade.

He was ever a roamer and from Oregon and California he went on to Mexico and South America, insatiable for adventure. It was upon his return from South America that he established the Democratic Register, which had so unfortunate an end. His collapse left his fortunes low, but in 1866 he was elected judge of Grant county, Or., and held that office till 1870.

While serving as judge he gave himself assiduously to literature, and his long nights of writing and study further injured his weakened eyes. He now had a little money in hand and he resolved to visit Europe, hoping to find more appreciation in the old world than in the new. Nor was he disappointed in his expectation. His first volume, entitled "Specimens," published while he was judge, was praised in the Overland by Bret Harte, but was neglected by the public. In London he published a collection of his poems under the more taking title "Songs of the Sierras," and they met with instant success. England liked to read of

the kindled camp
Upon the mountain brow that broke below
In steep and grassy stairway to the damp
And dewy valley snapp'd and flavored glow
With knots of pine.

In the United States he had been known mainly by didactic verse in the newspapers, preachments that struck the popular heart, though they had brought little fame to the author. One of the most successful of these early waifs was "Is it Worth While?"—

Is it worth while that we jostle a brother
Bearing his load on the rough road of life?
Is it worth while that we jeer at each other
In blackness of heart?—that we war to the knife?
Got pity us all in our pitiful strife.

God pity us all as we jostle each other;
God pardon us all for the triumphs we feel
When a fellow goes down; poor, heart-broken brother,
Pierced to the heart; words are keener than steel,
And mightier far for woe or for weal.

Were it not well in this brief little journey
On over the isthmus, down into the tide,
That we give him a fish instead of a serpent,
Ere folding the hands to be and abide
For ever and aye in dust at his side?

Look at the roses saluting each other;
Look at the herds all at peace on the plain—
Man, and man only, makes war on his brother,
And dotes in his heart on his peril and pain—
Shamed by the brutes that go down on the plain.

It was in London that he suddenly became a lion. England likes its Americanism neat and strong—the past can hardly be employed for the English taste. Joaquin Miller, as he had now come to call himself, taking a Spanish sounding name that went well with the Sierras, was quite prepared to play up the picturesque which was not altogether a pose, though he no doubt realized its practical advantages. Of his dazzling reception in London he has himself given an account in the autobiographical notes to the editor of his poems published in 1902 by the Whittaker & Ray Company of San Francisco:—

"Letters—sweet, brave, good letters from the learned and the great—were so many I could not read them with my poor eyes and had to leave them to friends. They found two from the archbishop of Dublin. I was to breakfast with him to meet Browning, Dean Stanley, Houghton, and so on. I went to an old Jew close by to hire a dress suit, as Franklin had done for the court of St. James. While fitting on the clothes I told him I was in haste to go to a great breakfast. He stopped, looked at me, looked me all over, and then told me I must not wear that, but he would hire me a suit of velvet. By degrees, as he fixed me up, he got at, or guessed at some facts, and when I asked to pay him he shook his head. I put some money down and he pushed it back. He said he had a son, his only family now, at Oxford, and he kept on fixing me up; cane, great tall silk hat, gloves and all. Who would have guessed the heart to be found there?"

"Browning was just back from Italy, sunburned and ruddy. 'Robert, you are browned,' smiled Lady Augusta. 'And you are August-a,' bowed the great poet grandly; and, by what coincidence—he, too, was in brown velvet, and so like my own that I was a bit uneasy.

"Two of the archbishop's beautiful daughters had been riding in the park with the earl of Aberdeen. 'And did you gallop?' asked Browning of the younger beauty. 'I galloped, Joyce galloped, we galloped all three.' Then we all laughed at the happy and hearty retort, and Browning, beating the time and clang of galloping horses' feet on the table with his fingers, repeated the exact measure in Latin from Virgil; and the archbishop laughingly took it up, in Latin, where he left off. I then told Browning I had an order—it was my first—for a poem from the Oxford Magazine, and would like to borrow the measure and spirit of his 'God News' for a prairie fire on the plains, driving a buffalo and all other life before it into a river. 'Why not borrow from Virgil, as I did? He is a rich as one of your gold mines, while I am but a poor scribe.' And this was my first of inner London.

"Fast on top of this came breakfasts with Lord Houghton, lunch with Browning, a dinner with Rossetti to meet the great painters; the good old Jew garmenting me always, and always pushing back the pay."

His eyes failed once more, this time from overstraining them in reading the poems of Walt Whitman, "the last book I ever read." But he managed to do some newspaper correspondence, and his letters were very popular. He published books of poetry also, in quick succession—"Songs of the Sunland" in 1873, and "The Ship in the Desert" and "Songs of Italy" soon after. But he made more money from his plays, several of which, among them "The Danites" (1876) and "The Silent Man" (1878) were very popular. Other books of this period are "My Life Among the Modocs," "Shadows of Shasta," "The Gold Seekers of the Sierras," and "Memories and Rhyme." But his writing did not interfere with his travel, and though he built him a widely advertised house at Oakland, Cal., the Heights, looking out through the Golden Gate, he was seldom there to enjoy the famous view. One of his longest journeys was to Palestine and Egypt, a journey which inspired him to write a life of Christ, and led later to his notable prose poem, "The Building of the City Beautiful." But over this picture of a book did not appear until 1900. In the meantime he had traveled much, seen much, written much. He took part in the gold rush to the Klondike in 1897 and wrote picturesque letters about it. He lectured in many cities, displaying the picturesque exterior that was expected of him. He went with the expedition of the allies for the relief of the besieged legations at Peking during the boxer riots. And in one way and another he managed to impress himself on the imagination of the public more than almost any American poet of his time. As for genius, he himself held that there is no such thing:—

Is there such a thing as genuine inspiration? I think there is no such thing. Rather let us call it a devout and all-pervading love of the sublime, the beautiful, and the good; the never-questioning conviction that there is nothing in this world that is not beautiful or trying to be beautiful. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Genius is love that is born of this truth leading ever by plain and simple ways, and true toil and care, as all nature toils and cares, as God toils and cares; that all. I write this down for those who may come after. We shall have higher results from the plain, sweet truth.

THE SONS OF MARTHA.

The Sons of Mary seldom bother, for they have inherited that good part.

But the Sons of Martha favor their mother of the careful soul and the troubled heart;

And because she lost her temper once, and because she was rude to the Lord, her Guest,

Her Sons must wait upon Mary's Sons world without end, reprieve, or rest.

It is their care in all the ages to take the buffet and cushion the shock;

It is their care that the gear engages; it is their care that the switches lock;

It is their care that the wheels run truly; it is their care to embark and entrain,

Tally, transport and deliver duly the Sons of Mary by land and main.

They say to the mountains, "Be ye removed!" They say to the lesser floods, "Run dry!"

Under their rods are the rocks reprov'd—they are not afraid of that which is high.

Then do the hilltops shake to the summit; then is the bed of the deep laid bare,

That the Sons of Mary may overcome it, pleasantly sleeping and unaware.

They finger Death at their glove's end when they piece and replace the living wires.

He rears against the gates they tend; they feed him hungry behind their fires.

Early at dawn e'en men see clear they stumble into his terrible stall.

And hale him forth like a haltered steer and goad and turn him till evenfall.

To these from birth is belief forbidden; from these till death is relief afar—

They are concerned with matters hidden—under the earth line their altars are.

The secret fountains to follow up, waters withdrawn to restore to the mouth.

Yea, and gather the floods as in a cup, and pour them again at a city's drouth.

They do not preach that their God will rouse them a little before the nuts work loose;

They do not teach that His pity allows them to leave their work whenever they choose.

As in the thronged and the lightened ways, so in the dark and desert they stand,

Wary and watchful all their days, that their brethren's days may be long in the land.

Lift ye the stone, or cleave the wood, to make a path more fair or flat,

Lo! it is black already with blood some Sons of Martha spilled for that,

Not as a ladder from earth to heaven, nor as an altar to any creed.

But simple service, simply given to his own kind, in their common need.

And the Sons of Mary smile and are blessed—they know the angels are on their side.

They know in them is the grace confessed, and for them are the Mercedes multiplied.

They sit at the feet, and they hear the Word—they know how truly the Promise runs.

They have cast their burden upon the Lord, and—the Lord He lays it on Martha's Sons.

RUDYARD KIPLING.

Prison Sonnet.

I dreamed the woman who is all my care

Had stretched her arms to me; a weeping's tear

Dropped to my cheek unbidden; near, so near

She seemed I strove to touch in my despair

The empress' coronal of night-hued hair.

But anguish graven on her face I read,

And in a sudden agony of dread

I forced my lips to unaccustomed prayer:

"If Thou art God, despite my unbelief,

Guard her who hath not sinned against Thy word,

Who hath not mocked Thee in her deepest grief:

So shall my mouth revile no more, O Lord!"

Sleep veiled from me the splendor of her eyes . . .

Who knows if it be thus that He replies?

—John Carter.

RECENT DORAN BOOKS.

The George H. Doran Co., issued last month, among other books, **Twixt Land and Sea**, by Joseph Conrad; **The Story of Stephen Compton**, by J. E. Patterson; **The Lee Shore**, by Rose Macaulay; **Bunch Grass**, by H. E. Vachell; **The Private Life of Henry Maitland**, by Morley Roberts; **Modern Problems**, by Sir Oliver Lodge; **The Blindness of Virtue**, by Cosmo Hamilton; **The Elements of Child Study**, by W. W. Smith; and **The Case of Oscar Slater**, by Sir A. Conan Doyle.