

HOME & SCHOOL

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Mirage.

BY SUSAN COOLIDGE.

Beyond the plain sirocco-fanned,
The heat and hush of desert sand,
A belt of feathery palms arise,
Traced like a vision on their skies.
Cool waters ripple at their feet,
O dream divine, be real as sweet !
We near, the mocking shadow flee ;
But could we mount as eagles do,
High and yet higher, we should see
Where far, far off the real palms be,
Behind the false there hides the true.

Beyond the fog wreaths curling gray
Lies the bright stretch of clear noon
day
There seas are blue and glad, and
Of white waves leap on yellow sands,
The merry fisher trims his sail
With never thought of cloud or gale.
We sadly sit, - but could we rise
Above these vapors hovering dun,
Which are of joy the thin disguise,
We too should laugh -neath laugh-
ing skies,
Behind the shadow hides the sun.

Ah, coward heart ! be not so blind,
Be not so shaken, valiant mind,
As the grim shadow all men fear
Draws nearer with each urging year,
A hovering shape which flits and
flies,
And stains and blots the sunniest
Did we but dare to rise above
As angels do, emparadised,
Our eyes should see the cloud re-
move ;
Behind the dread, the Eternal Love ;
Behind the death, the welcoming
Christ !

Crossing the Desert.

ONE might imagine that the arid Sahara had been the bed of some great sea, and that weary of its burden of waters had refused to hold them, and being doomed never more to know the blessing of its cooling and life-preserving presence. The oases are depressions, and are of such a geological formation that the water from some hidden spring is retained, and a verdure nourished which has won for them from the desert travellers the name of Islands of the Blessed. Were it not for these resting-places it would be impossible to traverse the desert even with the aid of an animal so wonderfully adapted to endure the peculiar hardships, as is the camel. Supplied by nature with wonderful store-places for food and drink, it can subsist for a long time with but very slight nourishment. The hump which we in our childhood days imagined was especially provided to afford a seat for the rider,

is a reservoir of fat from which the camel draws nourishment, so that sometimes when the animals come in from a long journey, the hump is greatly diminished. The countries adjoining the desert are almost as effectually

here and there, and which no other creature would deign to touch. His foot is so adapted to the sandy ground that he can travel without difficulty where a horse would fall exhausted on the yielding soil, before half his

New Mexico and California, and the commander of one expedition testifies that camels have carried water for the mules used by the men sometimes for more than a week without once tasting it themselves.

The general ignorance concerning the whole continent of Africa, and especially the desert portion of it, has afforded a strong temptation to such as have penetrated into its secrets to exaggerate them, and as we are becoming better informed, some of the traditions of the past are losing their terror. Desert journeys are certainly not luxuriously comfortable, but they are probably attended with no severer suffering than has been experienced in mountain climbing. But men are less inclined to defy obstacles under a scorching sun whose enervating rays, reflected from the burning sand, acquire terrible power, than amid a cold and bracing atmosphere.

Monsieur Pouchet graphically describes his approach to one of the deserts of Upper Egypt :

"The eye only sees an unbroken sheet of burning sand. Not a cry, not a murmur is heard, and scarce even a loitering vulture devours the last fragment of some camel which had fallen on the sand, and the bleached skeleton of which will soon be added to so many others now marking out the desert routes. Not a cloud tarnishes the azure of the sky, not a breath refreshes the air ; a sun, the ardor of which nothing moderates, pours down its sparkling light and fiery rays, burning even through one's clothes. The motionless and heated atmosphere tortures the face with its fiery breath, and even the sand attains an extreme heat. My thermometers being broken, I tried to ascertain the temperature by plunging my hands into the superficial layers, but at the end of a few seconds a stinging pain compelled me to withdraw



CROSSING THE DESERT.

separated as if a sea rolled between, and were it not for this "Ship of the Desert," as the poetical Arabs call it, the separation would be greater. The desert is the camel's home. He can eat the scanty herbage that springs up

day's journey was accomplished. But stranger still is the wonderful provision which enables these patient creatures to toil beneath the burning sun for days without drinking. They have been used in explorations in

them.
"Instead of the rolling waves and cool breezes of the sea, this funeral region only gives out burning gusts and scorching blasts which seem to issue from the gates of hell ; these are