



America's Children



Martha of California

by James Otis

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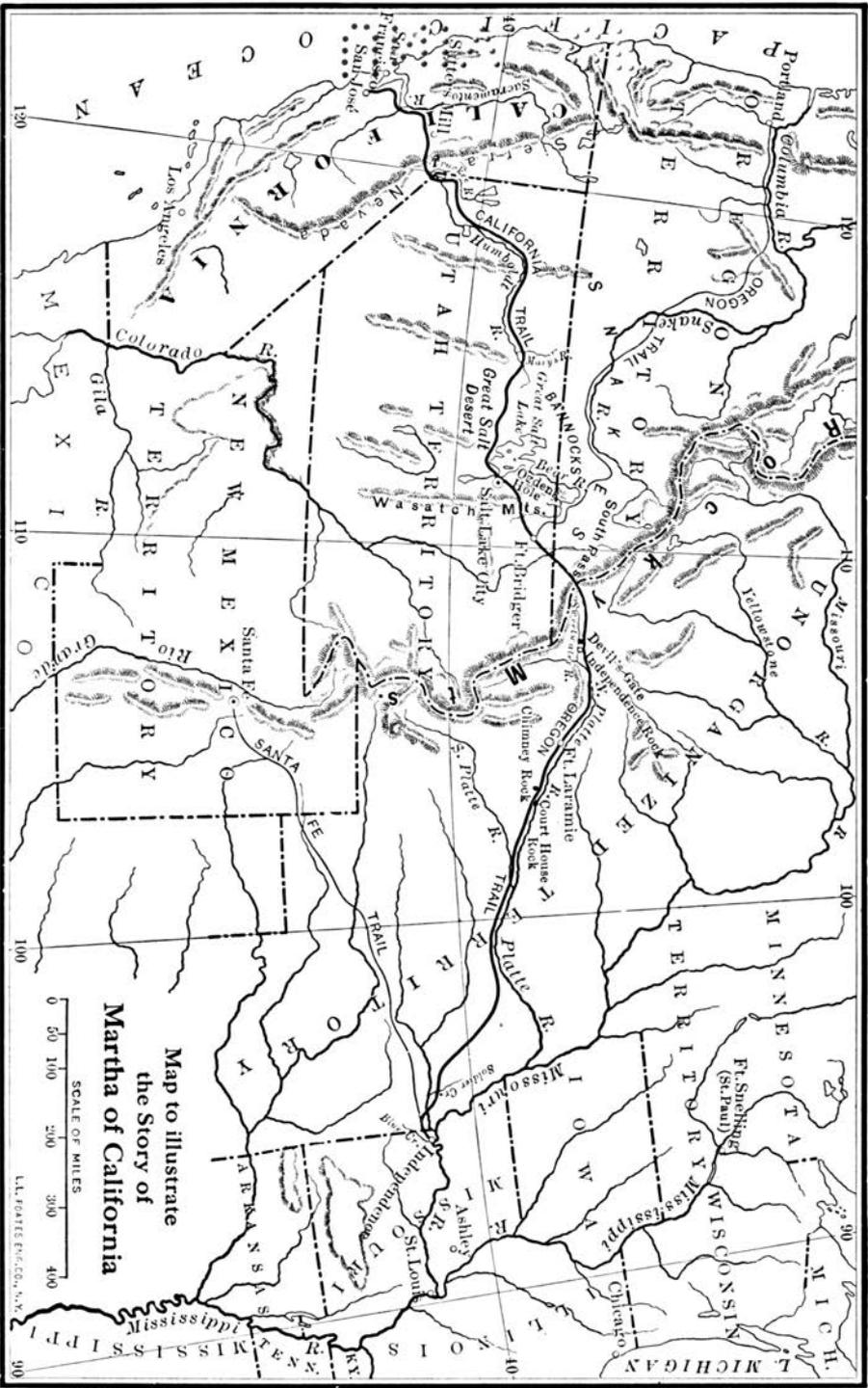
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Map to illustrate
the Story of
Martha of California

SCALE OF MILES
0 50 100 200 300 400

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A NOTE TO THE READER

This book was written in the early 20th century, a time when societal attitudes and language were significantly from what we recognize today. As you delve into its pages, you might come across terms and descriptions that our modern sensibilities find offensive or inappropriate. These echo the beliefs and biases of that era, some of which were fueled by ignorance, fear, and misunderstanding.

We've chosen to preserve the original text, providing an unvarnished window into the past. It's essential to approach this reading with an open heart and mind, recognizing the historical context that shaped these terms and views. While we've made progress as a society, the shadows of these old attitudes sometimes persist.

By recognizing and reflecting on the profound impact such perspectives have left on our culture, we can deepen our understanding of history and chart a course towards a more inclusive and compassionate future.

A CHANGE OF HOMES



IN case one should ask in the years to come how it happened that I, Martha Early, who was born in Ashley, Pike County, in the state of Missouri, and lived there until I was twelve years old, journeyed across the prairies and deserts to California, the question can be answered if I write down what I saw when so many people from our county went to make new homes in that state where gold had been found in such abundance.

For my part, I used to wonder why people should be willing to leave Missouri, enduring the many hardships they knew awaited them on the journey of two thousand miles, in order to buy land in a country where nearly all the inhabitants were Spaniards and Mexicans.

I suppose the stories told about the wonderful quantity of gold which had suddenly been found in California caused our people to think particularly of that far-off land. When the excitement of getting rich by digging in the earth a few weeks or a few months had in a measure died away, there came tales regarding the fertile soil and the beauty of the country, until nearly every one in Pike County, as well as in the county of the same name just across the Mississippi River in the state of Illinois, much the same as had a fever for moving.

Perhaps that is why the people we met while journeying called all the emigrants "Pikers." You see there were so many from both the Pike counties who went into

California in the year 1851, that it appeared to strangers as if every person on the trail had come from Pike County.

JOE BOWERS

THEN, too, fully half of all these emigrants were singing or whistling that song of "Joe Bowers," which was supposed to have been written by a Piker, and to represent a man from Missouri or Illinois.

Surely every one remembers it. The first verse, and if I have heard it once I certainly have a thousand times, goes like this

"My name it is Joe Bowers
And I've got a brother Ike.
I came from old Missouri,
Yes, all the way from Pike."

The song was intended to show that this Joe Bowers came from our county, and, perhaps, because so many of the emigrants were singing it, all of us who went into California in the year 1851 were, as I have said, called "Pikers."

However the name came about, I was a Piker, and before we arrived in this wondrously beautiful country, I wished again and again that I had been almost any other than an emigrant, for the way was long, and oh! so wearisome.

I must always think of Missouri as being one of the best of all the states in the Union, because it was there I



was born and there I went to school until father caught the California fever, which resulted in our setting out on a journey which, for a time, seemed endless.

My father had no idea of going so far simply to dig for gold. He had seen many who went across the country in 1849 believing they would come back rich as kings, yet who returned home poorer in pocket than when they left; therefore he came to understand that only a few of all that vast army of miners who hastened into California after the discovery at Sutter's Mill, got enough of the precious metal to pay for the food they ate.

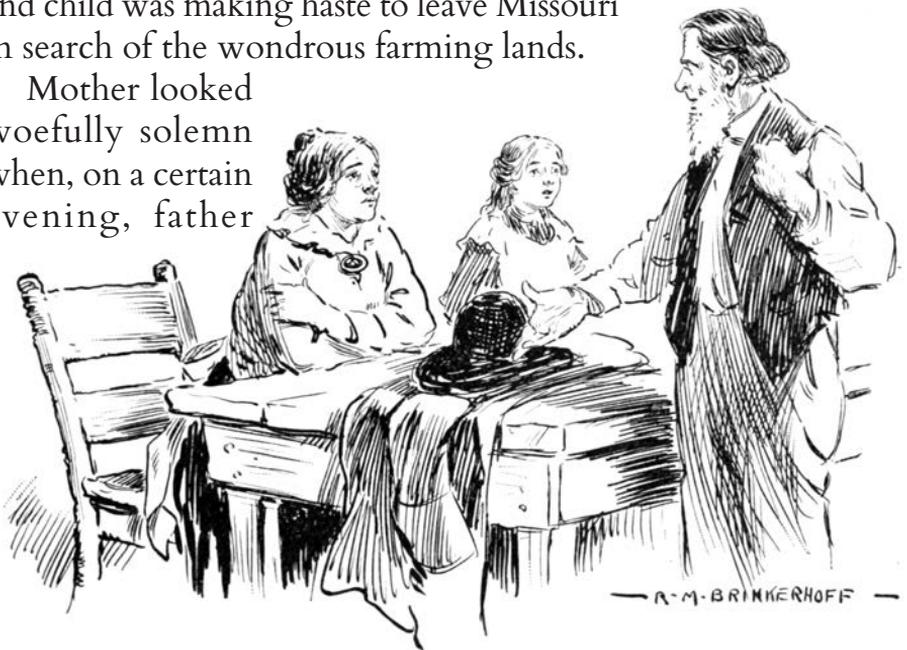
Father thought he could buy better land in California than was to be found in Pike County, for to have heard the stories told by some of the people who had come

back disappointed from the land of gold, you might have believed that one had only to put a few seeds at random in the ground in order to gather marvelous crops.

THE REASONS FOR MOVING

NOR was my father the only man who put faith in at least some of the fanciful tales told concerning the land of California which had so lately been given up 'to the United States by the Spaniards. Our neighbors for miles around were in a state of unrest and excitement, until it was decided that nearly all would undertake the long journey, and I could not prevent myself from wondering if Pike County would not feel lonely to have the people abandon it, for it surely seemed as if every man, woman, and child was making haste to leave Missouri in search of the wondrous farming lands.

Mother looked woefully solemn when, on a certain evening, father



came home and told us that he had sold the plantation for about half as much as it had cost him, and was going to join the next company that set out from Pike County.

It was a long time before mother would have very much to say about the journey, but as the days passed and the neighbors who were going with us came to our home that they might talk over the preparations for moving, she became interested in making plans, although again and again, when we two were alone, she told me that this trailing over two thousand miles of deserts and mountains was not to her liking.

MOTHER'S ANXIETY

It was only natural she should be worried about making such a great change, for all father's worldly goods consisted of the Pike County plantation and the live stock, and if, after selling the land and spending very nearly all his money to provide for the journey, we found that California farms were no better than the one we were leaving, it would be the saddest kind of mistake.

"Your father has set his mind on going; the homestead has been sold, and we must make the best of it, Martha, hoping that half the stories we have heard about California are true," she said to me so many times that I came almost to believe it was a foolish venture upon which we were about to embark.

Then, when I began to wonder how we were to live during such a long journey, and asked mother if it would be possible for us to cook and churn and do the family