

**A FIRST FAMILY OF
TASAJARA; IN TWO
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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A first family of Tasajara; In two Volumes, Vol. I by Bret Harte

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BRET HARTE

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TASAJARA; IN TWO
VOLUMES, VOL. I**

A FIRST FAMILY

OF

TASAJARA

BY

BRET HARTE, 1839-1902

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. I

LONDON

MACMILLAN AND CO.

AND NEW YORK

1891

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FIRST FAMILY OF TASAJARA

CHAPTER I

"It blows," said Joe Wingate.

As if to accent the words of the speaker a heavy gust of wind at that moment shook the long, light wooden structure which served as the general store of Sidon settlement, in Contra Costa. Even after it had passed a prolonged whistle came through the keyhole, sides, and openings of the closed glass front doors, that served equally for windows, and filled the canvas

ceiling which hid the roof above like a bellying sail. A wave of enthusiastic emotion seemed to be communicated to a line of straw hats and sou'-westers suspended from a cross beam, and swung them with every appearance of festive rejoicing, while a few dusters, overcoats and "hickory" shirts hanging on the side walls exhibited such marked though idiotic animation, that it had the effect of a satirical comment on the lazy, purposeless figures of the four living inmates of the store.

Ned Billings momentarily raised his head and shoulders depressed in the back of his wooden arm-chair, glanced wearily around, said, "You bet, it's no slouch of a storm," and then lapsed again with further extended legs, and an added sense of comfort.

Here the third figure, which had been lean-

ing listlessly against the shelves, putting aside the arm of a swaying overcoat that seemed to be emptily embracing him, walked slowly from behind the counter to the door, examined its fastenings, and gazed at the prospect. He was the owner of the store and the view was a familiar one. A long stretch of treeless waste before him meeting an equal stretch of dreary sky above, and night hovering somewhere between the two. This was indicated by splashes of darker shadow as if washed in with Indian ink, and a lighter low-lying streak that might have been the horizon, but was not. To the right, on a line with the front door of the store, were several scattered, widely dispersed objects, that, although vague in outline, were rigid enough in angles to suggest sheds or barns, but certainly not trees.

"There's a heap more wet to come afore the wind goes down," he said, glancing at the sky. "Hark to that, now!"

They listened lazily. There was a faint murmur from the shingles above; then suddenly the whole window was filmed and blurred as if the entire prospect had been wiped out with a damp sponge. The man turned listlessly away.

"That's the kind that soaks in; thar won't be much teamin' over Tasajara for the next two weeks, I reckon," said the fourth loungee, who, seated on a high barrel, was nibbling—albeit critically and fastidiously—biscuits and dried apples alternately from open boxes on the counter. "It's lucky you've got in your winter stock, Harkutt."

The shrewd eyes of Mr. Harkutt, proprietor,

glanced at the occupation of the speaker as if even his foresight might have its possible drawbacks, but he said nothing.

"There'll be no show for Sidon until you've got a waggon road from here to the creek," said Billings languidly, from the depths of his chair. "But what's the use o' talkin'? Thar ain't energy enough in all Tasajara to build it. A God-forsaken place, that two months of the year can only be reached by a mail-rider once a week, don't look ez if it was goin' to break its back haulin' in goods and settlers I tell ye what, gentlemen,—it makes me sick!" And apparently it had enfeebled him to the extent of interfering with his aim in that expectoration of disgust against the stove with which he concluded his sentence.