

**BY SHORE
AND SEDGE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649255375

By shore and sedge by Bret Harte

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN & CO., BOSTON, MASS.

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BRET HARTE



BOSTON
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
New York: 11 East Seventeenth Street
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1885

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AN APOSTLE OF THE TULE.



I.

ON October 10, 1856, about four hundred people were camped in Tasajara Valley, California. It could not have been for the prospect, since a more barren, dreary, monotonous, and uninviting landscape never stretched before human eye; it could not have been for convenience or contiguity, as the nearest settlement was thirty miles away; it could not have been for health or salubrity, as the breath of the ague-haunted *tules* in the outlying Stockton marshes swept through the valley; it could not have been for space or comfort, for, encamped on an unlimited plain, men and women were huddled together as closely as in an urban tene-

ment-house, without the freedom or decency of rural isolation ; it could not have been for pleasant companionship, as dejection, mental anxiety, tears, and lamentation were the dominant expression ; it was not a hurried flight from present or impending calamity, for the camp had been deliberately planned, and for a week pioneer wagons had been slowly arriving ; it was not an irrevocable exodus, for some had already returned to their homes that others might take their places. It was simply a religious revival of one or two denominational sects, known as a "camp-meeting."

A large central tent served for the assembling of the principal congregation ; smaller tents served for prayer-meetings and classrooms, known to the few unbelievers as "side-shows ;" while the actual dwellings of the worshipers were rudely extemporized shanties of boards and canvas, sometimes mere *corrals* or inclosures open to the cloudless sky, or more often the unhitched cov-

ered wagon which had brought them there. The singular resemblance to a circus, already profanely suggested, was carried out by a straggling fringe of boys and half-grown men on the outskirts of the encampment, acrimonious with disappointed curiosity, lazy without the careless ease of vagrancy, and vicious without the excitement of dissipation. For the coarse poverty and brutal economy of the larger arrangements, the dreary panorama of unlovely and unwholesome domestic details always before the eyes, were hardly exciting to the senses. The circus might have been more dangerous, but scarcely more brutalizing. The actors themselves, hard and aggressive through practical struggles, often warped and twisted with chronic forms of smaller diseases, or malformed and crippled through carelessness and neglect, and restless and uneasy through some vague mental distress and inquietude that they had added to their burdens, were scarcely amusing performers. The rheumatic Parkinsons,