

**A FIRST FAMILY OF
TASAJARA. VOL. II**

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A first family of Tasajara. Vol. II by Bret Harte

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BRET HARTE

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VOL. 11.

A FIRST FAMILY

OF

TASAJARA

BY

BRET HARTE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

London
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A

FIRST FAMILY OF TASAJARA

CHAPTER I

MR. DANIEL HARCOURT'S town mansion was also on an eminence, but it was that gentler acclivity of fashion known as Rincon Hill, and sunned itself on a southern slope of luxury. It had been described as "princely," and "fairy-like," by a grateful reporter; tourists and travellers had sung its praises in letters to their friends and in private reminiscences, for it had dispensed hospitality to most of the celebrities who had

visited the coast. Nevertheless its charm was mainly due to the ruling taste of Miss Clementina Harcourt, who had astonished her father by her marvellous intuition of the nice requirements and elegant responsibilities of their position ; and had thrown her mother into the pained perplexity of a matronly hen, who, among the ducks' eggs entrusted to her fostering care, had unwittingly hatched a graceful but discomposing cygnet.

Indeed, after holding out feebly against the siege of wealth at Tasajara and San Francisco, Mrs. Harcourt had abandoned herself hopelessly to the horrors of its invasion ; had allowed herself to be dragged from her kitchen by her exultant daughters and set up in black silk in a certain conventional respectability in the drawing-room. Strange to say, her commiserating hospitality, or hospital-like ministration, not only

gave her popularity, but a certain kind of distinction. An exaltation so sorrowfully deprecated by its possessor was felt to be a sign of superiority. She was spoken of as "motherly," even by those who vaguely knew that there was somewhere a discarded son struggling in poverty with a helpless wife, and that she had sided with her husband in disinheriting a daughter who had married unwisely. She was sentimentally spoken of as a "true wife," while never opposing a single meanness of her husband, suggesting a single active virtue, nor questioning her right to sacrifice herself and her family for his sake. With nothing she cared to affect she was quite free from affectation, and even the critical Lawrence Grant was struck with the dignity which her narrow simplicity, that had seemed small even in Sidon, attained in her palatial hall

in San Francisco. It appeared to be a perfectly logical conclusion that when such unaffectedness and simplicity were forced to assume a hostile attitude to anybody, the latter must be to blame.

Since the festival of Tasajara, Mr. Grant had been a frequent visitor at Harcourt's, and was a guest on the eve of his departure from San Francisco. The distinguished position of each made their relations appear quite natural without inciting gossip as to any attraction in Harcourt's daughters. It was late one afternoon as he was passing the door of Harcourt's study that his host called him in. He found him sitting at his desk with some papers before him and a folded copy of the *Clarion*. With his back to the fading light of the window his face was partly in shadow.

"By the way, Grant," he began, with an assumption of carelessness somewhat inconsistent with the fact that he had just called him in, "it may be necessary for me to pull up those fellows who are blackguarding me in the *Clarion*."

"Why, they haven't been saying anything new?" asked Grant, laughingly, as he glanced towards the paper.

"No—that is—only a re-hash of what they said before," returned Harcourt without opening the paper.

"Well," said Grant playfully, "you don't mind their saying that you're *not* the original pioneer of Tasajara, for it's true: nor that that fellow Lige Curtis disappeared suddenly, for he did, if I remember rightly. But there's nothing in that to invalidate your rights to Tasajara, to say