

# HARRIET TUBMAN

THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE

By

SARAH H. BRADFORD

"Farewell, ole Marster, don't think hard of me,  
I'm going on to Canada, where all de slaves are free."

"Jesus, Jesus will go wid you,  
He will lead you to His throne,  
He who died has gone before you,  
Trode de wine-press all alone."

page 3

## PREFACE.

The title I have given my black heroine, in this second edition of her story, viz.: THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE, may seem a little ambitious, considering that this Moses was a woman, and that she succeeded in piloting only three or four hundred slaves from the land of bondage to the land of freedom.

But I only give her here the name by which she was familiarly known, both at the North and the South, during the years of terror of the Fugitive Slave Law, and during our last Civil War, in both of which she took so prominent a part.

And though the results of her unexampled heroism were not to free a whole nation of bond-men and bond-women, yet this object was as much the desire of her heart, as it was of that of the great leader of Israel. Her cry to the slave-holders, was ever like his to Pharaoh, "Let my people go!" and

page 4

not even he imperiled life and limb more willingly, than did our courageous and self-sacrificing friend.

Her name deserves to be handed down to posterity, side by side with the names of Jeanne D'Arc, Grace Darling, and Florence Nightingale, for not one of these women, noble and brave as they were, has shown more courage, and power of endurance, in facing danger and death to relieve human suffering, than this poor black woman, whose story I am endeavoring in a most imperfect way to give you.

Would that Mrs. Stowe had carried out the plan she once projected, of being the historian of our sable friend; by her graphic pen, the incidents of such a life might have been wrought up into a tale of thrilling interest, equaling, if not exceeding her world renowned "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

The work fell to humbler hands, and the first edition of this story, under the title of "Harriet Tubman," was written in the greatest possible haste, while the writer was preparing for a voyage to Europe. There was pressing need for this book, to save the poor woman's little home from being sold under a mortgage, and letters and facts

page 5

were penned down rapidly, as they came in. The book has now been in part re-written and the letters and testimonials placed in an appendix.

For the satisfaction of the incredulous (and there will naturally be many such, when so strange a tale is repeated to them), I will here state that so far as it has been possible, I have received corroboration of every incident related to me by my heroic friend. I did this for the satisfaction of others, not for my own. No one can hear Harriet talk, and not believe every word she says. As Mr. Sanborn says of her, "she is too *real* a person, not to be true."

Many incidents quite as wonderful as those related in the story, I have rejected, because I had no way in finding the persons who could speak to their truth.

This woman was the friend of William H. Seward, of Gerritt Smith, of Wendell Phillips, of William Lloyd Garrison, and of many other distinguished philanthropists

before the War, as of very many officers of the Union Army during the conflict.

After her almost superhuman efforts in making

page 6

her own escape from slavery, and then returning to the South *nineteen times*, and bringing away with her over three hundred fugitives, she was sent by Governor Andrew of Massachusetts to the South at the beginning of the War, to act as spy and scout for our armies, and to be employed as hospital nurse when needed.

Here for four years she labored without any remuneration, and during the time she was acting as nurse, never drew but twenty days' rations from our Government. She managed to support herself, as well as to take care of the suffering soldiers.

Secretary Seward exerted himself in every possible way to procure her a pension from Congress, but red-tape proved too strong even for him, and her case was rejected, because it did not come under any recognized law.

The first edition of this little story was published through the liberality of Gerritt Smith, Wendell Phillips, and prominent men in Auburn, and the object for which it was written was accomplished. But that book has long been out of print, and the facts stated there are all unknown to the present generation.

page 7

There have, I am told, often been calls for the book, which could not be answered, and I have been urged by many friends as well as by Harriet herself, to prepare another edition. For another necessity has arisen and she needs help again not for herself, but for certain helpless ones of her people.

Her own sands are nearly run, but she hopes, 'ere she goes home, to see this work, a hospital, well under way. Her last

breath and her last efforts will be spent in the cause of those for whom she has already risked so much.

For them her tears will fall,  
For them her prayers ascend;  
To them her toils and cares be given,  
Till toils and cares shall end.  
S.H.B.

**Letter from Mr. Oliver Johnson for the second edition:**

NEW YORK, *March 6*, 1886.

MY DEAR MADAM:

I am very glad to learn that you are about to publish a revised edition of your life of that heroic woman, Harriet Tubman, by whose assistance so

page 8

many American slaves were enabled to break their bonds.

During the period of my official connection with the Anti-Slavery office in New York, I saw her frequently, when she came there with the companies of slaves, whom she had successfully piloted away from the South; and often listened with wonder to the story of her adventures and hair-breadth escapes.

She always told her tale with a modesty which showed how unconscious she was of having done anything more than her simple duty. No one who listened to her could doubt her perfect truthfulness and integrity.

Her shrewdness in planning the escape of slaves, her skill in avoiding arrest, her courage in every emergency, and her willingness to endure hardship and face any danger for the sake of her poor followers was phenomenal.

I regret to hear that she is poor and ill, and hope the sale of your book will give her the relief she so much needs and so well deserves.

Yours truly,

OLIVER JOHNSON.

page 9

AUBURN THEOL. SEMINARY,  
*March 16, 1886.*

**By PROFESSOR HOPKINS**

The remarkable person who is the subject of the following sketch, has been residing mostly ever since the close of the war in the outskirts of the City of Auburn, during all which time I have been well acquainted with her. She has all the characteristics of the pure African race strongly marked upon her, though from which one of the various tribes that once fed the Barracoons, on the Guinea coast, she derived her indomitable courage and her passionate love of freedom I know not; perhaps from the Fellatas, in whom those traits were predominant.

Harriet lives upon a farm which the twelve hundred dollars given her by Mrs. Bradford from the proceeds of the first edition of this little book, enabled her to redeem from a mortgage held by the late Secretary Seward.

Her household is very likely to consist of several old black people, "bad with the rheumatize," some forlorn wandering woman, and a couple of small images of God cut in ebony. How she manages to feed and clothe herself and them, the Lord best

page 10

knows. She has too much pride and too much faith to beg. She takes thankfully, but without any great effusiveness of gratitude, whatever God's messengers bring her.

I have never heard that she absolutely lacked. There are some good people in various parts of the country, into whose hearts God sends the thought, from time to time, that Harriet may be at the bottom of the flour sack, or of the potatoes, and the "help in time of need" comes to her.

Harriet's simplicity and ignorance have, in some cases, been imposed upon, very signally in one instance in Auburn, a few years ago; but nobody who knows her has the slightest doubt of her perfect integrity.

The following sketch taken by Mrs. Bradford, chiefly from Harriet's own recollections, which are wonderfully distinct and minute, but also from other corroborative sources, gives but a very imperfect account of what this woman has been.

Her color, and the servile condition in which she was born and reared, have doomed her to obscurity, but a more heroic soul did not breathe in the bosom of Judith or of Jeanne D'Arc.

page 11

No fear of the lash, the blood-hound, or the fiery stake, could divert her from her self-imposed task of leading as many as possible of her people "from the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage."

The book is good literature for the black race, or the white race, and though no similar conditions may arise, to test the possibilities that are in any of them, yet the example of this poor slave woman may well stand out before them, and before all people, black or white, to show what a lofty and martyr spirit may accomplish, struggling against overwhelming obstacles.

page 13

## **HARRIET TUBMAN**

THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE.

On a hot summer's day, perhaps sixty years ago, a group of merry little darkies were rolling and tumbling in the sand in front of the large house of a Southern planter. Their shining skins gleamed in the sun, as they rolled over each other in

their play, and their voices, as they chattered together, or shouted in glee, reached even to the cabins of the negro quarter, where the old people groaned in spirit, as they thought of the future of those unconscious young revelers; and their cry went up, "O, Lord, how long!"

Apart from the rest of the children, on the top rail of a fence, holding tight on to the tall gate post, sat a little girl of perhaps thirteen years of age; darker than any of the others, and with a more decided *woolliness* in the hair; a pure unmitigated

page 14

African. She was not so entirely in a state of nature as the rollers in the dust beneath her; but her only garment was a short woolen skirt, which was tied around her waist, and reached about to her knees. She seemed a dazed and stupid child, and as her head hung upon her breast, she looked up with dull blood-shot eyes towards her young brothers and sisters, without seeming to see them. Bye and bye the eyes closed, and still clinging to the post, she slept. The other children looked up and said to each other, "Look at Hatt, she's done gone off agin!" Tired of their present play ground they trooped off in another direction, but the girl slept on heavily, never losing her hold on the post, or her seat on her perch. Behold here, in the stupid little negro girl, the future deliverer of hundreds of her people; the spy and scout of the Union armies; the devoted hospital nurse; the protector of hunted fugitives; the eloquent speaker in public meetings; the cunning eluder of pursuing man-hunters; the heaven guided pioneer through dangers seen and unseen; in short, as she has well been called, "The Moses of her People."

Here in her thirteenth year she is just recovering

page 15

from the first terrible effects of an injury inflicted by her master, who in an ungovernable fit of rage threw a heavy weight at the unoffending child, breaking in her skull, and causing a pressure upon her brain, from which in her old age she is suffering still. This pressure it was which caused the fits of somnolency so frequently to come upon her, and which gave her the appearance of being stupid and half-

witted in those early years. But that brain which seemed so dull was full of busy thoughts, and her life problem was already trying to work itself out there.

She had heard the shrieks and cries of women who were being flogged in the negro quarter; she had listened to the groaned out prayer, "Oh, Lord, have mercy!" She had already seen two older sisters taken away as part of a chain gang, and they had gone no one knew whither; she had seen the agonized expression on their faces as they turned to take a last look at their "Old Cabin Home;" and had watched them from the top of the fence, as they went off weeping and lamenting, till they were hidden from her sight forever. She saw the hopeless grief of the poor old mother, and

page 16

the silent despair of the aged father, and already she began to revolve in her mind the question, "Why should such things be?" "Is there no deliverance for my people?"

The sun shone on, and Harriet still slept seated on the fence rail. They, those others, had no anxious dreams of the future, and even the occasional sufferings of the present time caused them but a temporary grief. Plenty to eat, and warm sunshine to bask in, were enough to constitute their happiness; Harriet, however, was not one of these. God had a great work for her to do in the world, and the discipline and hardship through which she passed in her early years, were only preparing her for her after life of adventure and trial; and through these to come out as the Savior and Deliverer of her people, when she came to years of womanhood.

As yet she had seen no "visions," and heard no "voices;" no foreshadowing of her life of toil and privation, of flight before human blood-hounds, of watchings, and hidings, of perils by land, and perils by sea, yea, and of perils by false brethren, or of miraculous deliverance had yet come to her.

page 17

No hint of the great mission of her life, to guide her people from the land of bondage to the land of freedom. But, "Why should such things be?" and "Is there no help?" These were the questions of her waking hours.



The dilapidated state of things about the "Great House" told truly the story of waning fortunes, and poverty was pressing upon the master. One by one the able-bodied slaves disappeared; some were sold, others hired to other masters. No questions were asked; no information given; they simply disappeared. A "lady," for so she was designated, came driving up to the great house one day, to see if she could find there a young girl to take care of a baby. The lady wished to pay low wages, and so the most stupid and the most incapable of the children on the plantation was chosen to go with her. Harriet, who could command less wages than any other child of her age on the plantation, was therefore put into the wagon without a word of explanation, and driven off to the lady's house. It was not a very fine house, but Harriet had never before been in any dwelling better than the cabins of the negro quarter.

page 18

She was engaged as child's nurse, but she soon found that she was expected to be maid of all work by day, as well as child's nurse by night. The first task that was set her was that of sweeping and dusting a parlor. No information was vouchsafed as to the manner of going about this work, but she had often swept out the cabin, and this part of her task was successfully accomplished. Then at once she took the dusting cloth, and wiped off tables, chairs and mantel-piece. The dust, as dust will do, when it has nowhere else to go, at once settled again, and chairs and tables were soon covered with a white coating, telling a terrible tale against Harriet, when her Mistress came in to see how the work progressed. Reproaches, and savage words, fell upon the ears of the frightened child, and she was commanded to do the work all over again. It was done in precisely the same way, as before, with the same result. Then the whip was brought into requisition, and it was laid on with no light hand. Five times before breakfast this process was repeated, when a new actor appeared upon the scene. Miss Emily, a sister of the Mistress, had been roused from her morning slumber by the

page 19

sound of the whip, and the screams of the child; and being of a less imperious nature than her sister, she had come in to try to set matters right.

"Why do you whip the child, Susan, for not doing what she has never been taught to do? Leave her to me a few minutes, and you will see that she will soon learn how to sweep and dust a room." Then Miss Emily instructed the child to open the windows, and sweep, then to leave the room, and set the table, while the dust settled; and after that to return and wipe it off. There was no more trouble of that kind. A few words might have set the matter right before; but in those days many a poor slave suffered for the stupidity and obstinacy of a master or mistress, more stupid than themselves.

When the labors, unremitted for a moment, of the long day were over (for this mistress was an economical woman, and intended to get the worth of her money to the uttermost farthing), there was still no rest for the weary child, for there was a cross baby to be rocked continuously, lest it should wake and disturb the mother's rest. The black child sat beside the cradle of the white child, so

page 20

near the bed, that the lash of the whip would reach her if she ventured for a moment to forget her fatigues and sufferings in sleep. The Mistress reposed upon her bed with the whip on a little shelf over her head. People of color are, unfortunately, so constituted that even if the pressure of a broken skull does not cause a sleep like the sleep of the dead, the need of rest, and the refreshment of slumber after a day of toil, were often felt by them. No doubt, this was a great wrong to their masters, and a cheating them of time which belonged to them, but their slaves did not always look upon it in that light, and tired nature would demand her rights; and so nature and the Mistress had a fight for it.

Rock, rock, went the cradle, and mother and child slept; but alas! the little black hand would sometimes slip down, and the head would droop, and a dream of home and mother would visit the weary one, only to be roughly dispelled by the swift descent of the stinging lash, for the baby had cried out and the mother had been awakened. This is no fictitious

tale. That poor neck is even now covered with the scars which sixty years of life

page 21

have not been able to efface. It may be that she was thus being prepared by the long habit of enforced wakefulness, for the night watches in the woods, and in dens and caves of the earth, when the pursuers were on her track, and the terrified ones were trembling in her shadow. We do not thank *you* for this, cruel woman! for if you did her a service, you did it ignorantly, and only for your own gratification. But Harriet's powers of endurance failed at last, and she was returned to her master, a poor, scarred wreck, nothing but skin and bone, with the words that "She wasn't worth a sixpence."

The poor old mother nursed her back to life, and her naturally good constitution asserted itself, so that as she grew older she began to show signs of the wonderful strength which in after years, when the fugitive slave law was in operation in New York State, enabled her to seize a man from the officers who had him in charge, and while numbers were pursuing her, and the shot was flying like hail about her head, to bear him in her own strong arms beyond the reach of danger.

Harriet Tubman (1822–1913) was an escaped slave who became a leading figure in the abolitionist movement. Harriet Tubman also served as a spy for the US army during the civil war and was an active participant in the struggle for women’s suffrage. Tubman was born Araminta Ross, to slave parents who lived on plantations in Maryland. Little is known about her family background and ancestry, but her maternal grandmother came to the US on a slave ship from Africa (possibly from modern-day Ghana).