

# THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE

## AMAZING LIFE WORK OF HARRIET TUBMAN. A STORY STRANGER THAN FICTION. AFTER 80 YEARS OF DEVOTION SHE LIVES TO LAMENT THAT SHE CAN DO NO MORE THAN PLAN.



TELLING THE "PARABLE OF THE APPLES"



HARRIET TUBMAN AT 93

"LL brain you if I catch you!" Really, the negro should have been trimming the hedge instead of sleeping under it. But plantation negroes were what they were, and their masters, some of them, were not particularly philosophical in the days of 1827. So across the wide lawn sped a terrified African, and, not in his footsteps, club in hand, sprinted a wrathful white man.

ter that this was so, but because the whisper had gone forth among them that they were to be sold "down south," and they knew the bitterness of the separations that must come. All refused but Harriet Tubman. Her soaring spirit saw in the coming dissolution the beginning of a dream to be some day surely realized. She conceived then that she was, in the nature of things, the property of no one but herself.

In and out among the old flowering shrubs of the old Maryland house lawn they dodged. Now the white man leaped a pansy bed to corner his quarry, now the quarry crossed forbidden seed grass. He was trying to gain the comparative safety of the negro quarters near the salt marshes of the Chesapeake bay inlet, there to hide until the economic absurdity of braining a \$500 negro should appeal to this enraged owner. But the white man was young, resourceful and speedy, and things looked bad for economics. Bit by bit the panting negro was driven toward an angle of the stable yard wall, where escape was hopeless, and a battered skull the one safe bet.

At this stage of the proceedings and heading directly across the path of the slave owner appeared a small black figure in a calico slip. She was running at top speed, head down and pigtail flying, but two white crescents in the shadows of the dark unlovely face showed where two black eyes were turned upon the onrushing white man. He would never swerve for a negro, she knew, and, calculating her speed to a certainty, the black child butted him full in the ribs and bowled him over upon his ancestral grass. Wild with rage, he was on his feet instantly and, seizing a rusty wagon wrench which lay at hand, he hurled it unerringly at the girl's head and left her senseless on the lawn. But the shrieking negro escaped to the "quarters."

Such was Harriet Tubman as a child and such the incident which made this story worth the telling. When the little negro girl recovered sufficiently from the injury to her brain to resume her tasks upon the plantation she was prone to strange dreams, which came to her suddenly while working or while conversing with her fellow slaves. In one of these she saw a ship's deck with black men in murderous revolt and white men lying in crimson stains upon the flooring. In another she was on a ship at night and a negro woman, clasping a child to her bosom, crept from below and leaped into the sea. The old mammites to whom she told these dreams were wont to nod knowingly and say, "I reckon you one o' dem 'Shanteees' chile." For they knew the tradition of the unconquerable Ashantee blood, which in a slave made him a thorn in the side of the planter or cane grower whose property he became, so that few of that race were in bondage. At this time also Harriet began to develop a wonderful gift of presence and an abnormal cunning, so that many of her dreams soon or later came startlingly true, and she grew to have a mysterious hold upon those of her race with whom she came in contact. The white people on the plantation thought she was half-witted—a theory she did not seek to disturb.

**Her Strength Marvelous**  
As Harriet grew older she became a marvelous specimen of physical womanhood, and before she was 19 years old was a match for the strongest man on the plantation. She performed her duties toward her master faithfully, but in the caverns of her untutored mind there ever burned the fire which was the heritage of her warlike and liberty loving lineage. At last the day came when this master died and there were heavy hearts in the cabins of the negro quarters. The men who came in from the fields at dusk no longer romped with their offspring, and the tinkle of the banjo at twilight was heard no more by those on the veranda of the "big house" on the hill. It was not that they loved the mas-

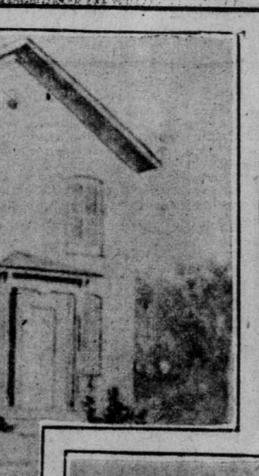
ter people would but follow her. Over many a flickering fire old mammites repeated the mysterious tale of Harriet's chieftainship, and their neighbors might recognize the thought that was uppermost in all their minds. This was the beginning of Harriet's leadership of her people. But they had not the blood of the Ashantee, and despite her encouragement and cunningly ordered plans for a night of exodus to the north only her two brothers ventured forth with her, and even they, when barely half the night was gone, slunk back upon their trucks and were like the rest.

Her methods were masterful. On some darkly propitious night there would be breathed about the negro quarters of a plantation a word that she had come to lead them forth. At midnight she would stand waiting in the depths of woodland or timbered swamp, and stealthily, one by one, her fugitives would creep to the rendezvous. She intrusted her plans to but few of the party, confiding only in one or two of the more intelligent negroes. She knew her path well by this time, and they followed her unerring guidance without question. She assumed the authority and enforced the discipline of a military despot. Strapped to her broad back was a basket laden with babies in the drowsy depths of pargoric. In her hand was a loaded pistol with which she brought to his knees the craven who spoke of turning back. "Dead niggers tell no tales," she would remark with grim ferocity; "you go on, or you die where you is." Under her direction the women were burdened like herself, while she uplifted them with an eloquence born of a noble nature, exhorting them to courage. Thus by secret paths of her making, through wilderness and ravine, with no guide but the north star, nor other light than that, she coaxed, browbeat, threatened, and finally led them forth into the sunlight of the free soil states.

From this time on she made 19 invasions of the south, each time returning safely to the north on her chosen mission. Indeed, to anticipate our story a little, she had before the outbreak of the civil war led to freedom and in most cases to employment more than 300 slaves.

It now came to pass that all through Virginia rewards were offered for the apprehension of the negro woman who was denouncing the fields of their laborers and the cabins of their human livestock. But she was not deterred by this, and with growing confidence repeated her excursions as often as her boardings made them possible.

**Harriet an Actress, Too**  
Harriet's ability as an actress has been alluded to. One of her masterly accomplishments in this line, young as she was, was the impersonation of a decrepit old woman. On one of her expeditions into Virginia, and with a reward of \$4,000 on her head, dead or alive, she had the incredible nerve to enter a village where lived one of her former masters. This was necessary to the carrying out of her plans for that trip. Her only disguise was a bodily assumption of age. To reinforce this her subtle foresight prompted her to buy some live chickens, which she carried suspended by the legs from a cord. In this manner she went about the real business of her visit. Suddenly the emergency arose which she had so marvelously divined. As she turned a corner she saw coming toward her none other than her old master. Lest he might see through her impersonation and to make an excuse for flight, she loosed the cord that held the fowls, and amid the laughter of the bystanders, gave chase to them as they flew squawking over a nearby fence. When the abolition movement swept over the New England states, Harriet was in her element and her presence at a meeting, eagerly sought, kindled the wildest enthusiasm. It was while on her way to attend a large anti-



HARRIET TUBMAN'S HOME IN ALBURN N.Y.



HARRIET TUBMAN AS A SCOUT IN 1861

### ANOTHER TRYING TO DOWN HER, SHE CHOKED INTO HALF UNCONSCIOUSNESS

Officers dared not bring the fugitive down to the wagon waiting at the curb to carry him away. With a fine sense of dramatic value, Harriet forced her way to the room where the fugitive sat and stood among the officers where the cheering crowd outside could plainly see her. The officers played a waiting game, and, thirsting for action, Harriet went out among the mass of people and, firing the imaginations of some boys, sent them about the nearby streets to

stairs to the wagon. He was attended by the United States marshal and a deputy and his master. Fired by the offer of his rescue, the crowd pushed forward, and Harriet, throwing off her disguise, shouted:

"Here he is! Here he is! Take him!" With these words she pounced upon the marshal with all her gigantic strength and bore him to the ground. Then, hurling men aside like children, she seized the prisoner, and with the mad ferocity of her ancestors fought her way down the street. "Down to the ribber! Drown him, but don't let dem have him!"

A policeman who struck her with his club she sent reeling to his knees. Another, trying to down her, she choked into half unconsciousness and hurled him sprawling to the sidewalk. Nothing could restrain the crowd now, and surrounding Harriet and her terrified charge, to whom she had clung throughout her superhuman struggles, they bore them to the river. Here she was placed in a boat, carried to the other side and rushed to a nearby house while Harriet followed by the ferry.

### "Drive Him Till He Drops!"

Meantime news of the fight spread to the other side of the river and the house was soon surrounded by a mob as hostile to Nalle as the other had been friendly. These, incited by officers' clever enough to precede Harriet across the river, were storming the house as she came up. There were negro sympathizers in the house, and dead on the stairs lay one of the mob. Over his body was hurled another through the window, and up to the room where the slave had taken refuge. Single handed she was a match for the officers, knocking down the first who attacked her and hurling another through the window. As in the days of her slavery she had lightly shouldered a sack of corn meal, her gigantic strength now came into play and lifting in her arms the almost unconscious negro, she rushed with him to the street. It seemed as though the god of liberty had enlisted under her banner. Passing the house was a man driving a spirited horse. With her wonderful divination of those in sympathy with her cause she halted him and deposited her living burden in the seat beside him. Instantly the man jumped out of his carriage. "This is a blooded horse," said he. "Drive him till he drops."

Leaping into the buggy and seizing the reins, Harriet lashed the horse into a gallop and drove furiously the proverbial distance to Schenectady. Here Nalle was handed over to an underground agent, and eventually made his way to Canada and freedom.

It was during this period that Harriet had settled in Auburn, N. Y. Here she was living in more comfort than she had ever known before. Powerful outcries among the abolitionists throughout the country had come to her support, for so valuable was she to their cause that no jot of her fanatical energy could be spared to the tasks of mere livelihood. When the war broke out, however, she had no thought but to serve her people in the new field thus opened to her. Armed with a letter from Governor Andrew of Massachusetts, she went to Washington and secured from the proper authorities an appointment in the secret service of the government. With this went a written order to all federal commanders, military and naval, to give her all facilities, transportation and rations necessary to the conduct of her duties as she should see them.

Her years of experience and vast personal acquaintance among the negroes gained in her former expeditions made her an invaluable adjunct in the gathering of detailed information from inside the confederate lines and in guiding the union troops through trackless swamps and unmapped timberland. Thousands of negroes were made contraband through the secret knowledge of the government. On one occasion when information had been received by the union general commanding at Beaufort, N. C., that a thousand negroes were congregated some miles up the river, and boats were about to be dispatched to fetch the contrabands. To the general's quarters as to how it could be done she was stubbornly silent, unbending only to say that she desired two gunboats, carrying part of a negro regiment, with its officers instructed to act under her direction. So great was the confidence reposed in her that her request was granted. By devious waterways known only to herself, she led her expedition by

night up the river and around the neck of the United States, and returned in triumph. And so well had she imbued them with her militant spirit on the return trip that she was able to enlist them all as part of the fighting force of the army. It is one of the great injustices of the war that, although Harriet was promised the regular bounty then offered for recruits, she never received a dollar for bringing about this wholesale enlistment.

Harriet's activities were not confined to her work as a scout. After every engagement she was found in the ranks of the hospital corps, undaunted by the bloody sights of the aftermath of battle. In a little book published by her friends some twenty years ago to relieve Harriet's pecuniary straits, Mrs. Sarah H. Bradford has written:

"Ngr was her work on the battlefield alone. At one time she was called away from Hilton head by one of our officers to come to Ferrandina, where the men were dying off like sheep from dysentery. Here she found thousands of sick soldiers and contrabands and immediately gave up her time and attention to them. At another time we find her nursing those who were down by hundreds with smallpox and malignant fevers. She had never had these diseases, but she seems to have had no more fear of death in one form than another. It is a shame to our government that such a helper as this woman was not allowed pay or pension. She drew for herself 20 days' rations during the four years of her labor. When the war was over she returned unobtrusively to her homely life in Auburn, where, after 80 years of service to her people and to the cause of human justice, she is closing her life in poverty. It was not pliancy, but rather with a flash of scorn in her dulling eyes that she remarked to the writer last week:

"You wouldn't think dat after I served de flag so faithfully I should come to want under its folds."

Then, looking musingly toward a nearby orchard, she asked suddenly: "Do you like apples?"

"On being assured that I did, she said: 'Did you ever plant any apple trees?' 'With shame I confessed I had not.' 'No,' said she, 'but somebody else planted 'em. I liked apples when I was young, and I said, 'Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folks to eat,' and I guess I done it."

Then she laughed as though a sudden comical recollection had come to her, and, throwing back her furrowed face, burst into a wild plantation melody, beating the time with her hands upon her knees and gleefully swaying to and fro.

Dar's chile an' brandy in de cellar, An' de darkey der'll hab sum; Mas' he new de kinsden's comin' An' de year ob Jos-bil-sum!

### Her Distinguished Friends

Of this heroine of her race, as she still works in the midnight of her life for the establishment of an industrial home for the deserving of her race, and as she was in the days of her more active life, a good idea is given in the following extract from a private letter written by the late Dr. Samuel M. Hopkins:

"This heroic woman, Harriet Tubman, belongs to the purest type of the unmixed negro. There is not a trace in her countenance of intelligence or courage, but seldom has there been placed in any woman's hide a soul moved by higher impulses, a purer benevolence, a more dauntless resolution, a more passionate love for freedom. This poor, ignorant, common looking black woman was fully capable of acting the part of Joan d'Arc or Charlotte Corday."

In the height of her fierce career Harriet numbered among her friends such figures in history as Governor Andrew, John Brown, Frederick Douglass, Gerrit Smith and Wendell Phillips. Following humbly in the footsteps of their example, the tireless trend of her philanthropic mind has kept to its tiny window of what she calls her "shanty" she can see the four walls and roof of the Industrial home, now dear to her heart. In the infirmity of age she can do little more than plan, and at 83 she is still eagerly promoting its permanent endowment. Harriet is very proud of the fact that she is a member of the Grand Army of the Republic, Woman's Auxiliary, and as I came away she said with a laugh: "You can put me in de paper feet up an' head down, but don't forget to put dat in, too, for I sho' belong to de G. A. R."

slavery convulse in Boston that she cry "Fire!" Soon the fire bells were ringing and the crowd in front of the office greatly increased. Harriet herself, assuming her favorite guise of a tottering old woman, stood at the foot of the commissioner's stairs. Repeated efforts of the officers to clear the building left the supposed old woman still at her post. The crowd had now become tensely silent, when some one loudly offered to buy the negro. This caught the crowd, and soon spirited bidding had raised an offer of \$1,200 for him. Suddenly at this juncture a window across the street was raised and a man's voice cried out: "Two hundred dollars for his rescue—not one cent to buy him!" At this moment, thinking the mob had spent its enthusiasm, the officers were bringing the negro down the