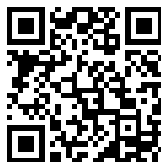

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HARRIET TUBMAN

AS SPY AND SCOUT FOR UNION ARMY IN CIVIL WAR

HARRIET TUBMAN

THE HEROINE IN EBONY

BY

ROBERT W. TAYLOR

FINANCIAL SECRETARY TUSKEGEE INSTITUTE

With Introduction by

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

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PREFACE.

My object in writing this sketch of Harriet Tubman — endearingly called “Aunt Harriet” — is to render her a service which she so richly deserves. There is a mortgage of seventeen hundred dollars on a piece of property held in her possession which she desires to leave as a Home for Aged Colored Men and Women. Some weeks ago I sent out an appeal through several colored newspapers, with the hope that this amount would be raised; but at this writing only seventy-seven dollars have been sent in.

The net proceeds from the sale of this sketch will be applied on this mortgage; and it is earnestly hoped that each one in whose hands this falls will not only read it, but will make himself or herself a missionary for the cause of Harriet Tubman.

ROBERT W. TAYLOR.

INTRODUCTION.

There are three reasons which make me feel impelled to say a few words by way of introduction to the character sketch of Harriet Tubman, by Mr. Robert W. Taylor: (1) Harriet Tubman is a character of whom any race might be proud. In the highest measure her life has been, and is yet, one of service for her race. In darker days than these, long ere the nation's conscience had been awakened to the evils of slavery, this brave Christian woman wrought for the good of her fellows with the determination and patience which we can hardly appreciate at this time. And yet how many of her own or of the white race know that, when history does her credit, her name must be enrolled with those of other brave champions of human liberty who sounded the death-knell of American slavery? If Mr. Taylor's efforts merited no other praise, he might well content himself with the assurance that, in bringing this woman's character to the public attention, he has rendered the race everywhere valuable service.

(2) The story is well told. In Mr. Taylor's

hands the facts connected with this good woman's life take on a new interest, and from beginning to end he invests her with an earnestness and a charity which all must love. (3) The object of this little book is so praiseworthy that, if on no other grounds, I must commend the work to the perusal and consideration of all for what it seeks to do.

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON.

HARRIET TUBMAN, THE HEROINE IN EBONY.

The subject of this brief sketch was born more than eighty years ago under conditions inconceivable to the present generation. She was neglected in infancy, cruelly treated in childhood, and her cup of misery and woe had been filled to overflowing long ere she reached womanhood. The only beauty that confronted her gaze was the panoramic expanse of nature, and her only music the plaintive melodies of her oppressed race. For her it was a crime to learn and treason to aspire: she was a slave.

Before reaching her 'teens, she was unfortunate enough to incur the displeasure of her young master, who dealt her a vicious blow on the head, crushing in her skull. For a long time her life was despaired of; but not then was she to be gathered unto Him, for there were thousands "crying like infants in the night, like infants for the light, without a language but a cry" for deliverance. And God was raising her up to answer that cry.

After this blow she was thought to be half-witted. So, when a neighbor came to her owner to hire a nurse-girl cheap, it was quite natural that Harriet should be selected as the one with whom he could most easily dispense. Her new home was far from being an ideal one; for her mistress was rigidly exacting,—in fact, unreasonable. Harriet was expected to do all the housework, milk the cows, as well as to be at the side of the cradle every time the little darling cried. Because of her inability to be at more than one place at the same time, she was beaten unmercifully more than once, and was finally returned to her owner with the recommendation, “She don’t worth the salt that seasons her grub.”

Upon her return she did not find outstretched arms to receive her. Indeed, what she had lately experienced was only a suggestion of what was to follow. “I will break you in!” was the greeting of her master; and from early morn till late at night she was made to work, beaten and cuffed upon the slightest provocation. Her lot was, indeed, a hard one, too hard for such a heart as throbbed in her breast to bear. So a few years later (1849) she made good her escape to freedom’s soil. But what did freedom mean to her,

when every wind from the South was charged with plaintive cries of her oppressed brethren for deliverance? It was but a mockery so long as she could hear the crack of the overseer's whip, the clanking of the slave chains, and the heart-rending cries of mothers bereft of their dear ones at the auction block.

Something must be done, and she proceeded to do it. Nineteen trips did she make South, rescuing more than three hundred slaves from the "Jaws of Hell." Most of her travelling was done in the cheerless solitude of the night, with no protection other than her cunning, no guide save the north star, and with no hope of reward save the consciousness that she was "about her Father's business." Such a terror did she become to the slaveholders of Maryland that a reward of \$40,000 was offered for her head. She was bold, daring, elusive. All of her trips to the South were carefully planned and brilliantly executed. She told me that, when she found her mother unwilling to leave behind her feather-bed-tick, and her father his broad-axe and other tools, she bundled up bed-tick, broad-axe, mother, father, all, and landed them in Canada. To hear her tell of her thrilling adventures, hair-breadth es-

capas, and dire sufferings, experienced in piloting the trembling slave from the "land of midnight darkness" to the sunlight of freedom, one cannot but believe that she was called of God to do the work which she did so masterfully, so conscientiously, so heroically.

Neither were her efforts confined to piloting slaves from the South to the North. Every anti-slavery convention held within five hundred miles of her she was sure to attend, and speak in words which brought tears to the eyes and sorrow to the hearts of all who heard her for the unspeakable sufferings of her brethren. She made the weak strong, the strong determined, and the determined invincible. After her words of untutored but fiery eloquence, her hearers stood like Martin Luther of old,—body, soul, and spirit devoted singly and unitedly to the one end.]

A few years after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, "Aunt" Harriet, *en route* to Boston to attend an anti-slavery convention, stopped at Troy, N. Y., for a few days. While there, she heard that a fugitive slave had been captured and would be taken back South that afternoon. She immediately started for the place of confinement of the prisoner, scattering the news as she went.

In an incredibly short time a crowd of several hundred besieged the building to get a view of the black slave who had committed the unpardonable "crime" of escaping from bondage. The slave finally appeared at the window; but, instead of being black, his skin was as fair, his bearing more erect, and his face reflected more intelligence than his captor, who was his half-brother. Many ascended the stairway leading to the room in which the prisoner was confined, led on by "Aunt" Harriet.

"These stairs must be cleared!" demanded the guard. "The prisoner is to be taken to the office of the United States Commissioner; and, if the crowd will form a lane through which we can pass, we will start immediately." All descended the stairs except "Aunt" Harriet, who, with her sunbonnet pulled over her face, seemed pitifully afflicted with the "rheumatiz," and the crowd rent itself in twain. Soon the officers appeared with their manacled prisoner, and walked two abreast down the stairs, "Aunt" Harriet slowly following. As soon as the street was reached, the old woman, who a few minutes before seemed helplessly decrepit, sprang upon the prisoner like a tiger on his prey, screaming at the top of her voice: "This

man shall not be carried back to slavery! Take him, friends! Drag him to the river! Drown him! But don't let him be carried back!" Her example was like dropping a spark in a keg of powder. The whole crowd burst forth in a mighty flame of enthusiasm for the liberty of the manacled prisoner; and, amidst the shouts of the crowd and the curses and execration of the officers as they wielded their clubs and flourished their revolvers, one of the hottest battles ever pitched between Right and Wrong was waged — and Right won.

The prisoner, with nearly every thread of clothing torn from his body and his head and face beaten almost beyond recognition, was rescued and hurried to the river, where a boat was in waiting to take him to West Troy. The news of his escape was flashed across the river; and, as soon as he landed, he was rearrested, and put in a temporary place of confinement. Very soon our heroine appeared on the scene, and started hotly in pursuit, followed by scores of determined men and women. "Where is that man?" she demanded. "He is up in that building," some little children told her. When she reached the stairs leading to the place of confinement, she saw the prostrate

forms of two men who had been shot down while attempting to enter the building ; but such had no terror for her. Up the stairs she led the crowd ; while the officers stood by, paralyzed with fear. The door was burst open, and the prisoner was seized and brought down in her arms as though he was a nursing babe. On reaching the ground, a gentleman, who had heard of the plight of the unfortunate, said, "Put him in my buggy, and drive this horse for all he is worth!" The offer was accepted in short order, and the prisoner was driven beyond harm's way.

During the Civil War she rendered invaluable service to the Union army as spy, scout, and hospital nurse. With the general of her army, whatever she said went. She was at the memorable battle of Fort Wagner, and told me that she prepared the last breakfast eaten by the gallant Colonel R. G. Shaw. Of her work in the South Wendell Phillips, in a letter to a friend, dated June 16, 1868, said: "After the war broke out, she was sent with indorsements from Governor Andrew and his friends to South Carolina, where in the service of the nation she rendered most important and efficient aid to our army. In my opinion, there are few captains, perhaps few

colonels, who have done more for the loyal cause since the war began, and few men who did before that time more for the colored race, than our fearless and most sagacious friend, Harriet." She numbered among her friends such men as John Brown, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, Parker Pillsbury, Governor Andrew, — the War Governor of Massachusetts, — Frederick Douglass, and William H. Seward.

Directly after the war she returned to Auburn, N. Y., where she has since lived in a home obtained through her lifelong friend, the great William H. Seward, and Miss Sarah H. Bradford, who became greatly interested in her, and wrote a history of her life, giving "Aunt" Harriet the proceeds of its sale to carry on her mission of mercy. Several years ago she came into possession of another property, consisting of twenty-five acres of land, on which are two splendid houses. This property adjoins her homestead, and is only a stone's throw from one of the most magnificent estates in Auburn. It is easily worth six thousand, but it is burdened with a mortgage of seventeen hundred; and her daily prayer is that this might be removed, so that she can bequeath it, free of debt, to her race, to be used forever as an old folks' home.

Friends, is not her ambition a noble and generous one? Where can we find one whose memory is more worthy of being perpetuated in this practical way? The idea is in keeping with her life's work. Not a monument of marble or granite would she have, but a home, where the homeless and friendless can find shelter and the aged and infirm be provided for.

For the past seven years I have called to see her on my annual visit to Auburn, N.Y., in the interest of Tuskegee; and each time I have found strangers under her roof,—aged, maimed, blind, or orphans. Nothing touches her heart more quickly than to see a human being in distress. She has never been known to turn a deaf ear to the appeal of an unfortunate soul. At this writing she has under her "vine and fig-tree" two friendless old women and two homeless orphans. "Aunt" Harriet cannot do by these unfortunates, however, as she has done by others, because the hand of affliction has rested heavily upon her for more than a year. There was a time when she travelled a great deal, and whatever requests she made of her white friends was granted. Many of her old friends have "crossed the bar," while others, I am sure, know not of her present con-

dition. Just now her lot is a hard one,—dependent almost entirely on what may be handed her by occasional callers and the scant earnings of her brother, several years her senior.

Such, in brief, is Harriet Tubman ; and a rarer soul has seldom dwelt in human clay. She has lifted up her voice in speech, in song, and in prayer for this people ; she has labored with her hands for means to carry on her mission of mercy ; by day, by night, in weather fair and foul, her feet “have moved at the impulse of love” for her fellow-man. Now she is bowed down with infirmity. Her gait is unsteady, her eye is dim ; the sun of her life ere long must set : but, O Father, stay that time until this humble message shall have accomplished its mission.

Judging Harriet Tubman by the depths from which she came and the sublime heights of unselfishness to which she has attained, she stands without a parallel in history,—solitary, majestic, sun-kissed. She has stood the great test, the supreme test, the Christ test,—which is service.

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