Three Women of Valor

Harriet Tubman, Sarah Winnemuca, Queen Liliukalani

Harriet Tubman

LED THE WAY, SETTING THE CAPTIVES FREE

H D Kailin

"Dead niggers tell no tales. You go on brother -- or die!"

So said Harriet Tubman while pointing a pistol at a runaway slave who had lost his nerve and was contemplating a return to servitude. Harriet Tubman was not about to turn back; neither was she letting anyone else turn back and for good reason, too dangerous.

An experienced conductor with the Underground Rail Road (UGRR), Harriet, personally conducted 19 forays south of the Mason-Dixon Line, resulting in the liberation of more than 300 slaves. (Some sources say 350+ but exact count was never kept.) She knew her business, that one cannot afford risking the groups' well-being to accommodate the fears of one. As she put it:

> . . . times were very critical and therefore no foolishness would be indulged in on the road.

Against all odds, not so much as a single one of her charges were lost either to recapture or to death. As she said:

> I never ran my train off the track and I never lost a passenger.

Born into slavery in the year *circa* 1820 or '21. (The record is hazy; some say she was born as early as 1819; others, as late as 1823.) Initially bearing an African name, "Araminta," Harriet, being of West African heritage, grew of age on a tidewater plantation in eastern Maryland, near a rural crossroads called "Bucktown."

From the time she was five she was hired out to weave and keep house. From age ten on she was worked in the fields. One day a "Miss Susan," drove up to the plantation requesting "a young girl to care for her infant. At the tender age of five, Araminta was loaned out to another plantation as a baby tender and domestic. It was her first experience outside the slave quarters and she recalled feeling abashed on entering into the company of white folk. In addition to her day chores, it fell to her to keep the baby from crying throughout the night. Once she was whipped five times before breakfast on account of the baby's whimpering. Lifelong scars on her neck bore witness to this ill usage. After a while she became worn down, exhausted, and fell sick. Then she was sent home. That was a repeating pattern: first, overwork, then collapse. When she was seven, one of her mistresses habitually whipped her first thing in the morning before breakfast as a matter of course. So as to ward off the blows, Araminta would put on thick clothing, then wail forth as if the beating had had its full effect. Later, when none were looking, she would shed her excess wrappings.

At age seven Araminta made her first break for freedom, running as far away as her little legs would carry her:

> By and by when I was clar tuckered out, I came to a great big pig-pen. Dar was an old sow dar an' perhaps eight or nine little pigs. I was too little to climb into it but I tumbled ober the high board, n an' fell in on de ground; I was so beat out that I could not stir. An' dere I stayed from Friday till de nex' Chusday, fightin' wid dose little pigs for de potato peelin's an' oder scraps dat came down in de trough. De ole sow would push me away when I tried to git her chillen's food, an' I was awful afeared of her. By Chusday I was so starved I knowed I had to go back to my Missus. I hand't got no whar else to go, but I knowed what was comin.

Proving to be too intractable to be tamed, Araminta was turned out-of-doors to work in the fields with the men, a lifestyle that was more agreeable to her nature. Breaking flax and lifting heavy bags of grain were some of the daily activities that strengthened her such that, as her friend and biographer, Sarah Bradford, related:

> . . . powerful men often stood astonished to see this woman perform feats of strength from which they shrank incapable.

One day , from her perch on a fencepost, Araminta saw a scene that left an indelible impression on her, that of her two sisters being led off in chains weeping and lamenting. She never forgot the agonized expression on their faces. To the last possible moment, she watched as the chain-gang to which they were attached disappeared from view, after which they were never seen or heard from again. Witnessing her mother's grief, her father's despair, Harriet asked of God this question:

> Is there no deliverance for my people?

One incident occurring in her 13th year, Harriet was at the local general store when suddenly the field boss burst in, in hot pursuit of a slave who had taken off without permission. Cornering his hapless prey, the boss man started in on him, administering a beating. Seeing this, Harriet attempted to interpose herself between the two of them. This so infuriated the boss man that he grabbed up a two pound counter-weight and struck her a stunning blow to the head, fracturing her skull and leaving her with a lifelong concave depression. Ever afterward, apparently as a result of this wounding, Harriet was subject to fits of somnolence which temporarily incapacitated her. When the fit was upon her, her appearance became altered as if she were retarded.

In her days of servitude, as she was approaching her majority, Harriet contracted a serious illness, one of undetermined nature, which left her laid up in a bed for months on end. While in this debilitated state, discussions regarding her fate were held in her presence. Reflecting on those trying times, Harriet said to her confidant, Sarah Bradford:

> . . . as I lay so sick on my bed, from Christmas till March, I was always praying for ole master. 'Pears like I didn't do nothing but pray for ole master. "Oh, Lord, convert ole master; Oh, der Lord, change dat man's heart, and make him a Christian." And all the time he was bringing men to look at me, and dey stood there saying what dey would give, and what dey would take, and all I could say was, "Oh, Lord, convert ole master." Den I heard dat as soon as I was able to move I was to be sent with my brudders, in the chaingang to de far south. Then I changed my prayer, and I said, 'Lord, if you ain't never going to change dat man's heart, kill him Lord, and take him out of de way, so he won't do no more mischief." Next ting I heard ole master was dead; and he died just as he had lived, a wicked, bad man. Oh, den it 'peared like I would give de world full of silver and gold, if I had it, to bring dat pore soul back, I would give myself; I would give eberything! But he was gone, I couldn't pray for him no more.

Upon recovering from this protracted period of illness, Harriet was subject to a deeper spiritual impress than previously, such that she, as it were, "prayed without ceasing":

> 'Pears like, I prayed all de time about my work, eberywhere; I was always talking to de Lord. When I went to the horse-trough to wash my face and hands, I cried, "Oh, Lord, for Jesus' sake, wipe away all my sins!" When I took up de broom and begun to sweep, I groaned, "Oh, Lord, whatsoebber sin dere be in my heart, sweep it out, Lord, clar and clean;" but I can't pray no more for pore ole master.

Again plans were formed to sell Harriet Tubman and two of her brothers to slavers from the deep south. Upon learning of this, all three of them resolved to escape to the north. On the day before their departure, Harriet made the rounds to the cabins in the encampment where her people lived and carried to them this song concealing a hidden meaning:

I'm gwine to leave you,
I'm sorry frien's, to lebe you,
I'll met you in de mornin'
On de oder side of Jordan,
For I'm boun' for de promised land.

Later, after Harriet turned up missing, her family took comfort in the knowledge that she had made a break for freedom.

> After striking forth on their journey, Harriet's brothers had a change of mind.

Suddenly the consequences of being caught loomed large in their calculations. They knew that they risked severe beatings administered by a cat-o'nine-tails or bull-whip. While slave owners generally avoided permanently incapacitating or killing a slave, they found that an occasional maiming or death suited their purposes by helping create the proper climate of fear.

Finally fear of detection and capture overcame both her brothers who decided to beat a hasty retreat back to the slave quarters before their absence was noted and an alarm raised. But their sister was not persuaded to return with them. Thus it came to pass that they bid each other good-bye and parted company. Now alone in the world, with neither map or compass to guide her, Harriet set her eye upon a star and pressed on:

> For I had reasoned dis out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have de oder; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when de time came for me to go, de Lord would let dem take me.

Once Harriet knew that she had crossed the invisible boundary between slavery and freedom, after days of hiding and night of walking, she was swept by a new sensation:

> I looked at my hands to see if I was de same person now I was free. Dere was such a glory ober everything, de sun came like gold trou de trees, and ober de fields, and I felt like I was in heaven.

Then another thought advanced itself to the exclusion of other considerations:

> I had crossed de line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free; but dere was no one to welcome me to de land of freedom, I was a stranger in a strange land, and my home after all was down in de old cabin quarter, wid de ole folks, and my brudders and sisters. But to dis solemn resolution I came; I was free, and dey should be free also; I would make a home for dem in de North, and de Lord helping me, I would bring dem all dere. Oh, how I prayed den, lying all alone on de cold, damp ground; "Oh, der Lord," I said, "I haint got no friend but you. Come to my help, Lord, for I'm in trouble!"

In time, Harriet would find work as a domestic, saving her wages and taking on extra work. When a sufficient amount had been laid aside to carry forward her plan, she would take her leave, to reappear mysteriously in the dead of the night on a faraway plantation. Initially she concentrated her efforts on her immediate family, her sisters and brothers, their husbands and their wives, and all their children. The babies she herself carried in a basket on her arm. Later she rescued other slaves who were not her relatives, as many as thirty at a time.

Initially she took her escapees as far as New York State but then, because of the Fugitive Slave Act and the infamous Dred Scott Decision of 1857 in which the U.S. Supreme Court stipulated that no slave had any right that a free man need honor, she began taking her fugitives to safety in Canada.

In order to effect successful rescues, Harriet Tubman availed herself of every manner of conveyance and adopted every imaginable ruse. There were hair-raising incidents, close-calls, and hot pursuit. She forded rivers and once hid out in a potato hole. On one occasion she came so close to her former master that he touched the hem of her garment, yet without recognizing her. This may have been due in part to her presence of mind in ruffling up some chickens she was carrying thereby distracting his attention. After that she jumped up and ran after the birds which by that time were running loose and she followed them over a fence and was gone.

It needn't be thought that Harriet relied entirely on quick-wittedness or spur-of-the-moment improvisation for she carefully plotted and strategized well in advance, and made plans for a variety of contingencies. She acquired forged identity papers; also tincture of opium to soothe a baby's crying.

She made a point of carrying out her rescues on a Saturday, calculating that when the slave-master realized on Sunday that his "property" had gone missing he would have to wait until Monday to contact the newspaper to sound the alarm. Another of her tricks, one she would resort to when she noticed that too much attention was coming her way from white folk, was to go down to the station and purchase tickets on a southbound train. That diversionary tactic alone was quite helpful in deflecting suspicion from her true intent. By far, however, her most successful ruse was that of disguising herself as an old woman. As Sarah Bradford wrote:

> At one time, as she was on her way South for a party of slaves, she was stopped not far from the southern shore of the Chesapeake Bay, by a young woman, who had been for some days in hiding, and was anxiously watching for "Moses," who was soon expected to pass that way.

This girl was a young and pretty Mulatto, named Tilly, she had been lady's maid and dressmaker, for her Mistress. She was engaged to a young man from another plantation, but he had joined one of Harriet's parties, and gone North. Tilly was to have gone also at that time, but had found it impossible to get away. Now she had learned that it was her Master's intention to give her to a Negro of his own for his wife; and in fear and desperation, she made her move. Friends had concealed her, and all had been on the watch for Moses.

The distress and excitement of the poor creature was so great, and she begged and implored in such agonized tones that Harriet would just see her safe to Baltimore, where she knew of friends who would harbor her, and help her on her way, that Harriet determined to turn about, and endeavor to take the poor girl thus far on her Northward journey.

They reached the shore of Chesapeake Bay too late to leave that night, and were obliged to hide for a night and day in the loft of an old out-house, where every sound caused poor Tilly to tremble as if she had an ague fit. When the time for the boat to leave arrived, a sad disappointment awaited them. The boat on which they had expected to leave was disabled, and another boat was to take its place.

At that time, according to the law of Slavery, no Negro could leave his Master's land, or travel anywhere, without a pass, properly signed by his owner. Of course this poor fugitive had no pass; and Harriet's passes were her own wits; but among her many friends, there was one who seemed to have influence with the clerk of the boat, on which she expected to take passage; and she was the bearer of a note requesting, or commanding him to take these two women to the end of his route, asking no questions.

Now here was an unforeseen difficulty; the boat was not going; the clerk was not there; all on the other boat were strangers. But forward they must go, trusting in Providence. As they walked down to the boat, a gang of lazy white men standing together, began to make comments on their appearance.

"Too many likely looking Niggers traveling North, about these days." "Wonder if these wenches have got a pass." "Where you going, you two?" Tilly trembled and cowered, and clung to her protector, but Harriet put on a bold front, and holding the note given her by her friend in her hand, and supporting her terrified charge, she walked by the men, taking no notice of their insults.

They joined the stream of people going up to get their tickets, but when Harriet asked for hers, the clerk eyed her suspiciously, and said:

"You just stand aside, you two; I'll attend to your case bye and bye."

Harriet led the young girl to the bow of the boat, where they were alone, and here, having no other help, she, as was her custom, addressed herself to the Lord. Kneeling on the seat, and supporting her head on her hands, and fixing her eyes on the waters of the bay, she groaned:

"Oh, Lord! You've been wid me in six troubles, *don't* desert me in the seventh!"

"Moses! Moses!" cried Tilly, pulling her by the sleeve. "Do go and see if you can't get tickets now."

"Oh, Lord! You've been wid me in six troubles, *don't* desert me in the seventh."

And so Harriet's story goes on in her peculiarly graphic manner, till at length in terror Tilly exclaimed:

"Oh, Lord! You've been wid me in six troubles, *don't* desert me in the seventh!"

"Moses! Moses!" cried Tilly, pulling her by the sleeve. "Do go and see if you can't get tickets now."

And sure enough, they got their tickets. As to why this man changed his tune toward them, Harriet never knew or inquired but just assumed that it was "de Lord" and let it go at that, never inquiring as to the agency he used. And when someone credited her with courage, she would deflect the compliment, saying:

"Don't, I tell you, Missus, 'twan't *me*, 'twas *de Lord*! Jes' so long as he wanted to use me, he would take keer of me, an' when he didn't want me no longer, I was ready to go; I always tole him, I'm gwine to hole stiddy on to you, an' you've got to see me trou."

Prominent abolitionists aided Harriet Tubman in various ways, including financially. As part of their organized effort, they established a network of safe houses, all part of a larger effort known to history as the "Underground Railroad." At no small risk to themselves, sympathetic Southerners opened their doors to escaping slaves. One such person was Sam Green who spent a full decade in prison for possessing a copy of "Uncle Tom's Cabin," the famous novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe which detailed in dramatic fashion the depredations of Southern chattel slavery. (In Maryland mere possession of this book was proscribed in law.) Had his association with Harriet Tubman become known to the powers-that-be something far worse than ten years in prison would surely have befallen him.

One evening, while the party of people she was leading waited patiently in the street in a pouring rain, Harriet Tubman approached the home of Thomas Garrett and gave her characteristic knock on his door. There was a long delay; then a window was raised and a stranger stuck his head out and demanded to know: "Who are you? What do you want?" Upon asking after her friend she was told that he had been obliged to leave on account of "harboring niggers." Certain the alarm would be sounded, Harriet fled with her people to a swamp and spent the rest of the evening there face down in the wet grass.

Wilmington, Delaware's "station-master" on the Under-ground Railroad, Thomas Garrett's practice was to parcel out shoes to the people he took in which, as the proprietor of a shoe-

making business, he was in a position to do. But twice he had to forfeit all of his earthly possessions as the penalty for providing such help. When pronouncing sentence, the presiding United States Court judge said to him:

> "Garrett, let this be a lesson you, not to interfere hereafter with the cause of justice, by helping off runaway negroes."

When he stood to receive sentence, the old man fixed his eyes on the Judge and said:

> Judge -- thee hasn't left me a dollar, but I wish to say to thee, and to all in this court room that if anyone knows of a fugitive who wants a shelter, and a friend, send him to Thomas Garrett, and he will befriend him!

Meanwhile, slave-holders, angered by Harriet's many successes, held heated public meetings disparaging her and declaring their intention of taking her dead or alive. The stupendous sum of $40,000, was placed upon her head ($12,000 alone of which was pledged by Maryland's State Legislature), making her the most wanted person in America. Despite this and threats to have her burned at the stake (*a la* Joan of Arc) and despite the warnings and apprehensions of her friends, Harriet set her face southward yet again. Undeterred, she reasoned with them saying:

> Now look yer! John saw de City didn't he? Yes, John saw de City, Well, what did he see? He saw twelve gates, didn't he? Three of dose gates was on de north; three of 'em was on de east; and' three of 'em was on de west; but dere was three more an' dem was on de south; an' I reckon if dey dill me down dere, I'll git into one of dem gates, don't you?

After rescuing her own family from slavery, Harriet next turned her attention to rescuing able-bodied men, for these were the ones she could count on to run the fastest and endure the most amount of hardship. Besides, in so doing she caused maximum economic hardship for their owners, a not insignificant side benefit. Of course this helps explain the exorbitant price placed upon her head; it's purpose was not to confer upon her any sort of special status but as an attempt to curtail the very real damage she was inflicting on the slave-owners' livelihood.

A MAN NAMED "JOE"

The circumstances of Joe's deliverance were these: year in and year out he had faithfully served his slave master and he thought, thereby, to have made himself well nigh indispensable. In reality, however, all it meant was that his master was able to fetch a higher price, a $1000 down and a $1000 to be paid at a later date. The morning after this transaction occurred, the new master came up riding up to Joe's slave shanty on a charger and summoned him forth, saying:

> Now Joe strip and take a licking.

Pleading, Joe replied:

> Mas'r habn't I always been faithful to you? Haven't I worked through sun and rain, early in de mornin' an' late at night; habn't I saved you an oberseer by doin' his work? hab you anything to complain agin me?

Replied his new master:

> No, Joe, I have no complaint to make of you. You're a good nigger, an' you have always worked well. But you belong to *me* now; your *my* nigger, and the first lesson my niggers have to learn is that I am master and they belong to me; and never to resist anything I order them to do. So I always begin by giving them a good licking. Now strip and take it.

Seeing there to be no recourse, he did as he was told but to himself he vowed:

> Dis is de first an' de last.

As soon as his torn-up flesh would allow it, he high-tailed it down river to a cabin where Harriet Tubman's father resided and this is what Joe said:

> Nex' time *Moses* comes, let me know.

And before long, Joe, his brothers, William, Peter, and Eliza were on their way, along with several others to form a party of seven led by Harriet who took them all to Canada but not first without a few close calls. For instance, when they got to Wilmington, they were alerted by Thomas Garrett that the bridge over the Dover River had been posted with a guard on the look out for escaped slaves, and specifically for Joe. So they worked out a plan whereby "bricklayers" would go over the bridge in a wagon in the morning, singing as they went, and come back at nightfall, still singing as is universally the wont of workmen. And of course, this time lying on the floor boards were the wanted fugitives. This ruse worked like a charm, throwing the authorities completely off their track.

Finally, they got to New York States' border, where they stopped at the anti-slavery office and were greeted by a Mr. Oliver Johnson, who turned to Joe and said:

> Well, Joe, I am glad to see the man who is worth $2,000 to his master.

On hearing this remark, Joe exclaimed:

> Oh, Mas'r, how did you know me!"

The reply he received greatly unsettled him:

> Here is the advertisement in our office and the description is so close that no one could mistake it.

On inquiring how much further it was to the Canadian border, Joe learned that it was several hundred miles, after which he turned pensive and withdrawn.

Now with the roar of Niagara Falls in their ears, there was only "one wide river to cross" as the Negro spiritual foes, and Harriet wanted all her companions to experience this glorious sight but she couldn't coax Joe to go to the train window and look out. Instead, deep in thought, he sat with his head in his hands. When Harriet felt the train cease to ascend but start to descend, she knew they were at the center of the bridge and that all danger was past; then she sprang to Joe's side of the car, and shook him almost out of his seat, exclaiming:

> Joe! you've shook de lion's paw!

Not understanding this figurative expression, Joe drew a blank. And so she said to him more explicitly:

> Joe, you're in Queen Victoria's dominions! You're a free man!

Then Joe arose and with hands held high began to sing and shout:

> *Glory to God and Jesus too,*
> *One more soul got safe;*
> *Oh, go and carry the news,*
> *One more soul got safe.*

As Harriet recalled:

> The white ladies and gentlemen gathered round him till I couldn't see Joe for the crowd, only I heard his voice singing, 'Glory to God and Jesus too,' louder than ever." A sweet young lady reached over her fine cambric handkerchief to him, and as Joe wiped the great tears off his face, he said, "Tank de Lord! dere's only one more journey for me now, and dat's to Hebben!" (Sarah Bradford)

After that joyous day, Harriet was to see Joe several times happy, industrious, and free. By the way, how do you suppose Joe might have responded several years latter (December 1, 1862) when Abraham Lincoln in his Annual Message to Congress described America, as "the last best hope of earth"? Maybe Joe would have responded mildly, saying that ***Jesus*** not ***America*** was the last best hope of earth.

In 1858, Harriet Tubman was finally able to liberate her parents. Her father was to be tried in court the following Monday for helping off slaves but she got to him first. Regarding this, she said:

> I just removed my father's trial to a higher court, and brought him off to Canada.

Of this incident, Thomas Garrett left us a few interesting details:

> She [Tubman] brought away her parents in a singular style. They started out with an old horse fitted out in primitive [fashion] with a straw collar, a pair of old chaise wheels, with a board on the axle to sit on, another board swung with ropes, fastened to the axle, to rest their feet on. She got her parents, who were both slaves belonging to different masters on this crude vehicle to the railroad, put them in the cars, [then] turned Jehu [an Israelite King noted for chariot warfare], . . . and drove to town in a style that no other human being ever did before or since.

JOHN BROWN

Remarkable to Harriet Tubman was that a white man could so take to heart her people's cause as John Brown did. She collaborated with him to the extent of recruiting volunteers in Canada to join his guerrilla army and it is said that had it not ill-health intervened, she would have joined him on his ill-fated raid at Harper's Ferry. In any event, as the *Boston Commonwealth* of 1863 reported, he was much on her mind and that she had a premonition regarding his fate:

> . . . she laid great stress on a dream which she had just before she met Captain Brown in Canada. She thought she was in "a wilderness sort of place, all full of rocks, and bushes," when she saw a serpent raise its head among the rocks, and as it did so, it became the head of an old man with a long white beard, gazing at her, "wistful like, jes as ef he war gwine to speak to me," and then two other heads rose up beside him, younger than he, – and as she stood looking at them, and wondering what they could want with her, a great crowd of men rushed in and struck down the younger heads, and then the head of the old man, still looking at her so "wistful." This dream she had again and again, and could not interpret it; but when she met Captain Brown, shortly after, behold, he was the very image of the head she had seen. But still she could not make out what her dream signified, till the news came to her of the tragedy of Harper's Ferry, and then she knew the two heads were his two sons [who were killed in the battle].

John Brown's nicknamed Harriet "General Tubman," which was his way of acknowledging that he thought her capable of leading an army into battle, which, as events transpired, was about what happened. As for John Brown, "General" Tubman said of him:

When I think how he gave up his life for our people, and how he never flinched, but was so brave to the end; it's clear to me it wasn't mortal man, it was God in him.

INCIDENT AT TROY

From the *Troy Whig*, April 28, 1860:

Yesterday afternoon, the streets of this city and West Troy were made the scenes of unexampled excitement. For the first time since the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, an attempt was made here to carry its provisions into execution, and the result was a terrific encounter between the officers and the prisoner's friends, the triumph of mob law, and the final rescue of the fugitive. Our city was thrown into a grand state of turmoil, and for a time every other topic was forgotten, to give place to this new excitement. . . .

This then were the circumstances: in the spring of 1860, Harriet was enroute to Boston where she had an engagement to address a large, anti-slavery gathering but stopped first in Troy, NY to visit a cousin. On that very day, April 27th, at eleven in the morning, a Charles Nalle, about age 30, had been arrested by a US Marshal, then taken to the corner of First and State Streets where on the second floor of the Mutual Bank building was a federal commissioner's office. At two o'clock that afternoon , he got a brief hearing before Commissioner Beach. An attempt was made to keep any sympathizers out of the hearing but, somehow, Harriet gained entry by disguising herself as an old woman, wearing a big bonnet. It has been suggested by some that she had been mistaken for the scrubwoman. However that may be, she was present when the decision was handed down to remand Nalle back to Virginia.

On hearing this decision, Nalle suddenly bolted for the window ledge as if to jump into the waiting arms of the crowd gathering below but he was hauled back in by the bailiffs. Then, in the blink of an eye, Tubman sprang to life, instantly transforming herself from frail, old lady to mighty warrior, jumping up and grabbing Nalle, wrenching him free of his guards and dragging him toward the stairs. As one eyewitness wrote,

"she was repeatedly beaten over the head with policeman's clubs, yet never for a moment releasing her hold."

Meanwhile, on the street below a huge mixed crowd of poor blacks but also Troy's most upstanding white citizens had gathered. Then, as Sarah Bradford related:

Offers were made to buy Charles from his master, who at first agreed to take twelve hundred dollars for him, but when this was subscribed, he immediately raised the price to fifteen hundred. The crowd grew more excited. A gentleman raised a window and called out,

"Two hundred dollars for his rescue, but not one cent to his master!"

Then, Harriet Tubman cried out:

Drag us out! Drag him to the river! Drown him! But don't let them have him!"

With characteristic foresight, Harriet had contracted beforehand with a sympathetic boats man to be waiting for them at river's edge. Turning again to the *Troy Whig* for its account:

> Exactly what did go on in the crowd, it is impossible to say, but the pulling, hauling, mauling, and shouting, gave evidences of frantic efforts on the part of the rescuers, and a stern resistance from the conservators of the law. . . . A number in the crowd were more or less hurt, and it is a wonder that these were not badly injured, as pistols were drawn and chisels used.
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> The battle had raged as far as the corner of Dock and Congress Streets, and the victory remained with the rescuers at last. The officers were completely worn out with their exertions, and it was impossible to continue their hold upon him any longer. Nalle was at liberty. His friends rushed him down Dock Street to the lower ferry, where there was a skiff lying ready to start. The fugitive was put in, the ferryman rowed off, and amid the shouts of hundreds who lined the banks of the river, Nalle was carried into Albany County.

Turning back then to Sarah Bradford's account:

> Again and again they were knocked down, the poor slave utterly helpless, with his manacled wrists, streaming with blood. Harriet's outer clothes were torn from her, and even her stout shoes were pulled from her feet, yet she never relinquished her hold of the man, till she had dragged him to the river, where he was tumbled into a boat, Harriet following in a ferry-boat to the other side. But the telegraph was ahead of them, and as soon as they landed he was seized and hurried from her sight. After a time, some school children came hurrying along, and to her anxious inquiries they answered, "He is up in that house, in the third story." Harriet rushed up to the place. Some men were attempting to make their way up the stairs. The officers were firing down, and two men were lying on the stairs, who had been shot. Over their bodies . . . [Harriet] rushed, and with the help of others burst open the door

> of the room, and dragged out the fugitive, whom Harriet carried down stairs in her arms. A gentleman who was riding by with a fine horse, stopped to ask what the disturbance meant; and on hearing the story, his sympathies seemed to be thoroughly aroused; he sprang from his wagon, calling out, "That is a blood-horse, drive him till he drops." The poor man was hurried in; some of his friends jumped in after him, and drove at the most rapid rate

to Schenectady.

Afterward, as a free man, Nalle was able to return to Troy as a free man where he and his wife and children lived seven years.

WAR!

In April, 1861, with the Battle of Fort Sumter, the war between the States commenced in earnest. Troops from every quarter were gathered. In Massachusetts, Governor Andrew sent for Harriet Tubman. He asked her if she would go south with the Union troops to serve in whatever capacity she was needed. At that time Harriet Tubman had a small farm in Auburn New York and her hands were full caring for her own people. Nevertheless, she answered the call.

At first she was employed as a domestic, then as a hospital nurse. The need was great and conditions quite dreadful. In her own words:

> I'd go to de hospital, I would, early eb'ery morn-in'. I'd get a big chunk of ice, I would, and put it in a basin, and fill it with water; den I'd begin to bathe der wounds, an' by de time I'd bathed off three or four, de fire and heat would have melted de ice and made de water warm, an' it would be as red as clar blood. Den I'd go an' git more ice, I would, an' by de time I got to de nex' ones, de flies would be roun' de fust ones black an' thick as eber.

As her reputation as a healer spread, she was called from one military post to another to tend to the sick and wounded. Her treatments included traditional remedies based on preparations of roots which she gathered at river's edge.

When the Union officers found their troops unable to win the confidence of the slaves, they asked Harriet Tubman to intercede. She proved so successful in eliciting valuable information that she ended up forming her own independent spy service, actually a rudimentary intelligence network which kept track of such things as Confederate troop movements.

Increasingly it became apparent that it would advance the cause if she were to accompany military expeditions into unsecured territory. General Hunter extended to her an invitation to join one such expedition up South Carolina's Combahee River to clear it of torpedoes and to cut railroads and bridges that the Confederates were utilizing. She agreed on condition that Colonel Montgomery was appointed to command the task force which consisted of 300 black soldiers. The Colonel, one of John Brown's men, was well known to her and was someone whose capability she regarded highly. Her request was honored.

On the night of June 2, 1863 the expedition, outfitted with three gunboats, began working its way up the river. As it did so, slaves working the fields observed its progress. At first

they dropped whatever tasks they were performing and hightailed it for the woods. But once word got out that these were "Lincoln's gunboats," they reversed direction; men, women, and children all came running down to the river until nearly 800 souls could been seen thronging the shoreline. Above the clamor and din Colonel Montgomery shouted out “Moses!" (that being Harriot’s nickname), Moses, you'll have to give 'em a song." She complied in rousing fashion, bursting forth with:

Of all the whole creation in the East or in the West,
The glorious Yankee nation is the greatest and the best.
Come along! come along! don't be alarmed,
Uncle Sam is rich enough to give you all a farm.

Plying back and forth, landing craft ferried the people to the gun-boats until all had been gathered aboard. Then the expedition shoved off for Beaufort, returning to the place from where it had originated. What proved to be the greatest source of satisfaction to Harriet in this episode, beside that no casualties had been incurred, was that most of the able-bodied men who had been liberated that day immediately and of their own volition enlisted in Lincoln' army.

A Boston newspaper, *The Commonwealth*, carried this dispatch, July 10, 1863:

> Col. Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 soldiers, under the guidance of a black woman, dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow, destroying millions of dollars worth of commissary stores, cotton, and lordly dwellings, and striking terror in the hearts of the rebellion, brought off near 800 slaves and thousands of dollars worth of property, without losing a man or receiving a scratch.
>
> After they were fairly well disposed of in the Beaufort charge, they were addressed in strains of thrilling eloquence by the gallant deliverer, to which they responded in a song. "*There is a white robe for thee,*" a song so appropriate and so heartfelt and cordial as to bring unbidden tears.
>
> The Colonel was followed by a speech from the black woman, who led the raid and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted. For sound sense and real native eloquence, her address would do honour to any man, and it created a great sensation ...

An enduring mystery is how Harriet Tubman, an unschooled illiterate, was able to grasp the big picture. Yet, with an uncanny sense of strategy, early in the course of the war, long before the Emancipation Proclamation had taken form in Lincoln's mind, she said:

> God's ahead ob Massa Linkum. God won't let Massa Linkum beat de South till he do de right ting. Massa Linkum he great man, and I'se poor nigger; but dis nigger can tell Massa Linkum how to save de money and de young men. He do it by setting de niggers free. S'pose dar was awful' big snake down dar, on de

floor. He bite you. Folks all skeered, cause you die. You send for doctor to cut de bite; but snake he rolled up dar, and while doctor [binds] it, he bite you agin. De doctor cut out dat bite, but ... de snake he spring up and bite you agin, and he keep doing till you kill him.

Tubman was at odds with Lincoln's approval of funding to establish a colony for liberated slaves in Panama. In 1859, denouncing the Colonization movement, she told a quaint story about a farmer who planted onions and garlic in his field to help fatten up the cattle only to discover that the taste of onions ended up flavoring the milk. He realized too late his error because by then the onions and garlic had seeded themselves and were then ubiquitous. She next provided the story's application:

. . . the white people had got the Negroes here to do their drudgery, and now they were trying to root them out and ship them to Africa. But they can't do it: we're rooted here and can't be pulled up.

Only after Abraham Lincoln was safely in the grave, did Harriet have anything complimentary to say about him. She said:

I didn't like Lincoln in those days. I used to see Mrs. Lincoln but I never wanted to see him. You see we colored folk didn't understand that he was our friend. All we knew was that the first colored troops sent South from Massachusetts only got seven dollars a month while the whites got fifteen. We didn't like that.

AT WAR'S END

In the summer of 1865, with the war behind her, Harriet took a train *via* New Jersey to get back to her home in upstate New York and one would have thought that, as a genuine war hero, she would not have been troubled but prejudice was rampant. The train conductor asked her for her ticket. She showed him her soldier's pass but he rejected it, claiming it must have been forged or stolen. He ordered her to give up her seat. When Harriet refused, the conductor started choking her. Several other men joined the fray and together they succeeded in dragging Harriet to the baggage car, though not without first breaking her arm. So there she lay, locked up for the rest of the journey. She was several months recovering from her injuries. Reflecting on this, Harriet concluded that she was so treated not only because she was black, but because she was a woman. After that she championed the rights of her gender as well as of her race, befriending Susan B. Anthony and other suffragettes.

At war's end Harriet returned to Auburn, N.Y., where she lived another 48 years secure and free in her own house on her own land.

What had drawn Harriet to Auburn in the first instance was William Seward (1801-1872), one of America's most stalwart abolitionists. It was he who sold her seven acre farm

in 1859. Actually, it was an illegal transaction because the Supreme Court the year before had declared that runaway slaves (of whom Harriet was certainly one) were not US citizens and had no right to own property. Howbeit, he sold the property to her all the same, the Supreme Court's ruling notwithstanding, and at a reduced price and on favorable terms at that, which is how they became near neighbors and fast friends for many years.

Elected NY State's governor in 1838, Seward was appointed to the US Senate in 1848 and then for eight years he served as Secretary of State under both Presidents Lincoln and Johnson. Uniquely positioned to bring to pass Harriet's vision of slavery's overthrow, Seward worked diligently in his various official capacities to that end.

Despite having good connections, Harriet's and her extended family's first winter in Auburn was marked by privation. Lacking firewood, they burned the picket fence in the fireplace just to stay warm. Notwithstanding trying circumstances, "Aunt" Harriet," as she was affectionately called, set about organizing "Freedom Fairs" for the purpose of collecting clothing and money to help out with two schools in South Carolina.

In 1868, she married Nelson Davis a war veteran whom she helped nurse back to health from tuberculosis. A brick maker, for many years he plied his trade on the premises. But in 1884 his health declined and that source of household income was lost.

Aunt Harriet's father, Benjamin died in 1871, her mother, in 1886. Then, in 1887 Harriet's wood frame home burned down. Though this was with one made of brick, her treasure trove of correspondence with war veterans and abolitionists was irretrievably lost. But whatever her trials or triumphs, she kept on trying to better her people. For instance, in 1896 she bought at auction a farm of 25 acres, all of which she deeded over to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in 1903. In 1908 many turned out to the dedication of the Harriet Tubman Home for Aged and Infirm Negroes. Afterward on one occasion she expressed her disappointment in the AME's church leadership, saying:

> When I give the home over to Zion Church what you suppose they done? Why they make a rule that nobody should come in without they have a hundred dollars. Now I want to make a rule that nobody should come in unless they didn't have no money at all.

One cause to which Aunt Harriet lent her voice was that of women's rights. Addressing a suffragette meeting in 1888, Harriet said to the gathering regarding the previous war:

> Loving women were on the scene to administer to the injured, to bind up their wounds and tend them through weary months of suffering in the army hospitals. If those deeds did not place woman as man's equal, what do?

At another suffragette meeting in Rochester, N.Y., in 1896, Aunt Harriet clasped hands at

the podium with Susan B. Anthony and, as one newspaper reporter wrote, Harriet impressed the audience:

> . . . with the venerable dignity of her appearance [and] honest and true benevolence of purpose which commanded respect.

Connections between the Sewards' family and Harriet's were close. She minded their children and they watched out for her family.

In this regard there is a curious tale to tell, in 1858 Harriet abducted an eight year old girl named Margaret from her family and brought her away to the Sewards who raised her in their own household. Since this is the only instance on record of Harriet's taking a juvenile out of her custodial home without parental consent some explanation seems in order. Presumably, the girl in question, Margaret, had been raised in the home of Harriet's brother, a prosperous free man. But no such brother can be identified. So was Margaret really Harriet's niece? For one, she was very light skinned, yet her facial features bore a marked resemblance to Harriet's. Not only that, there was a similarity in their personalities. In any event, they were closest of friends through many decades and Margaret, who was the mother of eight, was specially remembered in Harriet's will. Is it possible that Margaret was not Harriet's cousin but her daughter through rape by a white man at a time when Harriet was deathly ill and thus vulnerable? If so, it would explain a lot of things about why Harriet left slavery when she did and why she was rejected by her slave husband who did not follow her but after a few years married another woman.

IN THE AUTUMN OF LIFE

With the passing of the years, Aunt Harriet's demeanor was transformed by degrees from one of fierce determinedness to that of sweet saintliness. This is not to say that she wasn't a kick in the pants. Even as an old lady, she used to walk the two miles to Samuel Hopkins Adams' grandfather's home. There it would be asked of her, "Harriet will you sing for my grandchildren?" At first she would decline but then "would clap her stringy hands upon her bony knees, rock her powerful frame, snap her eyes," and belt out:

Go Down Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land
Tell ol' Pharaoh
Let my people go!

and she did it just as in former times for those she was leading out of bondage to freedom. And children being children would ask her all kinds of impertinent questions: "Show us your mark!" and she would comply, revealing to them the scars indelibly imprinted by the whip

and when they asked her "did you kill lots of people?" she'd reply:

> "Whuffoh I want to kill folks? Nobody nevah kill me!"

Aunt Harriet's grand-niece (or grand-daughter, as the case may be), Alice Stewart, recalled Harriet's flair for the dramatic:

> Suddenly I became aware of something moving toward me through the grass. So smoothly did it glide and with so little noise. I was frightened! Then reason conquered fear and I knew it was Aunt Harriet, flat on her stomach, and with only the use of her arms and serpentine movements of her body, gliding smooth along. Mother helped her back to her chair and they laughed. Aunt Harriet then told me that was the way she had gone by many a sentinel during the war.

Another facet of Harriet's life is seen in this exchange between her and a reporter who came to interview her:

> She [Harriet] looked musingly toward a nearby orchard, and she said: "Did you ever plant any apple trees?" With shame I confessed that I had not. "No," said she, "but somebody else planted them." I liked apples when I was young and I said: "Some day I'll plant apples myself for other young folk to eat," and I guess I did.
>
> (*N.Y. Herald*)

Not long before her death in March, 1913, at more than 90 years of age, knowing that she had run the course and had fought the good fight, Harriet exclaimed:

> I can hear dem bells a-ringin', I can hear
> de angles singin'; dere is only one crown
> left now, and dat's for old aunt Harriet --
> and she shall not lose her reward.

At her funeral, Auburn's Common Council's president, John F. Jaeckel made the following observation:

> I may say that I have known "Aunt Harriet" during my whole lifetime. The boys of my time always regarded her as a sort of supernatural being; our youthful imaginations were fired by the tales we had heard of her adventures and we stood in great awe of her.

More recently, aptly summing up her life in a chapter called *Jailbreak out of History: the re-biography of Harriet Tubman*, Butch Lee wrote:

> Harriet wasn't leading the weak. No, that's got it backwards. She was leading the *strong*. The great anti-slavery struggle was a movement of the best and the bravest, the most serious-minded folk of that day. And it was among these, the strong, that Harriet was a leader.