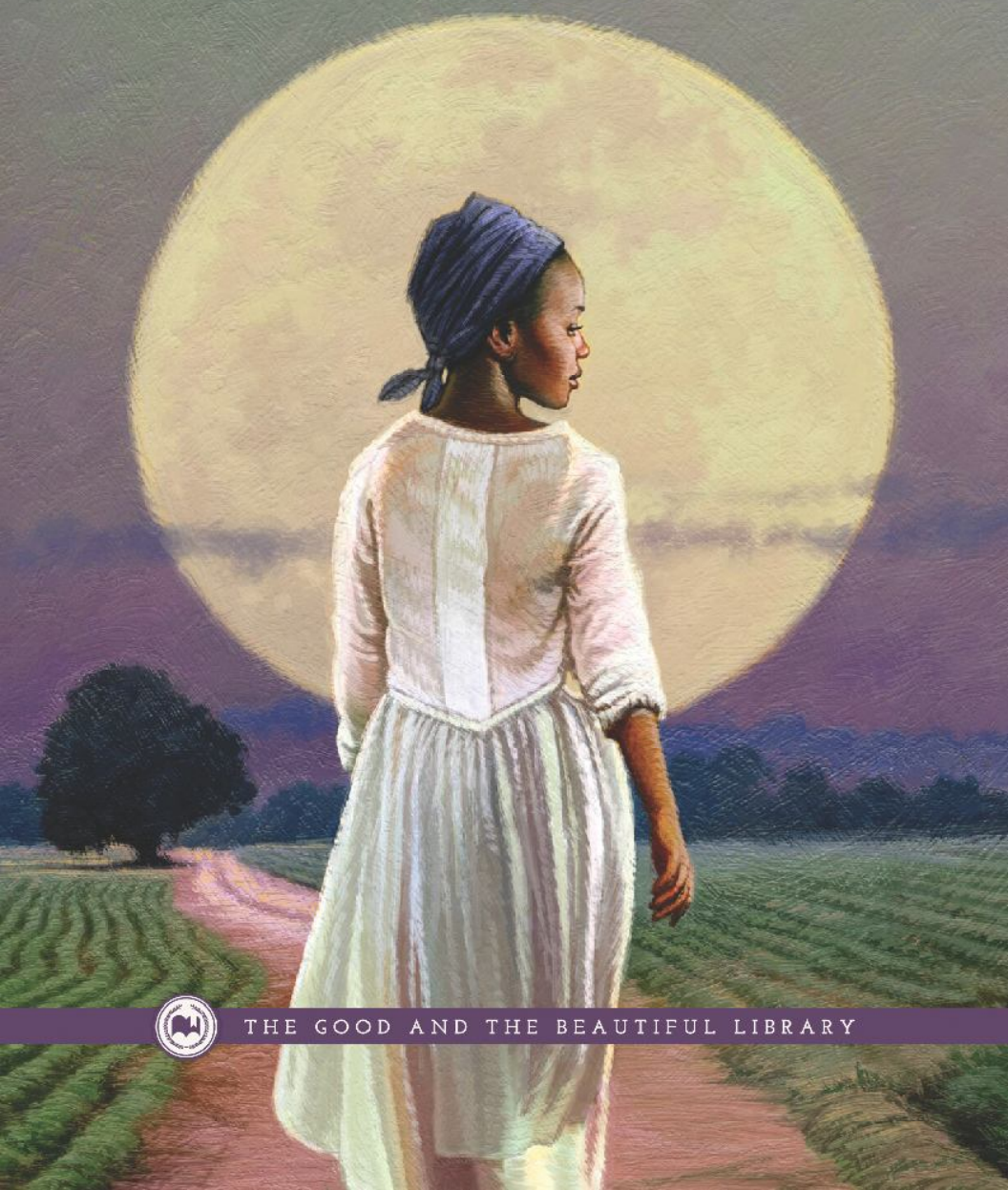


# HARRIET

~ The Moses of Her People ~

SARAH H. BRADFORD



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

# HARRIET

## The Moses of Her People

SARAH H. BRADFORD

*"...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."*

*Harriet, The Moses of Her People* is an inspiring true story of Harriet Tubman and her tremendous impact for good during a time of much oppression and hardship.

As an enslaved woman, Harriet experienced countless adversities and cruelty. "Why should such things be?" she often pondered. Even as a child, she knew slavery was wrong and must end. As a young woman, Harriet slipped away from her slave master one night. Alone, she courageously made her journey to the North, where freedom awaited her.

Harriet eventually gained her freedom and, despite great peril and hardship, returned many times to the South to free her family members and hundreds of others.

A woman of deep faith, courage, and love, Harriet prayed with complete trust that the Lord would hear and answer her prayers. She was fearless, for she knew God was at the helm and would guide her steps. Harriet's life is an example of dedicated service to God and to her neighbors. Truly she, like Moses, lived the commandments of God and, with His help, delivered her people.



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*By Sarah F. Bradford*

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This unabridged version has updated grammar and spelling. The original edition of this biography employed various racial terms that accurately portrayed the times in which Harriet Tubman lived, but are considered very offensive today. In an effort to maintain a true representation of the tragic prejudices presented in this narrative while remaining sensitive to offensive language, the words *mulatto*, *darkie*, and *nigger* have been removed or changed to milder terms.

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# Chapter One



On a hot summer's day, perhaps sixty years ago, a group of merry little black children 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 slave 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 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 dim-witted child, and as her head hung upon her breast, she looked up with dull blood-shot eyes toward her young brothers and sisters, without seeming to see them. By and by 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 playground 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 dull little black 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 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 slave 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 she 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 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. 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 slave quarter.

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 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 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 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.

As soon as she was strong enough for work, Harriet was hired out to a man whose tyranny was worse, if possible, than that of the woman she had left. Now it was out of door drudgery which was put upon her. The labor of the horse and the ox, the lifting of barrels of flour and other heavy weights were given to her; and powerful men often stood astonished to see this woman perform feats of strength from which they shrunk incapable. This cruelty she looks upon as a blessing in disguise (a very questionable shape the blessing took, methinks), for by it she was prepared for after needs.

Still the pressure upon the brain continued, and with the weight half lifted, she would drop off into a state of insensibility, from

which even the lash in the hand of a strong man could not rouse her. But if they had only known it, the touch of a gentle hand upon her shoulder, and her name spoken in tones of kindness, would have accomplished what cruelty failed to do.

The day's work must be accomplished, whether the head was racked with pain, and the frame was consumed by fever, or not; but the day came at length when poor Harriet could work no more. The sting of the lash had no power to rouse her now, and the new master finding her a dead weight on his hands, returned the useless piece of property to him who was called her "owner." And while she lay there helpless, this man was bringing other men to look at her, and offering her for sale at the lowest possible price; at the same time setting forth her capabilities, if once she were strong and well again.

Harriet's religious character I have not yet touched upon. Brought up by parents possessed of strong faith in God, she had never known the time, I imagine, when she did not trust Him, and cling to Him, with an all-abiding confidence. She seemed ever to feel the Divine Presence near, and she talked with God "as a man talketh with his friend." Hers was not the religion of a morning and evening prayer at stated times, but when she felt a need, she simply told God of it, and trusted Him to set the matter right.

"And so," she said to me, "as I lay so sick on my bed, from Christmas till March, I was always praying for poor ole master. 'Pears like I didn't do nothing but pray for ole master. 'Oh, Lord, convert ole master. Oh, dear 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 chain gang 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 eberyting! But he was gone, I couldn't pray for him no more."