

# HARRIET, TUBMAN.

## An Hour With Harriet Tubman.

By James B. Clarke.

Harriet Tubman, the Moses of the Negro bondsmen of the South, counsellor and associate of John Brown, scout and spy and nurse in the Union army, is quietly rounding out a long and useful life in the home for aged colored people which she founded and which bears her name.

Like most Americans who have had to choose their own surnames, Harriet must also fix the date of her birth. But this was so long ago that she cannot, like Booker T. Washington and others, who were born in slavery, dispense with the day and month and claim one of two years. If she did, it would probably be 1811 or 1812, for before the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law she had already become an experienced and intrepid conductor of the Underground Railroad.

"I remember," she said, "once after I had brought some colored people from the South, I went up to the Peterbone to the Big House. Gerritt Smith's son, Greene, was going hunting with his tutor and some boys. I had no shoes. It was a Saturday afternoon and—would you believe it?—those boys went right off to the village and got me a pair of shoes so I could go with them."

In those days Harriet was equally skilled with the gun or the hoe, in the laundry or the kitchen. Until recently she possessed enough of her "old-time energy to keep house and entertain her friends—the old and sick and homeless—in the little cottage by the road, just outside of Auburn, N. Y., which she purchased from Secretary Seward. Her falling strength has obliged her to share with four or five old women the modest home that she had established on the adjoining land. But, in spite of her advanced age, she is not ready to be Oslerized. On the day of my visit she had without assistance gone down stairs to breakfast, and I saw her eat a dinner that would tax the stomach of a gourmand. A friend had sent her a spring chicken and had the pleasure of seeing it placed before her with rice and pie and cheese and other good things. "Never mind me," Aunt Harriet replied to the friend's remark that the conversation was interfering with the dinner, "I'll eat all you give me, but I want you to have some of this chicken first." And when the lady protested that she was not hungry but would taste the rice, Aunt Harriet extended her hospitable invitation to another visitor to share her favorite viands. She resented the suggestion that some one should feed her. She only wanted the nurse to cut the chicken and place the tray on her lap.

Although her face is furrowed and her hand has lost its one time vigor, Harriet Tubman's mind is astonishingly fresh and active. She not only remembers things that happened when most people's grandmothers were little girls, she has the newspapers read to her and she follows with great interest the important events of the day. Hearing of the coronation of King George V, she requested Miss Annie F. Miller, the grand-daughter of Gerrit Smith, to send her congratulations to the king, whose grandmother, the late Queen Victoria, sent a medal and a letter to the old Negro woman who had brought so many of her people to the free soil of Canada.

No such medal or letter is mentioned in the biography of Harriet Tubman, so Miss Miller visited her to obtain further information about this mark of appreciation from the "Great White Mother," as Queen Victoria was affectionately called by her black subjects in Africa. Aunt Harriet said, "It was when the queen had been on the throne sixty years, she sent me the medal. It was a silver medal about the size of a dollar. It showed the queen and her family. The letter said, 'I read your book to Her Majesty, and she was pleased with it. She sends you this medal.' She also invited me to come over for her birthday party, but I didn't know enough to go. The letter was worn to a shadow, so many people read it, it got lost somehow or other. Then I gave the medal to my brother's daughter to keep."

I afterward found, on inquiring at the home of her niece, that Aunt Harriet had made no mistake in describing the medal. It is of silver and bears the likeness of Queen Victoria, her son, grandson and great-grandson, the present Prince of Wales. Such medals were circulated throughout the British Empire in commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897, but there can be no doubt that the queen personally directed one to be sent to Harriet Tubman, whose book had been read to her. This explains why this token from the greatest white woman of the nineteenth century is not mentioned in the biography of the greatest black woman, for the book of Harriet Tubman, by Mrs. S. H. Bradford, closes with the Civil war.

Satisfied that her honored friend had reasonable ground to congratulate the grandson of Queen Victoria on his coronation, Miss Miller assured Aunt Harriet that she would send a letter to the King of England, but that she would ask me to write it for her, as a British subject from the West Indies, I might be more familiar with the proper form of address. And Aunt Harriet immediately replied: "I know where he came from as soon as I heard him speak."

Aunt Harriet's wit is one of her most pleasing qualities. Wishing to make her an honorary member of the Geneva Political Equality Club, Miss Miller said, "I remember seeing you years ago at a suffrage convention in Rochester."

"Yes," the old woman affirmed, "I belonged to Miss Sus'n P. Ant'ny's 'society.' Our motto's Lincoln's declaration: 'I go for all sharing the privileges of the government who assist in bearing its burdens, by no means excluding women.' Lou certainly have assisted in bearing the burden. Do you really believe that women should vote?"

Aunt Harriet paused a moment as if surprised at this question and then quietly replied, "I suffered enough to believe it."

When Miss Miller asked her full name she answered in solemnly measured tones, "Harriet Tubman Davis."

"Shall I write it with or without the Mrs.?"

"Any way you like, jes' so you git der Tubman," the old woman responded.