

The Jamaican Healer

Long ago, back in 1805 in Jamaica, a little girl named Mary Jane Grant was born. Her father was a Scottish soldier and her mother a Jamaican medic. Mary's mother was a free born woman which meant she was not a slave. Many black women in Jamaica at that time were forced into slavery, but not Mary's mother, and not Mary.

My name is Eleanor, and I am a British nurse. The year is 1854. A war has broken out far away in an area called Crimea. The newspapers are reporting horrific things! Many people have been injured on both sides of the war and the hospitals are dirty and full of disease. The newspapers are saying that many of our British soldiers are dying not because of their injuries, but because of the diseases that are spreading. The water the men are drinking is dirty and there are huge rats running on the floor. There is not enough food to go around and the men cannot get better without good care.

I went to offer my help to Florence Nightingale's helpers but I was refused. While I was there, I met a lady with the name Mary Seacole. She was from Jamaica and had travelled to the offices to offer her help too. Like me, Mary's help was refused too but I could not help but wonder if this was because she is black and from Jamaica. I saw Mary cry in the street that day. She was shocked.



Later that week Mary saw me. She was borrowing a ship of her own to travel out to the Crimean war because she wanted to help. She needed a group of nurses to go with her, so of course I said "Yes!"



After a long, wild journey on a large ship with many nurses, we arrived in Crimea. Mary's aim was to set up a British hotel near the frontline. This was a scary thought at the time because the frontline was where the fighting was going on. All Mary wanted to do was give supplies of food, water and medicine to those that needed it, for both sides of the fighting.

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While I was living and working in the British hotel with Mary, many of us got to know her very well. In fact we gave her a nickname; Mother Seacole.

We gave her this nickname because we loved her so much, just like we would if she were our mother. She looked after the soldiers and cooked them their favourite meals just like their mothers. She will always be known as Mother Seacole.

We learned about how she had treated people with the disease cholera and had even survived it herself. She knew lots on how to heal people that Mary's mother had taught her. She even knew many of the soldiers already because many had been to Jamaica while she was growing up and helping her mother.



In 1856, the war ended. We knew that we would have to go back to England just like the soldiers. Mary went back to Britain with hardly any money at all. She had spent her own money to buy food and blankets for the soldiers. When Mary moved back to Britain she was named a hero.

Many soldiers that had been injured had written letters back home telling tales of Mother Seacole. They were sent to the newspapers so everyone could read all about Mary and how she had helped during the war. One soldier even wrote a poem about Mary and her work. He was so grateful for her help! I didn't get to see Mary again but I loved reading the letters from the soldiers.

Later on, Mary wrote a book all about her adventures. It was called 'Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands' and people loved reading about where she had been in her life and what she did. Mary was also given medals for her work in medicine. She was now famous! Although she was nurse in Britain and in the Crimean war, in Jamaica she will always be known as 'The Jamaican Healer'.

The Jamaican Healer Comprehension

What happened in the story?

Who is telling the story?

How do you think Mary Seacole felt when her help was refused? Find clues in the text to explain your answer.

Where did Mary learn all of her medical skills?

What was Mary's nickname during the Crimean war?

What kind of person do you think Mary Seacole was?

The Jamaican Healer Comprehension

How do you think Mary helped the injured soldiers?

What does the author think about Mary and her achievements?

Can you find any interesting adjectives in the story?

Why do you think the author started the story by explaining who Mary Seacole was?

When is the story set?

Did you like the story? Explain why.
