

MARY SEACOLE WAS BORN IN KINGSTON, JAMAICA EARLY IN THE 19th CENTURY IN A BUILDING THAT WAS PERHAPS THE BLUNDELL HALL ON EAST STREET NEXT DOOR TO THE INSTITUTE BUILDING. SHE DID NOT DIVULGE HER AGE NOR DID SHE DISCLOSE THE NAME OF HER FATHER BUT IMPLIED THAT HE WAS OF A GOOD SCOTTISH FAMILY. TO HER FATHER SHE TRACED HER AFFECTION FOR CAMP LIFE AND FOR THE POMP, PRIDE AND CIRCUMSTANCES OF GLORIOUS WAR. HER MOTHER WAS CREOLE.

FOR A TIME MARY LIVED WITH A RELATIVE AT 57 WATER LANE, KINGSTON BUT SHE STATED, "WHEN I WAS ABOUT TWELVE YEARS OLD I WAS MORE FREQUENTLY AT MY MOTHER'S HOUSE AND USED TO ASSIST HER IN DUTIES, VERY OFTEN SHARING WITH HER THE TASK OF ATTENDING UPON INVALID OFFICERS OR THEIR WIVES...". GROWING UP IN THIS ATMOSPHERE CONTRIBUTED TO MARY'S INTEREST IN MEDICAL ART.

SOME YEARS LATER SHE MARRIED AN ELDERLY MAN, JOHN SEACOLE. HE WAS SICKLY AND IN ORDER TO IMPROVE HIS HEALTH THEY MOVED TO BLACK RIVER. THIS WAS A VERY UNHAPPY CHOICE SINCE BLACK RIVER WAS THEN A FEVER-RIDDEN SWAMP. NOT LONG AFTER MR. SEACOLE BECAME MUCH WORSE AND THEY RETURNED TO MARY'S MOTHER IN KINGSTON WHERE HE DIED IN A FEW WEEKS TIME.

FOLLOWING THIS HER MOTHER DIED AND IN 1843 BLUNDELL HALL WAS NEARLY DESTROYED BY FIRE. MARY TRIUMPHED OVER THESE DIFFICULTIES AND DURING THE CHOLERA EPIDEMIC IN 1850 SHE WORKED WITH DOCTORS AS A FLEDGING NURSE, GAINING FIRST-HAND KNOWLEDGE OF THE DISEASE AND DEVELOPING A MEDICINE THAT PRODUCED REMARKABLE RESULTS.

MARY BECAME A TRAVELLER AND VISITED NASSAU, HAITI AND PANAMA. ON A SECOND VISIT TO PANAMA SHE WAS RECOGNIZED FOR HER UNSTINTING EFFORTS TO FIGHT THE PREVALENT DISEASES.

FROM PANAMA SHE WENT TO CUBA WHERE SHE WAS FACED WITH A TERRIBLE CHOLERA EPIDEMIC. SHE PROVED HERSELF CAPABLE IN DEALING WITH THE SITUATION AND BECAME KNOWN AS THE "YELLOW WOMAN FROM JAMAICA WITH THE CHOLERA MEDICINE".

THE CRIMEAN WAR BROKE OUT IN 1854 AND MARY DECIDED TO GO AND HELP THE SOLDIERS, MANY OF WHOM HAD SERVED IN JAMAICA. THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT RECOGNIZE HER OFFICIALLY, BUT ALLOWED HER TO GO AND SET UP A HOTEL WHICH WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. SHE WAS HOWEVER DECLARED A BANKRUPT AFTER THE WAR.

MARY SEACOLE DIED IN 1881, MOST HIGHLY RESPECTED AND DEEPLY REGRETTED BY ALL WHO KNEW HER. SHE HAD MADE MANY FRIENDS OF ALL RANKS AND STATIONS IN LIFE, AND THE CARE AND SKILL WHICH HAD BEEN USED ON BEHALF OF THE SOLDIERS IN THE DREADFUL CONDITIONS IN THE CRIMEA WERE MOST HIGHLY APPRECIATED BY ALL WHO HAD RECEIVED HER MINISTRATIONS.