



A portrait of Seacole, c. 1869, by Albert Charles Challen

## MARY SEACOLE - THE BLACK FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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**"Wherever the need arises on whatever distant shore I ask no higher or greater privilege than to minister to it"**

**Inscription on Mary's statue (opposite the Houses of Parliament in the grounds of St Thomas' Hospital).**

**Mary Seacole's reputation after the Crimean War (1853-1856) rivalled Florence Nightingale's.** A born healer and a woman of driving energy, she had to overcome official indifference and prejudice because she was Black.

Mary Seacole was born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1805. Her father was a Scottish soldier, and her mother was a practitioner of traditional Jamaican medicine caring for invalid soldiers and their wives in her boarding house. Mary learned about medicine from her mother, soon gaining her own reputation as a 'skilful nurse and doctress'. Mary travelled widely and gained experience of treating patients with cholera and yellow fever.

Mary heard about the Crimean war and how the nursing system there had collapsed. She was not allowed there, so at the age of 50, and at her own expense she opened a store and hotel near Sevastopol and cared for wounded soldiers there and on the front line.

The war correspondent WH Russell said: 'I trust that England will not forget one who nursed her sick, who sought out her wounded to aid and succour them, and who performed the last offices for some of her illustrious dead'.

Her contribution was forgotten even in her lifetime, but learning about Mary is now part of the school curriculum.