

Young Heroes



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**Fictional accounts of the National Heroes of
Jamaica as children and young people written by
Gwyneth Harold.**

Illustrations by Taj Francis

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Marcus Garvey

Chance Never Satisfied Hope



Marcus closed the gate of his parents' yard and hustled along Market Street. The bag of marbles at the bottom of his capacious shorts pocket clicked softly, keeping time with

the pace of his jogging. On any given Saturday afternoon, boys would be gathered at the side of the printery, and if Marcus selected his challengers carefully, he could increase his cache by at least a third. He never left the outcome of anything important, like a game of marbles, to chance.

It was a typically busy afternoon in the market town of St Ann's Bay; and even more so as the harvest season was nearly over and people had money in their pockets. Two ships were at the docks as raw sugar was loaded in their holds while the crew enjoyed a few days in the town. He watched as a loader man hauled fresh fruits and vegetables from a mule-drawn dray parked at the corner with Market Street and took them into a hotel. Marcus paused to allow a drover with a small herd of goats to cross before him - rams were known to buck - and decided that he would stop and buy an othahetie apple at the cart.

A motor vehicle honked incessantly urging the goats to hurry along. The driver did not wait, but instead made a wide arc to negotiate the corner; he could not see the dray in the bend and he could not brake in time. A fender clipped a mule. It reared and kicked the motor vehicle driver in his side, causing him to completely lose control of the vehicle and crash in the wall of a doctor's office. There were ample hands to lift the driver inside for help. The mule looked all right until his driver urged the team forward and it refused to put one its back leg down and pulled its share of the weight limping along on three legs.

"I would have been at that spot a few moments later," Marcus reflected as he looked around at the damage. The crashed car, the limping mule and some wasted vegetables that slid off the cart during the melee.

He was more aware of his safety during the remainder of his walk and was alarmed that the speed of motor vehicles and their lack of agility simply made traffic more dangerous. He could only imagine what the streets of busier places like Montego Bay and Kingston were like.

Marcus had a successful afternoon of marbles and returned home with two heavy pockets. On his return trip he passed the mangled motor vehicle that had been pushed on to an open lot. Later that evening there was the report of a single gunshot; his father, who had been reading the Gleaner, mumbled that it must be the vet putting down the injured mule.

Mr Garvey settled his folded newspaper on a side table as Mrs Garvey came in to serve dinner.

Marcus took up his school slate and started to write. After Church the next day, he was still scribbling and erasing and rewriting on his slate. By afternoon he was satisfied and asked his father to read his thoughts.

After Mr Garvey read the short passage he said, "Interesting son, a real vision into the future. What do you want to do with it?"

"I want to print it and circulate it to the custos, the pastors, the magistrates, the Governor..."

"What about sending it to the Gleaner son? A letter to the Editor."

Marcus got a sheet of clean writing paper, his pen and inkwell and, in his best handwriting, wrote:

The Editor Sir,

The industrious people of St Ann's Bay are suffering from the benefits of mechanical advancement. Motor vehicles can be seen now every single day on our narrow streets, which can barely serve the needs of man and beast, and all too often, it is the reason behind awful carnage where we intended only faster and more efficient transportation.

Only yesterday, the hard labour of an honest farmer was wasted when a motor vehicle critically injured a trusty mule which suffered greatly before it was put down. That farmer may now have to incur debt to replace the mule and perhaps deprive his children, of schooling or his land of expansion for more production. That very same motor car would have killed me. Had my steps been only a few paces faster, I would have been on that spot of disaster.

Chance cannot satisfy hope in this country. We cannot rely on luck, we need to put our God-given intellect to create laws that regulate how motorised vehicles must travel on the roads. These laws should address speed, caution in going around corners and perhaps which roads must be out of bounds to them. With the power of the automobile, must come additional responsibility on the operators; and those drivers will only respond to binding laws.

Marcus was about to sign his name, but at the last moment felt shy, and instead signed it 'A Youth'. He carefully blotted the ink, folded the letter and placed it into an addressed envelope. His father would mail it at the post office while he was at school.

A week later the letter was published and it caused discussion in the marketplace and rum bars of St Ann's Bay. Later that week the Baptist pastor's topic was "The law, God's protection for the people".

Over the next month, other letters showed up on the pages of the Gleaner concerning the issue of traffic. Most were descriptive but a few were sceptical of laws restricting speed and personal freedoms. Others weighed in against those arguments making

reference to a new law in England that restricted the speed of locomotives in built up areas; and that it was only a matter of time before regulations came for motor vehicles.

Marcus read them all and only wished that he had signed his full name; but he was also sure that there would be other times and other issues on which he could express his twelve-year-old mind.