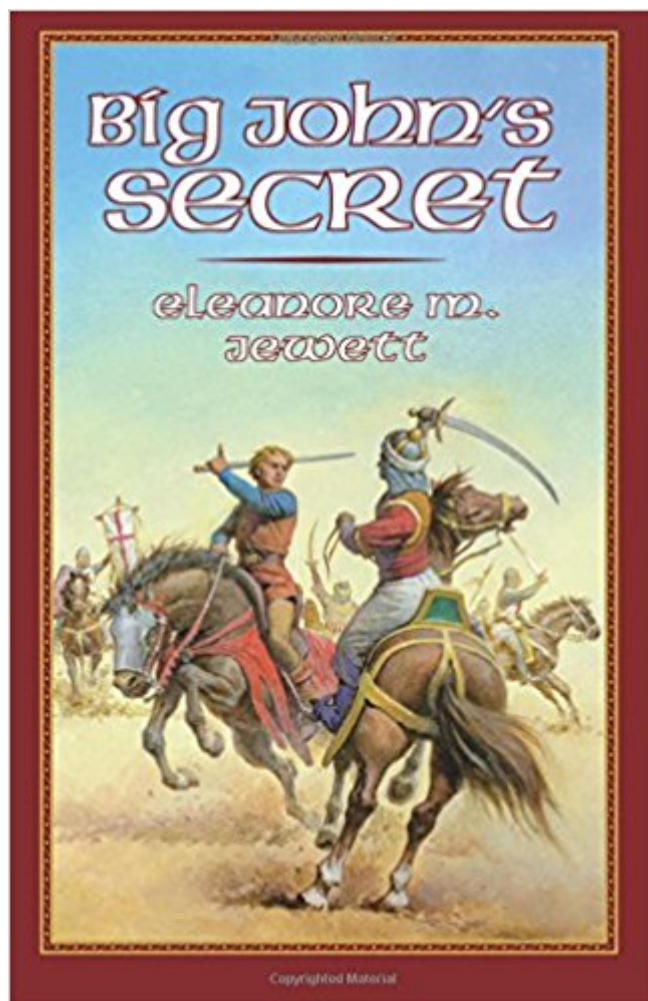


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Big John's Secret (Living History Library)



Synopsis

Mystery surrounds the young peasant boy known as Big John. Raised during the strife-filled days of the reign of King John of England, his life is one day changed when a knight says, in passing, "You remind me of someone—someone I once knew and loved." It is from "Old Marm," the herb woman, that John understands that injustice has been done his family. Though never telling him the family name lest he unwittingly betray himself, she does all she can to prepare him to one day reclaim his name and family honor. Then Old Marm dies, and John is left without a clue to his identity. In the next years John's unusual size and strength and the knowledge he has gained of letters and of the art of healing earn him a place as page to an earl organizing the 5th Crusade. In the Holy Land John searches for a father he hopes is living still. Amidst battle, capture and setbacks, John—now a squire to a Knight Hospitaller—encounters Francis of Assisi, who had come to the Holy Land just at this time to preach the Gospel to the Saracens. It is another meeting that changes the course of Big John's life. .

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Eleanore M. Jewett was born in New York City in 1890. She found it to be a somewhat lonely city for an only child, but the fact that one side of her family had been there since it was a small Dutch village made her feel like she "practically owned the place." Her solitude caused her to create imaginary friends with whom, at around the age of nine, she even formed a literary club. Since

young Eleanore was the only one who actually could put pen to paper the club died a natural and early death, but she dates her ambition to write for children from this time. When Mrs. Jewett was doing a Master's degree in comparative literature at Columbia University she became deeply interested in the medieval period, a fascination begun many years earlier after hearing a story about King Arthur. The Hidden Treasure of Glaston, a story of mystery set at Glastonbury Abbey around 1171 in the days of King Henry II of England, and Big John's Secret, were direct and satisfying results of this interest. The Hidden Treasure received a Newbery Honor in 1947. The truth and nobility which she infused into her historical novels was also something valued in her daily life. Big John's Secret, whose hero comes to have a deep interest in the art of healing, took inspiration from Mrs. Jewett's experience as wife of a committed physician. In her dedication to the book she bears witness to this. After their marriage, the Jewetts moved from New York City to a town in upstate New York where they lived with their two daughters. Eleanore Jewett died in 1967, leaving a small but solid contribution to the field of children's literature.

I read this with my homeschooled kids as part of our history lessons. The descriptions of the era were good for bringing history to life. We learned about the fifth crusade and customs of the era. It seemed to give a balanced picture. Neither the Christians nor the Muslims were shown to be complete saints or villains. We really enjoyed seeing Saint Francis of Assisi there. It was nice that the author explained which parts were fiction and which were based on fact.

My nine year old is studying the Middle Ages and this has been one of his favorite books of historical fiction to read. I read parts of it aloud when I could just because I enjoyed it so much as well! Written in a way that keeps you wanting to come back for more!

My son enjoyed reading this book, it was a birthday gift.

Good historical fiction for middle school level.

Purchased this book for my son to read in his book club. He liked it so much that I decided to read it myself so I could spend some time with him discussing the book. I truly enjoyed this book; and I love reading books on my Kindle!!

Ok story,

"Big John" is a 12-year-old boy living as a serf in 13th century England, but with a mysterious past understood only by Old Marm, who teaches him lessons and courtly behavior secretly when no one is around. As his past becomes clearer to him, he sets out with knights on the 5th Crusade as a squire - but largely in hopes of finding his lost father. Amidst various adventures and misfortunes, John's path crosses with none other than St. Francis of Assisi and intertwined with a true piece of history involving a visit to the fierce ruler of the Saracens. An interesting and engaging story for middle-school children - especially 5th to 8th grade. It offers a surprisingly balanced view of the Crusades as well as beautiful themes of faithfulness and forgiveness.

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