

In the 18th and 19th centuries Englishmen who came to Jamaica often contracted tropical diseases like yellow fever, dysentery and cholera. They lacked the resistance to such diseases that persons born in tropical climates had. When they became ill their English friends and even English doctors did not know what to do as the diseases were strange to them. But in Jamaica there were some women who had learned from experience how to care for persons who caught such diseases. Usually they kept boarding houses and nursed these boarders who were ill.

British soldiers stationed at Up-Park Camp, Fort Charles and other places, and the crews of British warships learnt of these lodging houses. Whenever they became ill they would board in them until they were nursed back to health. One such lodging house in Port Royal was owned by a coloured woman named Couba Cornwallis. In 1780 she nursed the great admiral, Lord Nelson back to health from a bout ^{with} dysentery. Another coloured nurse owned Blundell Hall on East Street.

If you walked down East Street in 1815 you would see a number of large two-storey wooden houses. One of them, Date Tree Hall stood on the site of the present buildings of the Institute of Jamaica. Below it was Blundell Hall, and in the hallway of that lodging house you might see a girl of ten playing with her doll. She pretended that it had ^{yellow fever} ~~dysentery~~, a disease which was common at that time. She held a bottle of coloured water to the doll's mouth, pretending to give it a dose of medicine.

Her attention was drawn away from the doll by a puppy which ran up to her. He wagged his tail vigorously and looked at her expectantly. Perhaps he hoped to be petted or fed. She rested her doll on the floor and covered it up to the neck with a sheet. At first she began to pat the puppy but soon she decided that he was another patient. ~~How~~ "Poor puppy", she said as she tucked him under her arm. She patted his nose with her free hand. "You have dysentery and need to take your medicine". She forced open the puppy's mouth with one hand, gripped the bottle with the other and started to try to pour the coloured water down its throat.

The puppy wriggled with all its might. When it found that it could not escape it squealed and squealed and squealed. ^{Its} calls of distress caused Mary's mother to leave her work and run into the hallway. "Mary", she called, "what are you doing to that puppy?" "He has dysentery, mama, and I am trying to give him his medicine", the little girl replied. "Mary, I wish you would go back to nursing your doll. It is only made of wax and your medicine won't hurt it. A dog is different. Where did you get the puppy anyway?" "He ran in from East Street, mama," Mary answered. "But", her mother pointed out, "he is sure to be full of fleas. Take him out to the street, and then you may go and spend the rest of the day with your grand-aunt."

"I will, mama", Mary promised, "but I would like to nurse as you do. I hope that one day the people will call me 'the doctress' as they do you". She carried the pup with her, left him in the street, and walked to 57 Water Lane where her grand-aunt lived. Many years later she wrote of this period of her life: "Whatever disease was prevalent in Kingston my poor doll soon contracted it. I had many medical triumphs in later days and saved some valuable lives but few have given me more gratification than the rewarding glow of health which my fancy used to picture stealing over my patient's waxen face after long and precarious illness". She told, too, of "luckless brutes--cats and dogs around" which had "remedies forced down reluctant throats". Her next effort was to make what she called "simples and essences" for human patients. But no one would agree to

take them. Consequently she tried them out on herself.

Mary was born in 1805. Her mother had married a young Scottish officer whose name it is believed was Grant. Mary later wrote that her energy and love of camp life was inherited from her father but it might have been learned from experiences with her mother. The latter always worked strenuously at her nursing because Blundell Hall usually had many officers and their wives. Thus Mary grew up seeing numerous soldiers being nursed and becoming acquainted with them. While she was very young, whenever her mother was busy she was sent to stay with an old relative whose home was filled with grandchildren.

However, she heard many patients talk admiringly about her mother. She became imbued with a desire to nurse people back to health, and started practising on her dolls, animals and herself. She preferred that to playing with her cousins. It is not surprising then that when she was twelve she was given a chance to nurse real patients. She began to help her mother. From the guidance of her mother and through practice she came to learn much about the art of healing. She was very fortunate because in those days nursing was not a profession for which people had to study and gain certificates. Charles Dickens, the famous English novelist described a nurse in one of his books. She was an old woman who was nearly always tipsy and she chatted constantly. Generally old persons who had nothing to do were asked to sit with the sick.

From the soldiers who stayed at Blundell Hall Mary heard about the exciting adventures they had and the many parts of the world in which they had been stationed. Their stories gave her the urge to travel. She was only a young woman when she made a voyage to England to stay with relatives for a year. From then she showed a flair for business. She took with her a large quantity of West Indian products, especially pickles and was able to sell them at a nice profit. In England she came into contact with racial prejudice when boys in London streets teased her and a friend about their brown complexions. This did not make her dislike England. Shortly after she came back to Jamaica she returned there to spend two years.

When she was returning on that second occasion her transport was the sailing ship, Velusia. In mid-voyage she was surprised to hear cries of "Fire! Fire!" A fire had broken out on the ship. While the crew worked to put it out Mary thought how to preserve her life. She ran to the cook and made a bargain with him. If the ship began to sink he was to bind her to a hen coop with ropes. Fortunately the fire was put out, and she did not have to find out how helpful one of the cook's hen coops would be in the water. When the ship stopped at New Providence Island in the Bahamas she collected a large number of beautiful shells which she sold when she reached Kingston. This ability to make money by trade was to support her later when she nursed in foreign lands, work for which she was not paid.

Once she reached home she began working at her mother's side again, nursing at Blundell Hall. There she met Edwin Horatio Seacole, a godson of Admiral Horatio Nelson. Though a sickly man he offered her his hand in marriage and she accepted it. After the wedding they resided in Black River where they ran a store. Though she nursed her husband continually he became so ill in Black River that she brought him to her mother's lodging house in Kingston. Despite her efforts he died there, and for a time she was weighed down by grief and despair.

It was not in her nature to remain so for long. Work is a good instrument for making one forget sad events. She soon resumed her nursing. But only to suffer another loss! Her mother passed away. As if this were not enough for one person to suffer fate dealt her another terrible blow. In 1843 a great fire swept

through Kingston, burning down all the houses from the east end of Harbour Street to the old Roman Catholic chapel in Duke Street (St. Aloysius School now occupies that spot). Blundell Hall was destroyed.

Mary had to rebuild it little by little. Meanwhile she earned money by nursing officers and their wives at Up-Park-Camp. Many single officers were attracted to her while she nursed them. They pressed her to marry them but she turned down the proposals. Her calling came first. Moreover, she had a sense of adventure and did not want to be tied down. Realising ~~how~~ ^{how much} more she needed to learn in Medicine she tried to learn as much as possible from the military surgeons at Up-Park-Camp.

From time to time diseases were brought to Jamaica by sick passengers on ships. In this way a cholera outbreak took place in 1850. In some areas like the district around Passage Fort and Fort Henderson large numbers of people died in the epidemic. Mary worked very hard to save lives from this highly fatal disease and obtained hints from doctors as to how to fight it.

She noted that victims of cholera often vomited until they were exhausted. Their muscles became cramped and they died quickly unless they were skilfully treated. She developed a mixture of herbs which relieved the pains. She also observed that the disease was most widespread in areas where sanitation was poor. The main reason that we are free from cholera now is that since Mary's time science has been able to demonstrate that microscopic organisms called germs cause such diseases. We know that the cholera germ is imbibed thorough food and drink. By ensuring that drinking water is pure and that people know the value of cooking food--boiling water kills germs--our community has prevented outbreaks of the disease in recent times.

When Mary's mother died she lost the only close relative she had living in Jamaica. Therefore, when her brother invited her to join him in Panama she agreed. By that time the cholera epidemic here had abated. As she had done when she was going to England she gathered together a lot of commodities that she might sell. For weeks before she left her home was the scene of tailors cutting cloth, and making rough coats, shirts and trousers. In the kitchen cooks made preserves, guava jelly and other delicacies. These were in the pile of baggage which she took to Panama.

Her brother ran a boarding house in Cruces called the "Independent Hotel". When she reached there she found it a convenient place to sell her goods. At that time Americans living on the eastern seaboard and in the south of their country preferred to reach California by sailing to Panama, crossing overland, and taking ships sailing northwards. If they tried to cross the broad Prairies of their land they were attacked by the Indians who sought to prevent settlement there because it was their hunting ground. When Mary reached Cruces a railway line was being laid down so that travellers across the isthmus would be transported by rail instead of by pack mules. The native Spanish speaking people, West Indians and Americans were building the railway line.

Soon after Mary arrived in Cruces cholera broke out there. One of its first victims was a Spaniard who died. Since the inhabitants had never seen its effects they assumed that the cramps the man suffered from were caused by poison. And since he had last been seen with Mary's brother they suggested that the latter had done the poisoning. Mary looked at the body. "No," she said, "it is the cholera he had. Look at his face. See how his eyes are sunken, his skin discoloured and shrivelled. See how his limbs are cramped". They weren't convinced. "That is all talk", they claimed. Mary looked steadily at them. Then she spoke with the confidence of one who is certain. "It is the cholera and it never strikes only

one person. You will see more like him. Adios!"

She was right. Soon another man contracted the cholera. She went to him and offered to nurse him. He agreed. She used mustard emetics to make him throw up whatever was in his stomach. Then she gave him calomel, first in large doses and later in small doses. She rubbed him with warm fomentations and placed mustard plasters on his stomach and his back. Can you see the policy behind her methods? She cleaned out the alimentary canal of her patients and kept it clean; and she kept them warm to increase the circulation of the blood. Her treatment triumphed over the illness and her patient recovered. As news of her success spread others who contracted cholera turned to her for nursing.

Most of the natives of Cruces didn't know what to do at first. They were frightened when so many became so painfully ill and died. They made their priests ~~drag~~ drag the dust covered statues of saints from the churches into the street. Then they knelt and prayed passionately and tearfully to the saints for protection. Mary remarked that in the meantime their homes and the streets were filled with dirt and rotting ^{at} garbage. She remembered that there was a connection between the disease and lack of cleanliness.

A doctor was sent from Panama City to help to cure patients struck down by cholera but he had little experience of the disease. As the people came to see that Mrs. Seacole had more skill than he more of them turned to her. Some paid handsomely for her nursing. But she was sorry for all who had the disease. When the poor ~~came~~ ^{called} on her she nursed them too though her only payment would be their gratitude.

She became more expert with the plentiful nursing. She knew the first signs--giddiness, diarrhoea, sunken eyes and a distressed look. She learnt that when the face of the patient became indigo and he was doubled up because his limbs were so painfully cramped he was too far gone to be saved. Finally she courageously tried to take the town in hand. Through pouring rain and the pools it made she waded from door to door in the poorer section of the town. She ordered the people to open their doors and windows. She tended those who had cholera in its early stages, left the hopeless and moved on.

When the epidemic was at its height the town's authorities used convicts to bury the dead. Mary worked desperately. Once when she failed to save the life of a baby she did a post mortem on the body. She hoped that would provide her with knowledge of the source of the disease. All the people came to know her as she waded through the fields and streets in tall, thick boots nursing persons of every nationality. When she conquered the disease she did not cease tending the patients. No. They had a period of careful strengthening with medicines and food so that they would not have relapses. They called her the yellow woman from Jamaica with the cholera medicine.

In her zeal to save lives she sometimes slept only two hours per day. It is not surprising then that she finally became ill with the cholera too. The many friends she had made rallied to her side. They would stop at her house and ask through her bedroom window: "Air you better, Aunty Seacole, now? Isn't there a something we can do for you, ma'an"? They offered her food and aid of every kind. Fortunately for her the attack was a mild one. She followed the course she had set so many patients and passed through a period of careful strengthening till she was hale and hearty again.

Once she was well again it was natural for those whom she had nursed to express their appreciation of her work in public. She accepted this but in one case found the speaker's praise too heavily mixed with prejudice for her liking. He was a thin, sallow American. In a toast to her he said: "So, I say, God

bless the best yaller woman he ever made--^{yellow}, from Jamaica, gentlemen--^{two}, from the Isle of Springs. Well, gentlemen, I expect there are only ^{two} things we're vexed for--; and the first is, that she ain't one of us--a citizen of the great United States--; and the other thing is, gentlemen--^{yellow}, that Providence made her a yaller woman. I calculate, gentlemen, you're all as vexed as I am, that she's not wholly white--^{do}, but I du reckon, on your rejoicing with me that she's so many shades removed from being entirely black; and I guess, if we could bleach her by any means we would--^{do}, and thus make her as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be--. Gentlemen, I give you Aunty Seacole!"

In her reply Mrs. Seacole said: "But I must say that I don't altogether appreciate your friend's kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been dark as any nigger's I should have been just as happy and as useful and as much respected by those whose respect I value. And, as to his offer of bleaching me, I should, even if it were practicable, decline it without any thanks". Mary possessed a deep wisdom about men and affairs and she was satisfied with the colour God gave her.

She also heartily approved of the bids slaves made for freedom. It must be explained that Panama was then part of New Granada--now Colombia. There, slaves had been freed from early in the 19th century when Bolivar led revolts to gain independence for New Granada, Venezuela and other countries. However, slavery existed in the United States at the time Mary was in Cruces and Americans often carried their slaves with them. In Cruces if slaves passing through escaped from their owners the Alcalde (Mayor) refused to help the owners to recapture them. Mary remarked: "It was wonderful to see how freedom and equality elevated men, and the same negro who perhaps in Tennessee would have cowered like a beaten child or dog beneath an American's uplifted hand would face him boldly here and by equal courage and superior physical strength cow his old oppressor".

She also recounted with delight what happened when an American woman from New Orleans treated her slave girl very brutally. The citizens of Cruces became angry and they took the woman to the alcalde. He immediately freed the girl. Cruces was lawless as well as unhealthy. Many of the men passing through were on their way to the newly opened goldfields of California. They were adventurers who wished to become rich overnight. When they were in a foreign land in which they were not known and in which they would stay for a very short time they did whatever they could get away with.

It took all of Mary's undoubted courage to handle them. When a thief with a knife tried to rob her brother's "Independent Hotel" she outfaced him. Since she would not give way to his wishes he withdrew. However, she became tired of dealing with so many lawless persons. She urged her brother to give up his hotel and return to Kingston. Since he was reluctant to do so she finally left by herself.

When Mary reached Kingston she found that an outbreak of yellow fever had occurred. In her day it was not known that that fever was carried by the Aedes Aegypti mosquito. Therefore swamps were not drained or filled in, and efforts were not made to eradicate the mosquito. The disease became widespread--what we call an epidemic. It hit hardest persons newly arrived from Europe. Their blood lacked the antibodies to resist it. If they survived a bout with the disease they generally had much resistance afterwards.

Mary Seacole nursed some of the soldiers who contracted yellow fever at Blundell Hall. In addition she organised a team of nurses to tend others at Up-Park Camp. Soon the soldiers were calling her "mummy" as they heard Jamaican

children call their mothers. As soon as the epidemic ceased she took ship again for Panama in order to wind up her business affairs there. When she was with her brother again she felt tempted to remain. She opened a store but she found the thieves as plentiful as before. After about three months she heard that the Crimean War had broken out and that regiments of soldiers she knew had been sent to the Crimea. She decided to nurse in that war, little knowing that her decision would help to open a new chapter in the history of nursing.

Later she wrote: "I am not ashamed to confess--for the gratification is, after all, a selfish one--that I love to be of service to those who need a woman's help. And wherever the need arises--on whatever distant shore--I ask no higher or greater privilege than to minister to it."

In previous wars the British and other military authorities had made few arrangements for the treatment of wounded soldiers. They lay on the battlefield in agony if they could not drag themselves off. If their regiments were victorious and pursued the enemy they waited for long to be taken behind the lines for treatment. If their regiments were defeated and fled they had the same problem. Behind the lines there were only a few doctors to tend them. But hundreds, even thousands were wounded in battle. When wounds remained untreated for a long time gangrene set in. If it was allowed to poison the heart the soldier died. Therefore legs and arms were amputated by any group of men handy, with or without a doctor's guidance. Behind the lines too men caught fevers and other diseases and died from neglect. This situation was taken for granted because it had existed for many centuries.

However, there were two women who were determined to bring the compassion and tenderness of women's nursing to the male world of the battlefield. One was in London and the other one was in Cruces when the Crimean War broke out. Florence Nightingale had studied nursing at a convent hospital in Germany. Mary Seacole had learnt nursing from her mother and from various doctors since her childhood. Both approached the British war office and both were turned down. Mary found that the authorities there ~~rejected~~^{rejected} her offer with much good-natured laughter.

The news from the battlefield in the winter of 1854 was bad. Men were dying untended in hospitals because the staffs were too small. Florence Nightingale was born the daughter of well-to-do parents. They managed to influence men in high quarters who gave her permission to set up a hospital at Scutari. Mary Seacole had no influential friends in London. When she thought of joining Florence Nightingale's band of nurses they had already left for the Crimea. Mary shed tears at the thought of so much suffering taking place while she was unable to relieve it.

Then she had an idea. With her experience at running lodging houses and stores she could earn the money to stay in the Crimea while she nursed. She teamed up with Mr. Day, a distant cousin to open a hotel and store there. They called themselves the firm of Seacole and Day. Then Mary had cards printed and posted to the British army in the Crimea. They stated that Mrs. Mary Seacole (late of Kingston, Jamaica) announced to her former kind friends and to the officers in general that she would be leaving London for the Crimea in the screw-ship "Hollander", and that on arriving at Balaclava she would establish a mess-table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers.

Mary Seacole and Mr. Day boarded the screw-ship, "Hollander" in January, 1855. As she was a good sailor she enjoyed the voyage. But her mind was on nursing. Therefore, when the "Hollander" paused at Malta in the Mediterranean she went ashore and procured a letter of introduction to Florence Nightingale. When

her ship reached Scutari she was delighted to see many friends and officers she knew. They gathered around her with welcoming words. She noticed that some were wounded. Though afraid of giving offence to the medical staff there she couldn't resist the temptation to redo bandages bandages that had slipped and adjust overly tight ones. At first the doctor was alarmed at a stranger doing such things. However, when he watched her work he saw that she was competent and thanked her.

Mary wondered at the large numbers of men who needed attention at Scutari. If the scene was so horrible there, she reasoned, what must it be like at the battlefront? She decided then to set up her hotel about three or four miles nearer to the battlefield. There she would be even more useful to those who were wounded. Consequently, although she met Florence Nightingale at Scutari she stayed there only overnight and set out for Balaclava the next morning.

She had hardly reached Balaclava when she found work to do. A large group of wounded soldiers had just arrived on the backs of mules and in ambulances. Mary helped to transfer them from the mules and ambulances to the transports which would carry them to the hospitals at Scutari and Buyukdere. And while those vehicles were being readied to leave she tended the men. The doctors were happy for her aid. While she was there she thoughtfully made sponge cakes and lemonade for the wounded since it reminded them of home.

Now began hardships and dangers which would test her perseverance and courage to the utmost. For six weeks she slept aboard the Medora in Balaclava harbour. It was an ammunition ship and her bed was over numerous barrels of gunpowder and tons of cartridges. If by accident the gunpowder were ignited she and the ship's crew would be blown to bits. Every evening at 8.00 o'clock the ship's captain made the rounds to see that everyone put out their lights.

Each day she clambered down the steep sides of the ship and took a boat to shore where she had goods piled up. There she stayed exposed to the wind and rain with only a rough tarpaulin overhead to protect her while she sold her stores.

At the same time she had to arrange for goods brought from England to be taken ashore. She had to accompany the boatmen. Otherwise they would disappear with her goods. Even when she was in the boat they would play tricks. They would tip the boat so as to cause a parcel to fall in the water and pretend not to understand her calls for them to stop--they were Maltese and Greeks. At the same time Mary would see a boat dash from among the ships in the harbour to pick up the goods she had lost. She had problems with thieves on land as well. They stole some 20 horses, 4 mules, 50 goats, many sheep, pigs and poultry. Such burdens would have broken the will of many a person but Mary persevered. Her only satisfaction at that time was that many of the thieves died in suspicious deaths.

She had fearful and pleasant moments. One night another ammunition ship in the harbour caught fire. She and the crew of the Medora watched the fire anxiously until it was put out, and they slept very uneasily the rest of the night. ^{But even} when she had only her tarpaulin shelter news of her skill at medicine became known to soldiers. They often came to her for treatment.

Mrs. Seacole chose a site between Balaclava and Radikoi for her hotel. It was conveniently near a railway station and a stream, and the British authorities gave her permission to erect buildings there. Every day she went there to supervise the building of the hotel. Sometimes she went on horseback, sometimes on carts, and at other times on railway wagons which carried ammunition. She found it difficult to obtain skilled carpenters. Fortunately, she became ac-

acquainted with two British sailors who agreed to help her to build it. She called them "Big Chips" and "Little Chips". But she needed more help. It came from a Turkish pacha with whom she struck up a friendship. He liked to visit her store, to learn English phrases and to practise them in conversation. When he discovered that she needed workers he provided two carpenters with an officer to supervise them. Mary dubbed the officer "Captain Ali Baba".

When the winter was over she looked forward to an easier time on Spring Hill as she called the region where she had her store. But spring brought troubles. The heavy rains made a break in a dam above Spring Hill and the stream which was near Mary's store became a river in spate. The torrent began to carry away some of her stock. When she saw a box in which she kept mementos being washed away she rushed into the water to grab it. The torrent swept her off her feet and rolled her over and over. But she was a strong woman, strong enough to regain her feet and struggle to the bank of the river.

Help came to her in this new distress. When the British soldiers heard that the rains and flood had damaged her building and stock they sent to buy most of her goods. Thus she was provided with the money to repair her building and purchase new stock. The pacha, too patronised her store every day. He was so friendly that the British soldiers who were her customers thought he was courting her. But she knew better; in a conversation he had revealed that he had three wives at home.

While the pacha was stationed in her area with his troops Mary had very little trouble with thieves, and he sometimes brought his regimental band to play at Spring Hill. This pleasant period ended when he and his troops were transferred to another area. He gave Mrs. Seacole and Mr. Day portions of the quarters in which his troops had resided. These Mary used to erect what she called the "British Hotel". It was a two-storeyed building. Floating above it on a mast was the Union Jack. Upstairs there was a storehouse while downstairs contained the store with its closets, shelves and counters. Outside it were two wooden buildings which held the apartments of Mrs. Seacole and Mr. Day as well as a canteen. A portion of the yard was fenced in to keep livestock.

It was very difficult to run a canteen in a war zone since that area was not under the control of a government and a police force. The British Hotel was beset by thieves, both human and animal. Soldiers shoplifted goods while they made purchases, and the Crimean rats ate or defiled anything they could get at. So hungry were they that they even attacked one of Mary's helpers while he slept. He was so angry that he gave up the job. But the professional thieves of the human variety caused her her greatest losses. In one night they stole 40 goats and seven sheep. On another occasion they took nearly all her horses. With each loss she was heartbroken but she never remained so for long. Resilient by nature, she was soon her vigorous self again.

One problem every army has is how to provide regular supplies of food for its members. Mary's hotel often aided the British army when its supply lines did not function well. When enough food did not reach the heights above her store which the British occupied the officers would leave their servants on guard. They would come on their horses to the British Hotel, eat there and take back for others as much food as they could carry. Mary sold them roast chicken, boiled ham and tongue, beef, mutton, coffee, milk, sugar, butter and other food as well as medicines and items like handkerchiefs.

Because of a shortage of helpers she had to rise before daybreak. From about seven o'clock to nine o'clock in the morning her hotel was a restaurant. After that it became a private hospital as the sick came to her. She wrote: "They came

with every variety of suffering and disease; the cases I most disliked were the frostbitten fingers and feet in the winter". As soon as her tasks were finished there she went to the Land Transport hospital which was opposite her "British Hotel". It had been erected shortly after her own buildings were complete. As it was near the battlefront it was usually overflowing with casualties. She would nurse as many soldiers as she could. While she did so they would give her news of events on the battlefield.

As a result of all this work Mary's skill soon became so well known that anyone hurt in the vicinity of her hotel was automatically taken to her first. If the injury was very serious he would then be carried to the Land Transport hospital. Sometimes when officers were ill at the front their friends would invite her to go there to nurse them. The wounded and the sick were like a magnet to Mary. Finally she ceased to wait to be invited to the front; she voluntarily went there and nursed whoever needed care.

When her nursing was over at about noon she returned to the British hotel to entertain her many customers. They came for lunch or in the late afternoons and early evenings for dinner. She made it a rule to close at 8.00 p.m. and she was strict about behaviour in her hotel. Her rules also forbade drunkenness and gambling with cards and dice. A friendly officer agreed to act as provost-marshal and help to maintain discipline. However, the customers understood Mrs. Seacole's rules so well that he rarely had to exercise his authority. Mary also closed her hotel on Sundays. The soldiers were disgusted at this practice but after the war when she looked back on events in the Crimea she was glad of it. She felt then that the rest she had every seven days had enabled her to remain in good health throughout the war.

One morning her friend, Omar Pacha was passing Spring Hill with his troops and he paused at her hotel. He told her he was bound for the battlefield. So excited did she become at the thought of seeing a battle that she mounted her horse and accompanied him. From a point on a hill she watched the English and French cavalry, and the Turkish infantry spread out below her on the plain. First they reconnoitred and then they attacked. She watched the puffs of smoke from the guns firing from each side. She found that first experience of witnessing a battle very thrilling. She decided to go again.

On the next occasion she packed a large shoulder bag with lint, bandages and medicines, and stationed herself on Cathcart's Hill. Soon after the battle began she busied herself nursing the wounded. Fresh wounds cleansed and bandaged would not become septic and cause loss of a limb or even a life. When bleeding was checked early the wounded did not become weak or die through loss of blood. In all cases proper nursing reduced pain. And Mary nursed all--the British, their Allies and their prisoners. When she returned to her hotel she had a stretcher laid ~~down~~ in front of it. Anytime a wounded man returning from the front was weary from walking or from loss of blood he could be laid on the stretcher. She would nurse him until he could continue his walk to the hospital. She treated many there.

When there was a lull in the siege of Sebastopol these serving had time to visit various hospitals. Florence Nightingale went to Balaklava to supervise the hospitals there. The Duke of Newcastle visited them and so did Mary Seacole.

During that period a famous French cook named Alexis Seyer also visited Balaklava. He liked to come over to Spring Hill to talk with Mary. She challenged him to a contest in cooking--she felt she could outdo him with her West Indian dishes--but he refused. The reason he gave was that if he defeated her he

would lose his reputation for gallantry to women: Her comment on this in her book was: "What nonsense to talk like that when I was doing the work of half-a-dozen men". Yet she liked the good-natured Frenchman.

One stormy night a Sardinian regiment marching to the battlefield lost its way. They came upon the British Hotel, knocked until Mary woke up and asked her to put them up. She and her staff found room for the officers while the men pitched tents in her yard. She soon found that some members of the regiment were men she had nursed before.

While preparations were being made to bombard Sebastopol there was less fighting than usual. Visitors from many parts of the world came to look at the war zone. Many resided at the British Hotel. Since the soldiers had a respite they organised races, dog hunts, cricket matches and other sports, all ending with attendance at the British Hotel for entertainment. They held dinner parties there, too and Mary thoroughly enjoyed the fun. The calls on her nursing skills were less too. However, the long range guns of the Russians never ceased firing and at times there were skirmishes in the trenches. Now and then Mary would be saddened to hear that some officer she knew had been killed.

Since the Russian long range guns managed to fire shots into the British camps beyond the battlefield she grew used to danger. She wrote: "Once when I was riding through the camp of the Rifles, a round shot came plunging toward me, and before I or the horse had time to be much frightened, the ugly fellow buried itself in the earth, with a heavy thud, a little in front of us". She was undaunted by this event. When rumours in the British camp stated that an attack on Sebastopol was about to be launched she checked for herself. She wrapped up herself to keep out the cold and walked the $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to Cathcart's Hill in the dark. She stayed there until past midnight when she saw many regiments marching down to the trenches. Then being certain that there would be action in the morning she hurried back.

It was 18th June, 1855. She and her helpers made sandwiches and packed up ~~some~~ chicken, tongue, ham, wines and spirits. Then she filled her large shoulder bag with her equipment for nursing. Early in the morning she loaded up two mules with the food and called her steadiest lad to guide them. Then with her bag slung over her shoulder she mounted her horse and rode to her post on Cathcart's Hill. Sentries stopped her several times but there was always some soldier nearby who knew her. When the others were told who she was they would cheer her as she went on. The hill was crowded with non-combatants and she left the mules there under the supervision of the lad.

Mary ran onto the battlefield laden with provisions which she supplied to officers waiting for a signal to attack. Then she helped the wounded that were there. She went on to a makeshift hospital near the scene of action. There she spent much time aiding the doctors with the growing number of wounded. On the way there shells were dropping all around her. When they whizzed close soldiers would shout, "Lie down, mother, lie down". She would throw herself on the ground and remain prone until the soldiers called laughingly that the danger was past. More thoughtful ones would go and help her up. From field to hospital and back to the field she went. Wherever she found a wounded man she tended him. Sometimes officers ordered her to turn back but when she showed them her bandages and medicines they let her continue. Her reward in all this was the grateful smiles and the thanks of those she treated.

It was during this action that she received her only wound of the campaign. When she threw herself on the ground to escape a shell she dislocated ~~her~~

thumb. The soldiers nearby bandaged it tightly but it also needed some adjustment because it never again resumed its proper shape. Even then, once it was bandaged Mary continued nursing as if nothing had happened. When she did return to Cathcart's Hill the lad and her mules were missing. She had to ride three miles to find him, and then she worked her way round to the hottest part of the battle. There she crept to where some wounded men lay to give them some refreshment. Only when it was growing late did she return to Spring Hill. On the following day some Irish soldiers showed their gratitude to her by bringing her two simple gifts they had found--a Russian dress and a pigeon.

She was still excited about the battle when ~~the~~ news ~~reached~~ ^{reached} her that two officers she knew had been killed. On the following day she returned to the battlefield to attend the burial of an officer whose wife she had delivered of child in Jamaica. A temporary armistice was declared. It seemed then that life would be easier but her old enemy, cholera broke out in the camps. It killed more of her friends. Those engaged in war learn not to mourn for long. The soldiers who attended the British Hotel had much fun and laughter while they awaited the next assault which might end their lives. Mary shared their high spirits. By that time the area around Spring Hill had more stores and was under regulations and police control. With this protection food was plentiful.

In summer the Crimea suffered from a ~~plague~~ ^{large} plague of ~~large~~ ^{large} which bit every one and made them uncomfortable. They were just one other burden for Mary. Soon her attention was drawn from them by rumours that many reinforcements were being taken to the battlefield. That indicated a major assault. At the sound of guns she rode to the position from which she usually witnessed the fighting. She watched until one side advanced and gained ground. Then she descended to the area where fighting had ceased. It was strewn with dead and wounded men. She wrote: "The ground was thickly cumbered with the wounded, some of them calm and restless, a few filling the air with their cries of pain--all wanting water, and grateful to those who administered it, and more substantial comforts". Officers rode about the field helping the wounded. Mary was the only woman on this errand of mercy. She preceded the first Red Cross Nurses to serve on battlefields by many years.

She tended the wounds not only of the French and Sardinian allies of Britain but also those of the Russians who were enemies. In one case a soldier who had been shot in the mouth was dying fast. She incautiously inserted a finger in his mouth in the hope of feeling the bullet. In his agony his teeth clamped on her finger. Only with the help of others was she able to remove it. By then it was bitten so deeply that her finger was permanently scarred. When she left the battlefield she was accompanied to Spring Hill by a Frenchman who chose to be nursed back to health there. She also arranged for a wounded colt to be taken there. She kept it as a pet and finally took it to England. By this time she was so accustomed to war that she collected mementoes of each battle. In this Battle of the Tchernaya fought on 16th August, 1855 she took from the field a Russian metal cross and a few buttons.

In the weeks that followed each side bombarded the other with terrible ferocity. During that period Mary had to sleep through the constant roar of guns. On the days she was either busy treating the wounded brought to her or she went to Cathcart's Hill to watch the bombardment. She was there when the guns were turned on Sebastopol. She saw the houses of the city ablaze and a ship on fire in the harbour. Once more by spying on troop movements she knew when another attack was due--this time with both cavalry and infantry.

On the morning of 8th September she left the British Hotel on her horse, her bag filled with medicines, bandages and refreshments. While non-combatants were prevented from entering the area of fighting the officers allowed her to pass. She stationed herself on the edge of the battlefield. Among those who stood there was W.H. Russell, the correspondent for the Times of London. His job was to make notes and drawings about each battle for his newspaper.

Mary did not remain a spectator for long. As soon as the British troops advanced she ran on to the field amid the falling shells. While she aided as many wounded men as she could she gave special attention to the 97th Regiment. It had been stationed in Jamaica and she had many friends in it. She wrote: "My poor 97th, their loss was terrible! I dressed the wound of one of its officers seriously hit in the mouth; I attended to another wounded in the throat, and bandaged the hand of a third, terribly crushed by a rifle bullet".

While she nursed the men a shell fell so near to her she thought it would take her life. She threw herself on the ground. Here is how she told it: "I was so seriously frightened that I never thought of rising from my recumbent position until the hearty laugh of those around me convinced me that the danger had passed on. Afterwards I picked up a piece of this huge shell, and brought it home with me."

So exceptional was the sight of a woman on the battlefield nursing the wounded that the Times correspondent described it for the people of England to read: "I have seen her go down, under fire, with her little store of creature comforts for our wounded men; and a more tender or skilful hand about a wound or broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons. I saw her at the assault on the Redan, at the Tchernaya, at the fall of Sebastopol, not with plunder, good old scull! But with wine, bandages, and food for the wounded or the prisoners."

That evening Mary Seacole remained on Cathcart's Hill watching the burning buildings of Sebastopol until the night's cold forced her to leave. Unknown to the British the Russians departed from the burning city leaving only their dead and wounded. Mary had been betting her friends that she would be the first woman to take refreshments into Sebastopol. Therefore, when she received news that the British had found it deserted she began to prepare to go there. Since her mules were too tired from the previous day's work she borrowed others. These she loaded with food, drink and medicines. She rode towards Sebastopol. But the sentries stopped her. They had strict orders not to let anyone pass. Would she win her bet? She went to General Garrett and he gave her a pass. So she did keep her word. When she entered the city it was still blazing furiously. And there was danger from falling shells. At intervals she heard explosions. The Russians who had left had started to bombard it.

Mary almost had a bad time when a mischievous American sailor suggested to some French soldiers that she was a Russian spy. They arrested her while she shouted for Mr. Day and swung a heavy bell that hung from her saddle as a weapon. Luckily her nursing came to her aid. The French officer whom she had nursed at Spring Hill saw them and ordered them to release her. She immediately flew at the mischievous sailor and beat him with her bell. The French soldier apologised to her and she apologised to the one whom she had given a lump (cocca) on the head with her bell.

When Mary returned to Sebastopol ^{at the} ~~the~~ ^{morning} she came upon the Russian hospital. There were thousands of dead and dying men. It was the most terrible sight she had ever seen. Such was the care of soldiers in those days. She and

Florence Nightingale were opening a new era in the treatment of soldiers--one on the battlefield, the other in the army hospital. And the British nation was made aware of this through newspaper reports of the performances of these two women. Punch magazine, then very popular in England published this verse about Mary Seacole: "The sick and sorry can tell the story
Of her nursing and dosing deeds
Regimental M.D. never worked as she
In helping sick men's needs".

With the retreat of the Russians the British soldiers were able to relax with some recreation. Mary's hotel became the centre to which they went after cricket matches, for baskets of refreshments to take on picnics, and for dinner parties. Then to her surprise an armistice was agreed on early in 1856. She and Mr. Day had just received a large shipment of goods, mules and horses. How could they sell them at a time when everyone was preparing to leave the Crimea? They had to take whatever they could get for them.

The bright side of the coin was the large number of soldiers of all ranks who came to thank Mary before they left or wrote her letters from other points of the Crimea. She did one last service for her friends killed in the war. She visited their graves, took some little items from each--pebbles, wild flowers, tufts of grass--and posted them to their relatives. A few days before she left the Crimea for good she paid one last visit to Cathcart's Hill. Without soldiers fighting and guns roaring it was a peaceful scene. Even the trenches had fallen in. Soon the traces of war would disappear.

At this time the Adjutant-General of the British army gave her a testimonial. In it he stated that she had frequently exerted herself "in the most praiseworthy manner in attending wounded men even in positions of great danger."

Though Mrs. Seacole and Mr. Day were among the last to leave they still had some stock left. At the end they had to give it away. They sailed to England where they tried to regain their wealth by setting up a canteen at Aldershot, a large army camp. They were unsuccessful. They decided to dissolve the firm of Seacole and Day. Mr. Day went to Australia while Mary remained penniless in England wondering how she would fare.

However, the soldiers had not forgotten her. When the Guards arranged a dinner at Surrey Gardens they invited her as their guest. After the dinner the soldiers chaired her around the Gardens. A committee headed by the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in the Crimea, Lord Hokeby, the Dukes of Wellington and Newcastle, and many other famous Englishmen organised a four day music festival in the Surrey Gardens, and presented the proceeds to her.

Although not much is known of the rest of Mary's life we can assume that she invested these proceeds well. We know that she wrote the story of her life; and that takes time. Most of the extracts in this biography were taken from her book. We know that she visited Jamaica in 1857 and that she kept in close touch with friends she made in the Crimea. In her will she left legacies to some of them and their children when she died in 1881. On her passing there were many glowing tributes to her in the British newspapers.

Her memory was kept alive in Jamaica because the Institute acquired a bust of her and everyone who visited the museum saw it. It was sculpted by Count Gleichen, a well known sculptor of the 19th century, and a nephew of Queen Victoria. When national spirit was high in Jamaica in the late 1950's our people thought of perpetuating the memory of great men and women. A women's hall at the University of the West Indies was named after Mary Seacole. So was the headquarters of the nurses' association built at Arnold Road. Recently, a ward at

The Institute also has the two medals she was awarded for service in

Kingston Public Hospital was named after Mary.

In Britain, however, her name was almost completely forgotten. Then in the early 1970's it was brought to light by an accident. Someone bought an old copy of Mary's autobiography for a few pence at a second-hand bookshop. He gave it to Miss Elise Gordon, the secretary of the British Commonwealth War Memorial Fund. Someone had written a copy of Mary Seacole's will at the back of the book and given what proved to be a clue to the site of Mary's grave. Elise Gordon did some research and traced the grave. It was in St. Mary's Catholic Cemetery in north-west London.

The British Commonwealth War Memorial Fund organisation ^{got together with} the Lignum Vitae Club whose members are Jamaican women residing in London. They had the bush which had covered Mary's tomb cleared away. The headstone was cracked and unclean. They had a new one made, an exact replica of the old one with the lettering in blue and gold. A reconsecration service was held in the chapel of the cemetery. It was attended by Jamaica's High Commissioner to Britain, representatives of the Jamaica Nurses Association as well as members of the two other organisations mentioned. After the memorial mass the High Commissioner laid a wreath beneath the new headstone. The Jamaica Nurses Association has undertaken the upkeep of the tomb.

The urge to tend the sick and to gain satisfaction from seeing persons who are ill become well are two very valuable impulses. Mary Seacole had them and that is why she saved so many lives. Her sense of adventure, her love of independence, her hardy body and spirit gave her a preference for travel, trading and nursing rather than marriage and homemaking. She was an intelligent woman who could write well and had a variety of exciting experiences. Jamaica has a tradition of producing nurses who have served in Britain, Canada, the United States and other parts of the world. Mary Seacole was a pioneer of that tradition.

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GLOSSARY

- Yellow Fever--A tropical fever in which the patient vomits plentifully and his skin turns yellow
- dysentery--inflammation of the large intestine along with excessive bowel motions and fever
- prevalent--happening often or to many persons
- gratification--pleasure
- simple--medicinal herb essence--medicine made of oil and alcohol
- resume--to begin again
- epidemic--affecting a whole community
- microscopic--so small as only to be visible with a microscope
- diarrhoea--over much loosening of the bowels
- sallow--of a sickly yellow colour
- eradicate--destroy
- Memento--anything that reminds one of an event; souvenir.
- function--operate
- gallantry--thoughtfulness for the feelings of women
- Cavalry--soldiers on horseback
- infantry--soldiers on foot
- non-combatants--those not engaged in the fighting
- crippled--burdened
- to precede--to go before
- sentry--guard on duty
- to perpetuate--to prevent from being forgotten
- to fore--to be in any state, good or bad
- proceeds--sum of money gained from an activity

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SOURCES

- Journal Adventures of Mary Seacole in Many Lands by Mary Seacole
- "Mary Seacole's grave restored in London"--Daily Gleaner, 18th Dec. 1973
- "Mary Seacole honoured in London"--Daily Gleaner, Dec. 1973

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ILLUSTRATIONS: Map of Grinice with places named in text.

Map of places where Mary nursed.

Mary Seacole cont.

Drawing of Mary as little girl trying to give puppy medicine--dell lying on floor beside her

Drawing of Mary tramping through rain and mud in Cruces to nurse cholera patients. She wears knee length boots.

Drawing of Mary on battlefield of Crimea nursing wounded soldier..during battle..on hill in background stands Times Correspondent taking notes.

Drawing of Mary placing baby in hands of soldier..mother lies on bed in background as baby has just been delivered..Blundell Hall

Picture of Up-Park Camp in 1840, coloured lithograph by Joseph Kidd..can be taken from Historic Jamaica by Cundall

Picture of Bust and medals in Institute

Picture of Mary Seacole's tombstone--Gleaner, 18th Dec. 1973

The Institute should be asked whether they have a picture of Blundell Hall between 1800 and 1840.

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