

Among these she made some life-long friends, and it is probable that her intimate relations with officers and their families, in the capacity of nurse, at this time, encouraged her afterwards in her desire to go to the Crimea.

#### CHOLERA IN JAMAICA

During the year 1850 cholera ravaged Jamaica and Mrs. Seacole took an active part in fighting this terrible plague and gained much valuable instruction from a doctor who lodged in her house.

Her experience in Kingston was soon to prove of further use, for shortly after the cholera epidemic she left for the Isthmus of Panama to visit a brother who had settled at Cruses, and there a serious outbreak of the same scourge occurred soon after her arrival. In this desolate portion of the globe medical aid was inadequate if procurable at all. Mrs. Seacole was an indefatigable worker among the sufferers and was happily able to bring relief to many who were stricken down. At last she took the disease herself, but fortunately it was a comparatively mild attack and she recovered - to settle at Cruses temporarily as an Hotel-keeper.

Her account of the life and manners of the people, and of the general conditions obtaining, at that time, on the Isthmus is exceedingly interesting and well told.

#### YELLOW FEVER IN JAMAICA

Mrs. Seacole returned to Jamaica and in 1853 was a chief actor in the fearful struggle with the yellow fever epidemic of that year. Invalid officers, their wives and children kept her house filled continuously and in addition to the work of attending to her own patients she was entrusted to organize the nursing of the sufferers at Up-Park-Camp.

Her affairs in Panama now called her attention to that country again and after another visit which gave her an opportunity of further reviewing the interesting, but often unpleasant traits of the people, she sailed direct for England and landed in the autumn of 1854.

Before Mrs. Seacole had left for her last visit to Panama, war had been declared against Russia. Regiments that had been stationed in Jamaica had been sent to the front, and Mrs. Seacole had entertained a strong wish to go to the theatre of the war, but had been dissuaded by her friends.

#### THE CRIMEAN WAR

Meanwhile the war had been progressing; the allied French and English troops had at first landed in European Turkey, but, finding that part of its country well defended by the Turks themselves, and having sustained great losses from cholera at Varna, had descended upon the Crimea, defeated the Russians in the battle of Alma, and laid seige to Sebastopol. The battles of Balaclava and Inkerman had resulted in victory, but the losses sustained had been severe. Now began the terrible winter of 1854. When we consider that it was estimated that of the total losses during the Crimean War only 12 percent died in battle, some idea of the unsanitary conditions and the disease prevailing can be arrived at.

The ill-administration of the Crimean War is a matter of history; the shocking provisioning of the army, and the mismanagement of the hospitals, the want of clothing, medicine, and were <sup>(etc)</sup> necessities of life, even after all these had been sent out in generous supplies from the mother country, cannot now be read of without indignation; what then must have been the feeling in England at the time, when, late in the year, details of the terrible sufferings and privations of our soldiers began to leak out at home.

Mrs. Seacole's former desire to go to the Crimea revived, and to a generous active nature like her detention became intolerable; her kind heart longed to be helping to alleviate the sufferings of her friends and once kind patrons, and others in their time of need.

The account of her repeated efforts to get the authorities to send her as a nurse to the Crimea cannot but awaken sympathy and admiration.

At length, having failed in every attempt, this brave woman decided to stake her all and go out to the Crimea, on her own account, as a sufferer, and open an hotel for officers and soldiers near Balaclava.

While in Panama she had become known to a Mr. Day, who was a superintendent of Mines at Exhibanos. She had nursed him through an illness and now, meeting him by chance in England and finding that he too was bound for Balaclava, she came to an agreement with him that they would establish an hotel and store conjointly. This was the origin of the firm of "Seacole and Day."

#### BUYS HER STOCK AND SAILS

Having invested a considerable portion of her capital in medicine, in the purchase of which she was kindly helped by a medical friend, with the remainder she got supplies of the comforts she thought would be most welcome to those having to endure illness and privation far away from home, and she sailed at the end of January for Constantinople.

#### THE VOYAGE

Her account of the voyage is charmingly told; at every stage on the journey she met friends, many of whom were men she had known in Jamaica. From a doctor at Malta she obtained a letter to Miss Florence Nightengale who had gone out in the Autumn, arriving on the eve of Inkerman, to fight her battle with disease and mismanagement which has made her name famous in English history.

From Constantinople, Mrs. Seacole crossed to Scutari and was interviewed by Miss Nightengale. She was deeply impressed by the rows and rows of sick and wounded she saw in the long wards of the hospital at Scutari, and in spite of two discouraging letters from Mr. Day, who had preceded her to Balaclava she was eager to get nearer the scene of action: for she says "her mind was filled with the thought, if it is so here, what must it be at the scene of war!" and she felt she could be of greater use, as she so well expresses it, "three or four days nearer to their pressing wants."

#### BALACLAVA

After 6 days' stay in Constantinople, getting in extra stores, she proceeded to Balaclava. Here a calamity threatened her; the ship on which her stores had arrived was ordered out of the harbour before it was possible to land them. Her partner failing in courage, Mrs. Seacole sought the grim admiral who had given the order, and in spite of much swearing from him she gained her point and the stores were rescued.

She stayed six weeks at Balaclava making necessary arrangements for the erection of her hotel. During this time she worked assiduously trying to relieve the wounded who were being transported to the hospitals at Scutari and Buyukdere. When no transports were working she kept a store under a tarpaulin on the wharf and sold provisions, and administered medicine to the sick.

#### SELECTS A SITUATION FOR HER HOTEL

The task of choosing a suitable situation for her hotel was soon accomplished; a spot which Mrs. Seacole christened "Spring Hill" was chosen two miles from Balaclava and a mile from the British headquarters. To get building materials or carpenters seemed at first an impossible task; but her energy and perseverance mastered many difficulties. Lumber, of which much was drift-wood collected in the harbour by permission of the admiral, whose approbation she had gained since her first encounter, was at last obtained and the services of two English sailors and two Turkish carpenters secured. The buildings were not fully completed, owing to the many difficulties in the way, till the following spring, but long before then the "British Hotel," for so she named it, had become a refuge of warmth and comfort where good, well-cooked food could always be had for soldiers of all rank.

A canteen for the men was among the outbuildings, and in the store officers were in and out from morning till night; they sent for help when ill and came to "Mother Seacole" in every dilemma.

STOP



## THE HOTEL A BLESSING

It was said of her store that you could get anything there, and what this must have been to men who had been without the most pressing necessities of life can be imagined. When the ill-provisioning of the army, and the want and distress, during rigorous winter weather, of the first year of the war, are considered, it is not easy to overestimate the boon the "British Hotel" must have been to those within reach of its cheery warmth.

She was a working woman, and having been refused the protection she would have had as an army nurse, she had to live by her own earnings, but those who could not afford to pay her never went away without help at her generous hands and services she rendered to the sick and wounded were unremitting.

All her spare time was spent visiting the sick and wounded and administering to those who came to her for treatment and nourishment rather than go into the hospitals.

She seems to have had considerable skill as a "doctress", as many of the officers whom she cured testified in her praise.

It took much pluck to carry on her every day life at "Spring Hill," but it was perhaps on the occasions of engagements between the enemies that Mrs. Seacole's heroism showed most; she seemed to have an inkling always when there was to be an encounter, and, carrying large bags well filled with lint, banges, needles, thread, and medicine, and accompanied by mules loaded with sandwiches and other food, wine and spirits, she would sally forth to the battle-field at dawn. Her reputation was her sure passport. She was sometimes under fire attending the wounded and taking food to the famished. With an ever-ready hand she risked her life in faithful devotion to the soldiers she loved so loyally.

## THE CLOSE OF THE WAR

Towards the end of the war her hotel was often the scene of festivity and she was proud to have such men as the Commander in Chief, the Earl of New Castle, a Prince of the Royal Family and others as guests at dinners given at "Spring Hill".

Her worth was appreciated by the highest and lowest alike, and far across the seas in the reports in the newspapers in England, the "Times" and "Punch" made her name popular, and most dear to the hearts of those who had sons, husbands, and brothers at the Crimea.

Regardless of her own gain she was at the end of the war quite without funds and on her return to England was dependant on money raised by subscription by her soldier friends and others.

It is to be hoped that she made a comfortable sum from the account of her life which she wrote on her return to England after the war.

## HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Not the least of her achievements is her clear and graphic autobiography. She possessed in no ordinary degree the gift of writing. Her descriptions both of places and scenes are forcibly written though in the simplest language, and her book not only portrays her own life and character, but throws many interesting sidelights on the history of the stirring events through which Mary Seacole lived.

The qualities of mind and heart which endeared her to the people who knew her are obvious on every page, and are those of a noble, generous nature. She had a fine sense of humour which carried her through many trying circumstances in her chequered experiences and a brave kind heart which endeared her to those who watched her useful unselfish career, and showed their appreciation by their encouragement and consideration at most trying times, and by the honour they afterwards paid her.