

WONDERFUL ADVENTURES OF MRS SEACOLE IN MANY LANDS

MARY JANE GRANT (later SEACOLE) was born in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1805 to Jamaican Scottish parents. By the age of twelve, she was assisting her 'doctress' mother to nurse British officers and their wives stationed at nearby military camps. A self-declared 'female Ulysses', Seacole travelled to London, New Providence, Haiti and Cuba before marrying Mr Seacole some time in the 1830s. Her husband did not live long, and after his death Seacole resumed her work nursing military personnel. In the early 1850s, Seacole established a 'British Hotel' in Cruces, Panama, where she catered for American gold-seekers. Reports of war in the Crimea inspired Seacole with the wish to become 'a Crimean *heroine*', and she travelled directly to England from Panama. Having encountered widespread rejection in her attempts to be recruited as one of Florence Nightingale's 'Angel Band' of military nurses, Seacole went to the Crimea in partnership with Thomas Day, a distant relative of her husband. By March 1855, they had established another British Hotel near the battlefield at Spring Hill, where Seacole catered for army personnel of all ranks and nursed the sick and the wounded.

The firm of Seacole and Day went bankrupt after the Crimean War, but a fund was quickly established to rescue Seacole from

economic hardship. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands* was published in 1857, and later that year a series of highly publicized benefits was held at the Royal Surrey Gardens. By this time, Seacole had been decorated for her services to the British army, and a second edition of *Wonderful Adventures* was published in 1858. The proceeds from book and benefits were evidently not sufficient to keep Seacole from 'want': another fundraising effort was made on her behalf in 1867, after which Seacole disappeared from public view. There are posthumous reports of her connections with the Royal family, and by the time Seacole made her will in London at the age of seventy-one she owned a considerable fortune and two properties in Kingston, Jamaica. She died in London of apoplexy at the age of seventy-six.

SARA SALIH is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Toronto. She is the editor of *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (Penguin, 2000), and has published articles on Judith Butler, Mary Prince, and 'race' in Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*. She is the author of *Judith Butler* (2002) and the editor of *The Judith Butler Reader* (2004).

Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands

Edited and with an Introduction by

SARA SALIH

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

Penguin Group (USA) Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India

Penguin Group (NZ), cnr Airborne and Rosedale Roads, Albany, Auckland 1310, New Zealand

Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 1857

Published in Penguin Classics 2005

5

Editorial matter copyright © Sara Salih, 2005

All rights reserved

The moral right of the editor has been asserted

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

EISBN: 978-0-141-90747-5

Contents

[Acknowledgements](#)

[Chronology](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Further Reading](#)

[A Note on the Text](#)

[Maps](#)

[Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands](#)

[Appendix](#)

[Notes](#)

[Glossary](#)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank librarians at the Bodleian Library, Oxford; the British Library, St Pancras; the Newspaper Library, Colindale; Cambridge University Library; the Templeman Library, University of Kent; Robarts Library, University of Toronto; the Thomas Fisher Rare Books Room, University of Toronto; and the National Library of Jamaica, Kingston. For help in tracking down documents and certificates, thanks are due to staff at the Public Records Office, Kew; the Family Records Centre, London; the Office for National Statistics, Merseyside; the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle; Wayne Modest at the National Institute of Jamaica; the Jamaica Archive, Spanish Town; the Nurses' Association of Jamaica; the Jamaica Defence Force; and the Family History Centre at Etobicoke, Ontario.

My academic debts are numerous. Hugh Small helpfully provided the reference for Florence Nightingale's letter to Sir Harry Verney; David Finkelstein corresponded with me about William Blackwood; and Nigel Hall supplied me with copious information about the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century publishing trades. Jan Marsh drew my attention to the 'Seacole' bust in the J. Paul Getty Museum; while Cornelia S. King and Marilyn Carbonell supplied information

about the first editions of *Wonderful Adventures* in the Library Company of Philadelphia and the University of Missouri at Kansas City Libraries respectively. Paul Kerr provided important information about Edwin Horatio Seacole, for which many thanks. Nadia Ellis consulted catalogues at the National Library of Jamaica, photocopied articles and sought out many useful contacts prior to my visit to Jamaica – for which many thanks.

Lynn Innes and Rod Edmond at the University of Kent provided intellectual and moral support, while Laura Barber was a patient, understanding and rigorous editor. Extra special thanks are due to Shaen Catherwood for all his work as an amanuensis at the National Library of Jamaica and for his companionship during my research trip. And, as always, Robert McGill patiently read and corrected drafts and pointed out things I would otherwise have overlooked.

Chronology

1805 Born Mary Jane Grant, Kingston, Jamaica, to Scottish father and Creole mother. She is brought up by an 'old lady'.

1807 Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.

1811 Bill making slave trading a felony.

c.1817 Helps mother to nurse officers and their wives from Up-Park Camp and Newcastle military station.

? Visits London twice as a young woman for a total of three years. Shortly afterwards travels to New Providence, Haiti and Cuba 'with a view to gain'.

1831 Slave revolts in Jamaica.

1833 Partial abolition of slavery in the colonies.

1834 Institution of 'apprenticeship' system as the first stage of emancipation.

1836 Marries Mr Seacole, identified in her will as Viscount Nelson's godson.

1838 Full emancipation instituted in all British colonies.

1844 The Seacoles move to Black River, where they establish a store. They return to Seacole's mother's house in Kingston; Mr

Seacole dies within a month. Mary Seacole's mother dies.

26 August 1843 The Great Fire in Kingston destroys Seacole's house.

? Seacole takes up work as a 'nurse and doctress' looking after invalid officers and wives from Up-Park Camp and Newcastle military station.

1850 Cholera epidemic in Jamaica. Seacole's brother, Edward, leaves Jamaica for Panama.

1851/2 Seacole follows Edward to Cruces, Panama, where he has established the Independent Hotel. Seacole falls ill from cholera after tending to the sick. Establishes the British Hotel opposite her brother's hotel.

1853 Hands over her hotel to her brother and returns to Kingston, where she remains for eight months during a yellow fever epidemic. Towards the end of the year she returns to Panama, where she opens a store at Colòn.

1854 Remains in Colòn for three months before travelling to Escribanos, one of the stations of the New Granada Gold-Mining Company. Meets Thomas Day, a distant relative of her husband and superintendent of a mine. Returns to Colòn to obtain supplies, and then goes back to Escribanos, where she remains for three months. She goes gold-prospecting on the Palmilla River.

28 March France and Britain declare war against Russia.

Seacole leaves Escribanos and travels directly to England with the intention of journeying to the Crimea, arriving in London after the Battle of the Alma (20 September 1854).

25 *October* The Battle of Balaclava and the 'Charge of the Light Brigade'.

4 *November* Florence Nightingale arrives in Constantinople from where she travels immediately to the military hospital at Scutari.

5 *November* Allied success in the Battle of the Inkermann.

14 *November* Heavy storm sweeps over the southern part of the Crimea, causing loss and hardship for French, English and Russian troops.

Winter Seacole attempts to get herself recruited as one of Nightingale's hospital nurses. After numerous rejections, she teams up with Day to establish the firm 'Seacole and Day'.

1855 *February* Seacole travels to Constantinople and on to the military hospital at Scutari, where she meets Nightingale. Having spent one night at Scutari, she crosses the Black Sea to Balaclava. She meets with Day and lets her Jamaican 'friends' know of her arrival.

March After six weeks organizing her stores and looking after the sick and wounded, Seacole moves two miles from Balaclava, where she begins building the British Hotel at a place she and Day name 'Spring Hill'.

9 *April* The Allies launch an all-out bombardment on Sevastopol, but halt their operations nine days later after sustaining great losses without strategic effect. Seacole tends to the sick at Cathcart's Hill.

May Nightingale visits hospitals at Balaclava, but falls ill with Crimean fever.

? Seacole meets the Duke of Newcastle and the famous French chef, Alexis Soyer.

6/17 June Third and fourth bombardments of Sevastopol, ending in Allied retreat. Seacole tends to the sick at the temporary hospital on Woronzoff Road.

28 June Death of Lord Raglan, Commanding General of the British Expeditionary Forces in the Crimea, exact causes unknown. Seacole sees his body and watches the funeral train.

Summer Building of the British Hotel is complete, at a cost of £800. Seacole receives officers there, and she treats men from other ranks.

16 August The Battle of Tchernaya. Russian troops attack allied lines on two fronts but incur terrible losses. Seacole tends to French, Sardinian and Russian soldiers.

September Omar Pasha leads his men to the Caucasus to relieve the fortress of Kars in Turkey. Seacole watches their departure.

8 September French and British troops once again attack the Malakhof and the Great Redan. The French take the Malakhof but the British fail to take the Redan.

12 September French and British soldiers occupy the ruins of Sevastopol.

Autumn Seacole takes part in festivities in the British camp after the fall of Sevastopol.

December Seacole and her customers celebrate Christmas in the Crimea 'after the good old "home" fashion'.

1856 29 *February* Hostilities declared ended.

14 March Formal armistice concluded on the Tchernaya.

30 March Peace treaty (Treaty of Paris) signed.

Spring Troops begin to leave the Crimea. Seacole and Day move to Balaclava where they set up a temporary store. The British Hotel is destroyed. Seacole returns to England after visiting 'yet other lands'.

5 July *The Times* reports that 'Mrs Seacole, the celebrated proprietress of the provision store in the Crimea, intends setting up a similar establishment at Aldershott [sic].'

25 October Firm of Seacole and Day declared insolvent; prosecuted as bankrupt three days later.

November Correspondence in *The Times* testifying to Seacole's services in the Crimea and urging readers to 'forward their mite to relieve her of her embarrassment'.

27 November Lord Rokeby writes to *The Times*, enclosing a letter of thanks that Seacole has sent to him. The Seacole Fund is established.

1857 9 *January* *The Times* reports an examination meeting in the bankruptcy proceedings of Seacole and Day.

31 January *The Times* reports that Seacole and Day have been granted first-class certificates of conformity in the bankruptcy

courts.

March/April Seacole writes *Wonderful Adventures*.

10 May Uprising by Indian troops in British service at Meerut, India (the so-called 'Indian Mutiny'). Disturbances quickly spread throughout North India.

25 July *The Illustrated London News* publishes a review of *Wonderful Adventures*.

27 July *The Times* advertises the first of a series of concerts for Seacole's benefit to take place at the Royal Surrey Gardens in London that evening. A report published the next day gives a detailed account of the entertainments. The reporter notes Seacole's intention to set out for India immediately.

30 July *The Times* reports on another concert at the Royal Surrey Gardens where Seacole made an appearance.

1858 Second edition of *Wonderful Adventures*.

1865 *October* Protests against post-emancipation inequities in Jamaica led by Paul Bogle and George William Gordon, ending in horrific reprisals by British troops under the orders of Governor Edward John Eyre. Bogle and Gordon both hanged. The actions of Governor Eyre hotly debated in England.

1867 *January* Another committee is engaged in further fundraising efforts.

1871 Queen Victoria's half-nephew, Count Gleichen, sculpts a bust of Seacole, which is apparently displayed at the Royal Academy the following year.

1876 *September* Seacole makes her will in London.

1881 *17 May* Seacole dies at 3 Cambridge Street, Paddington, Marylebone, London, after an apoplectic episode. She is buried in the Catholic cemetery in Kensal Rise, as stipulated in her will.

1905 *22 May* Kingston's *Daily Gleaner* reports Louisa Grant's death. The news sparks a renewal of interest in her sister, Mary Seacole.

1954 The Nurses' Association of Jamaica names its headquarters in Kingston 'Mary Seacole House'.

1973 *20 November* Nurses Association of Jamaica and members of the Jamaican Lignum Vitae Club in England reconsecrate and restore Seacole's grave in St Mary's Catholic Cemetery, Kensal Rise, London.

1981 *14 May* Memorial service held in London to mark the centenary of Seacole's death.

1984 Publication of Alexander and Dewjee's edition of *Wonderful Adventures*.

1991 Seacole commemorative stamp issued in Jamaica.

Introduction

Still the motionless figures dance between the shimmying of sisters, the jouncing and bouncing of youth. What are they? – why, waxworks, nothing more. – Who are they? – History. See, here is Mary Seacole, who did as much in the Crimea as another magic-lamping lady, but, being dark, could scarce be seen for the flame of Florence’s candle.¹

Until recently, ‘History’, as personified here by Salman Rushdie, has not been kind to Mary Seacole, the Jamaican nurse and entrepreneur who became a *cause célèbre* in London in the 1850s for her service to British soldiers during the Crimean War. Seacole’s autobiography ran to two editions after its publication in 1857 and although she was still a well-known figure when she died, ‘Mrs’ or ‘Mother’ Seacole, as she was known to her contemporaries, was indeed rapidly obscured from view by the metaphorical glare of Florence Nightingale’s candle. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole, in Many Lands* remained out of print for over a century until Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee’s landmark edition in 1984 revived its author’s memory in Britain.² There has never been a Jamaican

edition of *Wonderful Adventures*, but Seacole has been consistently remembered in the country of her birth, where she has always been regarded as an icon and a national hero.³ In Britain she has joined the other figures mentioned by Rushdie in *The Satanic Verses* – such as Ignatius Sancho and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw – in a burgeoning canon of early black writers recently rescued from historical obscurity.

Yet Seacole evades straightforward definition as ‘black’, ‘Black British’ or even ‘Jamaican’, partly because she uses a number of different self-identifications: ‘I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins,’ she announces on the first page of her narrative. Here she demonstrates her awareness of attributes commonly associated with ‘the Creole race’ (indolence and passion, for example), as well as displaying a self-perceived sense of difference to white people. Clearly Seacole does not regard herself as mono-cultural or mono-ethnic – she is at once ‘Scotch’, Creole and Jamaican – and asserting her paternal Scottish heritage *and* her ‘hot-blooded’ (Chapter I) Creole nature appears to present no contradiction for her.⁴ In the 1850s, it is likely that ‘Creole’ was most commonly used either in a racially neutral sense, or to describe the white off spring of settlers in the colonies. *The Oxford English Dictionary* cites the word as originally referring to people born and naturalized in places such as the Caribbean, but of African or European origin, ‘*the name having no connotation of colour*’ (my emphasis). Then, as now, ‘Creole’ was not a straightforward signifier of ‘race’, and yet in the nineteenth century it may have been more

commonly used to describe the Caribbean-born offspring of *white* colonists. In a roughly contemporary history of Jamaica published by the missionary W. J. Gardner in 1873, the inhabitants of Jamaica in the late eighteenth century are divided into ‘three general classes – whites, and Creole whites, freedmen and slaves’. By the mid nineteenth century, Gardner notes an increase in ‘[t]he coloured people by which is meant the mixed races (not black)’, and he uses the term ‘mulatto’ to describe this class.⁵

At no point in *Wonderful Adventures* does Seacole describe herself as belonging to the ‘mulatto’ or ‘coloured’ class, and in the first third of the narrative she identifies as a ‘Creole’ with relative frequency.⁶ It may be that her use of the word ‘Creole’ is an appropriation and a refusal of the racial category into which she would undoubtedly have been slotted, and although she does not avoid alluding to her ‘colour’, such references are increasingly rare in the later parts of her narrative. Instead, she emphasizes her ‘maternal’, ‘feminine’ qualities, so that if Seacole’s national, cultural or ‘racial’ affiliations remain multiple and difficult to define, her gender identification is clear from the outset. With typical ‘feminine’ tact, she withholds her precise date of birth on the first page of *Wonderful Adventures*, excusing herself ‘as a female, and a widow’ from revealing her age. This rhetorical modesty sets the tone for a narrative in which descriptions of heightened ‘womanliness’ become increasingly insistent even as Seacole herself departs from mid nineteenth-century ‘feminine’ ideals in her activities as a businesswoman and traveller.

Still, Seacole clearly *was* aware of how her ‘colour’ was perceived, since it was regularly brought to her attention by white contemporaries. One of the few details she supplies about her first trip to London as a young woman is a vivid recollection of ‘the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion’s complexion. I am only a little brown – a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit’ ([Chapter I](#)). Seacole’s comments imply that her companion somehow warrants the negative attention she receives, yet her own self-image as ‘nearly white’ by no means correlates with how she was represented in newspaper reports and visual depictions once she had become a public figure in the 1850s. *Punch*’s poem, ‘A Stir for Seacole’, published in December 1856, singles out her ‘berry-brown face’ for mention, and its 1857 illustration of ‘our own *vivandière*’ shows a darkened, if somewhat anglicized, Seacole standing at the bedside of a wounded soldier.⁷ Even more strikingly, the original front cover of *Wonderful Adventures* depicts Seacole against a bright yellow background: her forearms and forehead have been tintured with a red ink, while her cheeks are shaded black. Both the (unidentified) portrait and the terracotta bust of Seacole sculpted by Queen Victoria’s half-nephew Count Gleichen in 1871 portray Seacole with unmistakable ‘racial’ characteristics,⁸ as does the somewhat generic image of her in the frontispiece to the text. Seacole might have avoided categorizing herself racially, but this was clearly not how her earliest

commentators (and, indeed, those who succeeded them) perceived her. There is then, a threefold lack of fit between Seacole's self-identifications, her contemporaries' categorizations of her, and modern attempts to slot her into a national or racial canon, and yet such dissonance may provide useful insights into the contingency and instability of *all* racial/national/gendered (self)-classifications.

In spite of her coyness regarding her age, from official documentation it would appear that Seacole was born Mary Jane Grant in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1805.⁹ Seacole's mother was a 'Creole' who ran a boarding house in Kingston, while Seacole describes her father, mentioned only once in *Wonderful Adventures*, as a soldier from an old Scottish family. At an early age Seacole was taken into the household of an elderly woman to be brought up among her grandchildren, and it was only when she was twelve years old that she began to spend more time with her mother, from whom she acquired the 'Creole medicinal art' that eventually proved so useful during successive sojourns in South America and the Crimea. Seacole characterizes herself as a wanderer, 'a female Ulysses' who longed to 'see the blue hills of Jamaica fade into the distance' ([Chapter I](#)), and as a young woman she seems to have travelled widely. She visited London twice for a total of three years, but she reveals little about her time there. Nor does she give details about New Providence, Haiti and Cuba, all of which she visited subsequently. Having returned to Kingston, she was in her early thirties when she married Mr Seacole, identified in her will as

Viscount (i.e., Horatio) Nelson's godson.¹⁰ Apart from this, all Seacole tells us about her husband is that he was 'very delicate' (Chapter I) and that his health deteriorated rapidly once the couple had moved down to Black River in the parish of St Elizabeth, to set up a store. They returned to Kingston but Mr Seacole died soon afterwards, leaving his widow to fend for herself.¹¹ Seacole glosses swiftly over the reversals and successes which occurred during the period that elapsed between her husband's death and her departure for Panama some time in the early 1850s. The Great Fire of 1843 destroyed her home in Kingston;¹¹ in 1850 the island was ravaged by cholera, and Seacole demonstrates her knowledge of contagion theory by suggesting that a steamer from New Orleans brought the disease to Jamaica.¹² By this time, Seacole had already earned herself a reputation as a 'doctress' in nearby army bases at Newcastle and Up-Park Camp. Here she nursed army officers from the 47th, 48th and 97th, the regiments she would next encounter on the Crimean battlefields.

Very early on in the second chapter Seacole is setting off to join her brother, Edward, on the Isthmus of Panama, and readers are left to speculate as to the reasons behind her brevity in dispatching the first forty-five years of her life. Various critics have noted (some with a touch of disapproval) that Seacole divulges very little information about her Jamaican beginnings – her mother's influence, her relationship with her sister, Louisa Grant, her marriage to Mr Seacole, whose death is narrated in the same

paragraph as his proposal. The absence of Jamaica in *Wonderful Adventures* has been explained in a number of ways: Simon Gikandi suggests that Seacole disinvests herself of a Jamaican Creole identity in order to reconstruct herself as English, a melancholic quest which means that a 'problematic Jamaican identity... shadows the book'.¹³ Other critics concur with his view that Seacole evades the problem of 'race' and lives in denial of her blackness. Perhaps such readings tend to overemphasize Seacole's self-identification as a 'black woman'.¹⁴ Evidently, she felt no need to assert her identity as 'black' or 'Jamaican', and at least part of the reason that Jamaica is not the focus of her narrative is, quite simply, because her 'adventures' did not occur there. Still, it is likely that other, more complex, factors also inform Seacole's 'omissions'. Jamaica in the year of her birth was still a slave society, and it is worth bearing in mind that Seacole was thirty-three years old when slavery was fully abolished in Jamaica in 1838.¹⁵ Although she was not a slave, people of 'mixed' ancestry, classed as 'mulattos', were legally and socially discriminated against by whites. According to historian Philip D. Curtin, people of colour who remained in Jamaica after the abolition of slavery worked hard to suppress signs of their African origin; 'they discriminated socially against the darker members of their own class, they were just as prejudiced as the whites in their relations with Negro slaves, and finally a minority of the coloured group joined the whites in the fight against emancipation'.¹⁶ There were Creole slaves in Jamaica, as Orlando Patterson points out in

The Sociology of Slavery, but they regarded themselves as distinct from and superior to negro slaves.¹⁷

In that case, far from insisting on her 'black' identity, it is likely that as self-identified Creoles, Seacole and members of her family would have attempted to distinguish themselves from black people, whether slave or free, who were deemed their social and legal inferiors. It may well be significant that Seacole does not mention the slave revolts of 1831, partial abolition in 1833 and full emancipation in 1838, and a reader might be forgiven for assuming that the early part of the narrative did not take place in a slave society. Yet to undertake such a description might have placed Seacole in the uncomfortable position of anti-slavery critic, whereas from her enthusiastic endorsement of the Crimean War, her stated fondness for everything British, and her self-enrolment into a community of British soldiers, it is clear that she does not wish to represent herself as an enemy of empire or imperialism. Perhaps this is why her anti-racist ire is reserved for white Americans who, it is implied, are immorally continuing the slave system that had already been abolished in the British colonies. 'I think, if I have a little prejudice against our cousins across the Atlantic – and I do confess to a little – it is not unreasonable,' she declares in one of the text's key statements of identification:

I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related – and I am proud of the relationship – to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns. And having this bond, and knowing what slavery is; having seen with my eyes and heard with my ears proof

positive enough of its horrors – let others affect to doubt them if they will – is it surprising that I should be somewhat impatient of the airs of superiority which many Americans have endeavoured to assume over me? ([Chapter II](#))

The multiple and shifting nature of Seacole's cultural and 'racial' affiliations is striking: from implying a kinship with her (white) American and British 'cousins', she rounds on the (white British) reader to assert her commonality with 'those poor mortals whom *you* once held enslaved' (my emphasis). Modern critics who insist on Seacole's 'blackness' or 'Jamaican-ness' and her denial of these identities, overlook the fact that she does not (perhaps cannot) represent herself in consistently national or racial terms.

Rather than critiquing Seacole for what might seem to be her evasions and omissions, an analysis of the identifications she does choose might prove more useful. Throughout *Wonderful Adventures*, but particularly in the Crimean sections, Seacole's gendered identity is emphasized. Although entrepreneurship and femininity are not always easily reconciled, Seacole is careful to safeguard her self-constructions as a 'proper woman'. So, in the Crimea, she is 'Mami' above all else, the mother figure who attends to the needs of her self-appointed 'sons' to stand in for the (white) womenfolk they have left behind. This compounds her earlier self-portrayal as an able business-woman who maintains her 'feminine' propriety amidst scenes of chaos, disorder and brutishness in Panama. Here Seacole signals her femininity by ostentatiously disapproving of American women who do not meet her high Victorian standards as regards

gendered/sexed dress codes, manners and morals (she implies that American women's vicious treatment of their slaves is as 'un-feminine' and 'unmannerly' as it is unethical). Seacole, on the other hand, is always meticulously clothed. Arriving in Gatun, she recalls that 'with that due regard to personal appearance, which I have always deemed a duty as well as a pleasure to study, I had, before leaving Navy Bay, attired myself in a delicate light blue dress, a white bonnet prettily trimmed, and an equally chaste shawl.' The epithets ('delicate', 'white', 'prettily', 'chaste') heighten Seacole's 'womanliness', and yet the insistence on propriety is deliberately tempered by Seacole's comic description of her scramble up a 'clayey bank' towards the waterfront at Gatun. 'I gained the summit, and... reached the river-side; in a most piteous plight,' she recalls, 'for my pretty dress, from its contact with the Gatun clay, looked as red as if, in the pursuit of science, I had passed it through a strong solution of muriatic acid' ([Chapter II](#)). The comic effect is heightened by the incongruous reference to hydrochloric acid while it simultaneously reveals Seacole's professional knowledge. Femininity is clearly in jeopardy in this instance, and yet it is through the unpropitious circumstances in Panama that Seacole neatly exemplifies her propriety as well as a pioneering spirit of enterprise.

Seacole might wish to emphasize her gender, but she necessarily evinces a more acute awareness of her racial identity when she is brought into contact with people who perceive her as 'different' and inferior. The Americans she met in Panama in the early 1850s made

no attempt to conceal their racist attitudes, and they were taken aback by Seacole's assumption that she was their equal. Slavery was not abolished in the United States until 1863, but Panama was a free society at this time. Gold deposits were discovered in California in 1848, and Seacole explains that gold-prospecting Americans could avoid the dangerous and lengthy journey around Cape Horn by crossing the Isthmus. This route presented its own difficulties until the 'twin giants' iron and steam arrived in the shape of the railway in 1848, when the New Granada government granted generous terms to the American Panama Railroad Company for the construction of a railroad.¹⁸ Working on the Panama railroad may have seemed an attractive option for black Jamaicans whose ancestors were slaves, or who had been slaves themselves. Seacole's brother, Edward, departed early in 1850 with the first wave of Jamaican emigrants 'fleeing' to Panama, a movement that continued until the railroad was completed in 1855.¹⁹

Since this was the first significant migratory movement from the island, there was no legislation controlling emigration, and Seacole seems to have moved freely between Jamaica and Panama (although the journey to Cruces was arduous and involved travelling by steamer, railway and paddle boat). She left some time in 1851, returning to Kingston for eight months in 1853 and subsequently travelling back to Panama for a second stint as caterer and gold-pro prospector. 'The railway, which now connects the bay with Panama, was then building,' she remarks: 'Every mile of that fatal railway cost the world thousands of lives' ([Chapter II](#)). Health conditions

were indeed dire on the Isthmus, and Jamaican newspapers anxious to stem the flow of workers to Panama published vivid accounts of the sickness and hardship endured on the railroad.²⁰ Malaria, yellow fever and cholera were rife during the early 1850s in Panama, with doctors and medical equipment in scarce supply, and mortality rates reached such high levels that the disposal of bodies became a problem.²¹ Corpses were burnt and buried at sea, or shipped to America for use in medical schools.

Historian Velma Newton speculates that at least 5,000 workers emigrated from Jamaica to Panama between 1850 and 1855, and given this figure, it may seem strange that Seacole mentions only American labourers on the railroad when she is describing the high mortality rates that led workers to strike three times.²² At no point does she seem to have met other Jamaicans, and one gets the impression from *Wonderful Adventures* that she and Edward were the sole emigrants from the island. Still, it is possible that Seacole and her brother did not come into contact with Jamaican labourers, since the pair were among the ‘different categories of workers... needed to cater to the Californian-bound gold-seekers who were crossing the Isthmus’.²³ Edward’s Independent Hotel at Cruces was a stopping point for Americans travelling overland by mule to and from the gold-country in their ‘exciting race for gold’ (([Chapter VIII](#))Chapter III), and the demand for catering was evidently great enough for Seacole to establish ‘the British Hotel in Cruces’ – a telling choice of identification which she used again in the Crimea.

Seacole subsequently set up a hotel in the town of Gorgona, which she handed over to Edward when she left the Isthmus for Jamaica in 1853.

Although Seacole makes no mention of fellow-Jamaicans, she displays what might seem to be troublingly superior attitudes towards black people: a sailor is ‘a fine tall negro’ ([Chapter II](#)), while the barber she hires to shave American customers at her hotel is described as ‘the grinning black’ ([Chapter V](#)). Later, in the Crimea, the black cook she hires would undoubtedly have seemed a comic figure to a mid-nineteenth-century white readership with his ‘rolling’ eyes, his gleaming white teeth and his ‘wool’, a racist epithet for hair ([Chapter XII](#)). Still, although Seacole’s references to other races and nationalities are similarly reductive,²⁴ she openly admires the ‘negroes’ who held provincial government offices in Panama, and her criticisms of American racism are uncompromising:

Against the negroes, of whom there were many in the Isthmus, and who almost invariably filled the municipal offices, and took the lead in every way, the Yankees had a strong prejudice; but it was wonderful to see how freedom and equality elevate 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. ([Chapter V](#))

She is openly sympathetic towards those who have escaped or are escaping from the oppressions of American slavery, and she recounts in detail the narrative of a young black slave woman who is

mistreated by her ‘vicious’ American ‘owner’ at Gorgona ([Chapter VI](#)).

This section of *Wonderful Adventures* also contains detailed descriptions of Seacole’s own encounters with American racism. The most striking incident occurs during an Independence Day dinner speech in which one of her clients regrets that their host is a ‘yaller woman’ and expresses a wish that she could be bleached in order to make her ‘acceptable’ to white company. Seacole bluntly asserts that if her skin ‘had been as dark as any nigger’s, [she] should have been just as happy and as useful’, and she concludes by proposing a toast to ‘the general reformation of American manners’ ([Chapter VI](#)). Here her deployment of a white American ‘pidgin’ vernacular inverts eighteenth- and nineteenth-century white writers’ grotesque textual renditions of ‘black’ speech, while Seacole’s own clipped English implies her intellectual and moral superiority over her detractor. Nonetheless, from her use of the word ‘nigger’ it is clear that Seacole believes her lighter skin places her in a higher social category,²⁵ an assumption that white Americans clearly do not share. On her way back to Jamaica, she is viciously abused by white American women who refuse to travel in the same saloon as a ‘nigger’ (i.e., Seacole) and her servant (identified by Seacole herself as ‘yellow’) ([Chapter VI](#)). Although her journey to the Isthmus is motivated by frankly mercenary reasons, Seacole finds herself unwittingly drawn into ‘race politics’ because of the way she is interpellated by white Americans whose racist perceptions contrast

markedly with her self-image – as different to slaves and ex-slaves, and as morally superior to white American women.

By the time Seacole left Jamaica for Panama a second time, Turkey had declared war against Russia and the former had received assurances of support from their French and British allies.²⁶ France and Britain formally declared war against Russia on 28 March 1854, by which time British advance contingents had already sailed to Gallipoli in anticipation of hostilities. The origins of the Crimean conflict lay in a dispute over the guardianship of the holy places in Jerusalem, along with the Allies' concern at the decline of the Ottoman Empire and Russia's successful campaigns against Turkey in the Black Sea. Both Britain and France wished to prevent further westward expansion which would threaten their Mediterranean and overland routes to India, and the Allies claimed that they were fighting for the integrity of Turkey and the European balance of power.²⁷ The Russians were forced to withdraw from the Turkish provinces they had invaded, but England and France decided to break their power by attacking the naval base in Sebastopol (now Sevastopol). The siege took an unexpectedly long time, and historians generally agree that the decision to go to war was made without sufficient consideration of the tactical difficulties the expeditionary forces would have to face in the Crimea.²⁸

Public opinion played a large part in precipitating Britain's entry into the war, and the leading vehicle of anti-Russian sentiment in Britain was the press, particularly *The Times*.²⁹ British patriotism

soon changed to criticism in response to special correspondent William Howard Russell's impassioned reports from the battlefield at Sevastopol, in which he detailed the sufferings and privations resulting from military disorganization.³⁰ News of the war also reached the colonies, and during Seacole's 1853 sojourn in Kingston, Jamaican newspapers were filled with accounts from the Crimea.³¹ Seacole herself remained neutral as regards British military policy, but she expressed a straightforward wish to be a witness to war. This desire seems to have been heightened by news that the regiments she had nursed in Jamaica were already on their way to the Crimean war zone. After spending eight months in Jamaica employing her medical skills during a yellow fever epidemic, Seacole returned to Panama from where she journeyed to London in the autumn of 1854 on business regarding her gold-mining speculations. These 'wild' financial plans were quickly discarded for a scheme that would have seemed equally improbable to many people at the time.

When Seacole reached England, the Russians had been defeated at Alma, and English and French forces had marched towards the Russian naval base at Sevastopol on the Black Sea. Russell's uncompromising accounts of the losses incurred as a consequence of disease and mismanagement provoked a wave of national hysteria and recrimination which led to the scape-goating of those in command.³² Again, Seacole does not comment on military policy, but newspaper reports seem to have influenced her decision to

travel to the Crimea: she refers to ‘hints [that came] from various quarters of mismanagement, want, and suffering in the Crimea’, and she is aware ‘that the hospitals were full to suffocation, that scarcity and exposure were the fate of all in the camp, and that the brave fellows for whom any of us at home would have split our last shilling, and shared our last meal, were dying thousands of miles away from the active sympathy of their fellow-countrymen’ (Chapter VIII). This dire situation prompted the Secretary at War, Sidney Herbert, to write a letter to his long-time friend Florence Nightingale in October 1854, inviting her to take a group of nurses to the Crimea under government sponsorship. Nightingale immediately accepted Herbert’s offer that she should be ‘Superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment in the English military hospitals in Turkey’ with a preliminary budget of £1,000, and on 21 October 1854 she and her ‘Angel Band’ of thirty-eight nurses departed for the war zone.³³

Seacole arrived in London just after Nightingale and her nurses had left, and later in the winter she began her ‘unwearied’ efforts to be recruited as a Crimean nurse. Nightingale had appointed a delegation of women charged with selecting two more parties of nurses in a matter of weeks. Finding suitable personnel proved difficult, and although Seacole was by no means among the first applicants, the decision not to recruit her for subsequent parties seems to have been motivated by racism (later, in the Crimea, Nightingale was to express her disapproval of Seacole for moral reasons).³⁴ There cannot have been many black nurses applying to

serve in the Crimea in 1854,³⁵ and Seacole was clearly regarded as something of an anomaly by the white people she encountered in her quest for employment. According to current critical thinking about mid nineteenth-century 'race politics' in Britain, the non-institutionalized bigotry current at least from the eighteenth century onwards gave way to systemic, 'scientific' racism only in the aftermath of key colonial events – the so-called 'Indian Mutiny' (1857–9) and the Governor Eyre Controversy in 1865 (see Chronology), both of which are widely regarded as turning points in the aetiology of racism.³⁶ Although it is difficult to estimate the size of Britain's black population at this time, 'race issues' had already been brought to the fore in publications such as Thomas Carlyle's 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro [later changed to 'Nigger'] Question' (1849) and John Stuart Mill's reply.³⁷ When black people were not being vilified or defended in the press, they provided white people with a source of popular entertainment.³⁸ Seacole arrived in England just two years after the publication of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a novel which contributed to the widespread fetishization and commodification of 'the negro' in minstrel shows, advertisements and products such as 'mulatto dolls'. Black people were undoubtedly stereotyped in cultural productions of this kind, and yet African American visitors to England drew favourable contrasts between British tolerance and American racism, leading Douglas Lorimer to insist that '[w]hen a black visitor entered mid-nineteenth-century England, his [sic] social position, not his colour, determined the quality of his reception'.³⁹ This was

not Mary Seacole's experience, and her suspicions regarding English racism in the 1850s constitute an implicit challenge to the current truism regarding the relatively benign nature of racial attitudes in mid-nineteenth-century England.

When she failed to gain an interview with the Secretary at War, Seacole tried the Quartermaster General, but she was forced to change her tactics when these efforts yielded no results either. Having obtained Sidney Herbert's private address from Cox's Army Agents, Seacole 'laid... pertinacious siege' to his house until she received a message from Elizabeth Herbert 'that the full complement of nurses had been secured, and that my offer could not be entertained'. Now it dawned on Seacole 'that had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it', and 'for the first and last time' she suspected that something like American racism was operative in England. 'Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here?' she asked herself. 'Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs?' ([Chapter VIII](#)). Historian Anne Summers believes this was most certainly the case, and it appears that Seacole's experiences were not untypical: from contemporary accounts, we know that a certain Miss Belgrave was also rejected because it was deemed that the 'West Indian constitution is not one best able to bear the fatigue of nursing... although Mrs B. [i.e., Miss Belgrave] looks robust – and some English patients would object to a nurse being so nearly a person of colour (sic)'. Likewise, Elizabeth Purcell, who was described as an

‘exemplary character’, was rejected for being ‘too old [she was fifty-two] and almost black’.⁴⁰

Seacole herself was aware that perceptions of her ‘colour’ might prove a barrier to her good intentions. ‘To persuade the public that an unknown Creole woman would be useful to their army before Sebastopol was too improbable an achievement to be thought of for an instant,’ she writes, and she notices that the Herbert’s ‘flunkeys... marvelled exceedingly at the yellow woman whom no excuses could get rid of, nor impertinence dismay’ ([Chapter VIII](#)). Still, in spite of the ideological obstacles she encountered, Seacole did eventually succeed in her attempts to become ‘a Crimean *heroine*’, and she remained true to her word that her doubts regarding English racism would not be expressed again.

Having teamed up with Thomas Day, a distant relation of her late husband whom she had met in Panama, Seacole went to the Crimea as an independent caterer or sutler. The two of them established the British Hotel at ‘Spring Hill’,⁴¹ two miles from Balaclava, where they catered for officers of the British army until the end of the war in 1856. From this point onwards, epithets such as ‘yellow’ and ‘nigger’ and the racial self-awareness accompanying them are largely absent from the narrative. Seacole occasionally mentions her Caribbean cultural heritage (for example, when describing her superlative culinary skills), but she repeatedly asserts that she is doing ‘*woman’s* work’ in the Crimea, and it is as a mother and a nurse that she most insistently represents herself. So, while she claims that the

battlefield in all its horrors is not a fit place for a woman, she also insists that only a woman's hands are 'moulded' to the task of nursing injured soldiers back to health. In the Crimea, the 'blood-line' she acknowledges is gendered rather than racial: she is 'Mother Seacole' and the English soldiers are her 'sons'.⁴²

Seacole is careful to point out that even when they are close to death, her surrogate offspring are conscious of their carer's gender. "'Ha!'" exclaims 'a poor artilleryman' as Seacole treats his wounds, "'this is surely a woman's hand'" ([Chapter X](#)). The soldiers are fond of calling Seacole 'Mother' because, as she puts it, 'there was something homely in the word' ([Chapter XIII](#)), so that her hotel, the food and drink on offer there, and Seacole herself come to stand for everything British and imperialistic. Although careful not to display an 'unladylike' awareness of which battles were fought, when and where, Seacole is enthusiastic on the subject of war, and she repeatedly draws attention to her own function as a representative of the British nation.⁴³ After the armistice, she encounters a group of Russians who were delighted at their first glimpse of an English woman. 'I wonder if they thought they all had my complexion,' she muses ([Chapter XIX](#)). Even more remarkably, on a journey to the interior of the Crimea, Seacole's companions attempt to pass her off as Queen Victoria, and, when this fails, the Queen's first cousin. In her account of the incident, Seacole seems somewhat gleeful to have been nearly mistaken for the British matriarch and monarch.

By accentuating her feminine, maternal function, Seacole effectively diverts attention from other aspects of her identity that did not conform to mid-nineteenth-century ideals of femininity – the oft-cited ‘angel in the house’ of Coventry Patmore’s poem (1854), that exemplar of immobile domesticity. To journey independently to a war zone, even in the service of the nation, was to tread a fine line between propriety and impropriety, a balance that is reflected in the title of Seacole’s narrative – *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands*. ‘Adventures’ connotes masculine enterprise (with a hint of trade), while Seacole’s affixation of ‘Mrs’ to her name is a clear marker of her wifely identity. Once again, the narrative attempts to reconcile femininity and enterprise, propriety and exploration, and it seems that maternal, indeed heroic, femininity acts as a narrative screen for qualities a Victorian readership might have found less acceptable in a woman.

Mary Poovey has argued that Florence Nightingale answered the English public’s need for a hero at the beginning of the Crimean War, when national morale and confidence were low.⁴⁴ It may well be that Seacole’s desire to be ‘a Crimean *heroine*’ was partly motivated by the vast following Nightingale had swiftly acquired. Seacole was clearly aware of the power of the Nightingale myth, and the Crimean section of her narrative begins with its own contribution to this nationalist legend. Describing her visit to the military hospital in Scutari, Seacole gives the following detailed portrayal of Nightingale:

A slight figure, in the nurses' dress; with a pale, gentle, and withal firm face, resting lightly in the palm of one white hand, while the other supports the elbow – a position which gives to her countenance a keen inquiring expression, which is rather marked. Standing thus in repose, and yet keenly observant – the greatest sign of impatience at any time a slight, perhaps unwitting motion of the firmly planted right foot – was Florence Nightingale – that Englishwoman whose name shall never die, but sound like music on the lips of British men until the hour of doom. (Chapter IX)

Generally Seacole is not much given to physiological description, and her account of Nightingale – the quintessential Englishwoman with the pale face and white hand – might appear to assist in her own eventual eclipse by her fellow-nurse. On the other hand, the episode may be read as an attempt by Seacole, as an (unauthorized) Jamaican Creole, to align herself with her white, English counterpart and to forge a connection with her through shared feminine and humanitarian aims.⁴⁵ The invocation of Nightingale acts as a form of validation for Seacole's own presence in the Crimea, which would explain why the latter seems anxious to assure the reader that she 'saw much of Miss Nightingale, at Balaclava' (although the remark is relegated to a footnote and the text includes no further accounts of Nightingale) Alexis Soyer, the French cook who assisted Nightingale, humorously recalls Seacole's somewhat neurotic reiterations on this subject:

'You must know, Monsieur Soyer, that Miss Nightingale is very fond of me. When I passed through Scutari, she very kindly gave me board and lodging.'

That was about the twentieth time the old lady had told me the same tale... ⁴⁶

Strikingly, Seacole's hagiographic portrayal of Nightingale was not reciprocated. In an unpublished manuscript-letter headed with the instruction '*Burn*', Nightingale gives a negative account of Seacole and her activities in the Crimea. 'She kept -I will not call it a "bad house" but something not very unlike it – in the Crimean War,' Nightingale wrote to her brother-in-law the MP Sir Harry Verney in 1870. Far from being 'fond' of Seacole, Nightingale states:

I had the greatest difficulty in repelling Mrs Seacole's advances, & in preventing association between her and my nurses (absolutely out of the question) when we established 2 Hospitals nursed by us between Kadikoi & the 'Seacole Establishment'...

Any one who employs Mrs Seacole will introduce much kindness – also much drunkenness and improper conduct...

She had then, however, one or more "persons" with her, whom (I conclude) she has not now. I conclude (& believe) that respectable Officers were entirely ignorant of what I... could not help knowing as a Matron & Chaperone & Mother of the Army.⁴⁷

Nightingale's disapproving reference to 'drunkenness and improper conduct' contrasts with Seacole's insistence that 'drunkenness or excess were discouraged at Spring Hill in every way' ([Chapter XII](#)), while the hint regarding the 'one or more "persons"' with whom Nightingale apparently believed Seacole to be cohabiting introduces a sexual dimension to Seacole's character (her narrative is almost entirely unsexual) and to that of Nightingale herself (for the sexual 'consciousness' she displays).

There is no supporting evidence for Nightingale's statements concerning Seacole, which should perhaps not be taken at face value. They constitute a vigorous enough display of the aggression

Poovey regards as implicit in the domestic ideal, with its emphasis on domestic management and its representations of the home in explicitly military terms.⁴⁸ Further, while Seacole's contribution to the Nightingale myth seems designed to reflect positively on Seacole's *own* feminine propriety, it also contains hints of its obverse. Nightingale is 'keenly observant', there are signs of impatience in her demeanour, her right foot is 'firmly planted'. The relationship between Seacole and Nightingale seems mutually ambivalent, and yet nineteenth-century constructions of both women consistently emphasize their proper femininity – Nightingale's virginal pallor and purity, Seacole's robust maternity and patriotic spirit of enterprise.

In *Wonderful Adventures*, Seacole tends to elide the precise details of warfare and military strategy, focusing instead on local and quotidian affairs: 'I am fully aware that I have jumbled up events strangely, talking in the same page, and even sentence, of events which occurred at different times,' she announces at the beginning of [Chapter XV](#) before offering three excuses for her 'unhistorical [*sic*] inexactness':

In the first place, my memory is far from trustworthy, and I kept no written diary; in the second place, the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life, and I am only the historian of Spring Hill; and in the third place, unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all.

Evidently, Seacole is self-consciously attempting to differentiate her memoir from the numerous ‘journals and chronicles of Crimean life’ that were published in the wake of the war, and at least part of *Wonderful Adventures*’ freshness derives from its narrator’s emphasis on the subjective and the idiosyncratic. The text is not a ‘literary biography’: its few literary allusions are attributed to or corrected by the ghostly ‘editor’ ([Chapter XII](#)). Although Seacole’s proclaimed literary ‘ignorance’ might well be rhetorical (since such knowledge was widely deemed ‘unfeminine’), she gives no indication as to her literary influences, and we have no evidence about how much education she had. The text’s commercial success, however, was at least partly due to its unconventionality, along with the self-perceived uniqueness of its author. By the time Seacole wrote *Wonderful Adventures*, she was already a public figure whose activities in the Crimea had received wide media coverage: it is likely, then, that her parlous financial situation prompted Seacole to exploit this fame and notoriety in order to generate an income that would make up for her financial losses. An astute businesswoman in other contexts, Seacole clearly recognized that the key to success in the literary market-place did not lie in publishing a detailed account of the ‘facts’ of the Crimean campaign: readers were much more likely to be captivated by a local, eyewitness account in which famous figures and well-known events are described from the point of view of an engaged participant and spectator.

All the same, Seacole does touch on the contexts and occurrences about which she avoids giving fuller details. Referring to the ‘dreary

spring of 1855' she notes that she seldom discusses its 'horrors' with survivors: '... my memory prefers to dwell upon what was pleasing and amusing, although the time will never come when it will cease to retain most vividly the pathos and woe of those dreadful months' ([Chapter XIV](#)). Similarly, having recounted the aftermath of the fall of Sevastopol and her own role in plundering the city, she informs the reader of her continued reluctance to describe 'so many scenes of woe' ([Chapter XVII](#)). The rhetorical refusal to dwell on horrific occurrences while indicating that they did indeed take place, allows Seacole to maintain an air of patriotic courage and good humour. Further, since she only gleans battle information retrospectively from newspaper accounts, she may evade entering into debates about the wisdom of British military tactics. When Seacole does include descriptions of war, it is from the vantage point of a spectator whose appreciation of events is aesthetic rather than political. Her first experience of battle is 'pleasant enough', and she enjoys the sight of English, French and Turkish cavalry moving in on Russian outposts. 'It was very pretty to see them advance,' Seacole recalls, 'and I felt that strange excitement which I do not remember on future occasions' ([Chapter XV](#)). '[T]he dark-plumed Sardinians and red-pantalooned French' at Tchernaya Battle of August 1855 'formed a picture so excitingly beautiful that we forgot the suffering and death they left behind' ([Chapter XVI](#)), while the 'last great bombardment' ([Chapter XVII](#)) of Sevastopol, witnessed from the top of a hill with refreshments on hand, is presented as a piece of outdoor theatre and an excuse for a picnic.

Ulrich Keller has identified the Crimean campaign as the first historical instance in which modern institutions such as picture journalism, lithographic presses and metropolitan show business presented war as a cultural product for easy consumption by paying customers.⁴⁹ More generally, Paul Gilroy has observed that technological advances in the nineteenth century furnished new opportunities for the production of an ‘imperial phantasmagoria’, but for him, ‘racial difference was absolutely fundamental’ to the militaristic and patriotic imagery of empire and colony that was disseminated on a vast scale at this time.⁵⁰

This was indeed the era of imperial image-makers such as Roger Fenton (often dubbed ‘the first war photographer’) and James Robertson, and the imperial phantasmagoria as relayed through Fenton’s lens is insistently racialized. Not only do his photographs routinely identify people according to their national groupings, but they also occasionally feature officers standing alongside their black servants.⁵¹

Seacole undoubtedly contributed to this industry with her verbal pictures of what has been called ‘the sublime of modern warfare’,⁵² but her role in the representation of empire is complex. It would be possible to argue that her descriptions effect a reversal of the white, imperialistic gaze, and yet it is difficult to see precisely how such enthusiastic responses to war as an aesthetic spectacle constitute a challenge to empire. Further, although Gikandi and others insist that Seacole is located at the margins of empire, and although she places

herself at a literal, *spatial* remove from the military activity of her surrogate 'sons', the hints she gives regarding her intimacy with those in command render her a troublingly complicit figure.⁵³ By implying that she is privy to the secrets of generals, Seacole situates herself at the centre of a war machine whose exact workings she ostentatiously professes not to understand, allowing her to adopt an uncomplicated, uncritical, straightforwardly patriotic attitude towards British intervention in the Crimea. On the occasion of Lord Raglan's death, for example, she merely pays homage to 'the great general whom Providence had called from his post at such a season of danger and distress' ([Chapter XVI](#)), choosing not to note that Raglan was widely criticized and held at least partly responsible for the fatal 'blunders' of the notorious Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava in October 1854 in which 107 men and 397 horses were killed within twenty-five minutes.⁵⁴

Battle commentaries might be largely absent from Seacole's accounts, but she does not omit details of her own aggression and violence, and her apparently unselfconscious, designedly comic self-descriptions once again display the paradoxical nature of mid-nineteenth-century domestic ideals. So, for example, after the Russian evacuation of Sevastopol a group of French soldiers accost Seacole because an American 'sailor lad' has informed them that she is a Russian spy. The incident is 'enough to make a lion of a lamb' ([Chapter XVII](#)), and Seacole accordingly uses a plundered church bell to defend herself, setting upon 'the varlet' who had made her

the object of his practical joke.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the mercantile aspect of her work in the Crimea is downplayed. She claims that what she carried away from Sevastopol during the plunder of the city 'was unimportant' and throughout the Crimean section of *Wonderful Adventures*, she insists that her primary interest is to serve the British army, not to make money. One Crimean memoirist, Lady Alicia Blackwood, praises Seacole's 'wisdom' (i.e., enterprise) in setting up what she calls 'a perfect Omnibus Shop', but she notes 'the heavy prices' for which Seacole sold her goods. 'No doubt she paid heavy prices herself to provide for the demand,' Blackwood remarks with a hint of disapproval,

but if these were slightly usoriously added to on her behalf towards others, it was always remembered that she had, during the time of battle, and in the time of fearful distress, personally spared no pain and no exertion to visit the field of woe, and minister with her own hands such things as could comfort, or alleviate the sufferings of those around her... That she did not make her fortune by her merchandise was proved subsequently by her bankruptcy...⁵⁶

In this somewhat backhanded compliment, only Seacole's humanitarian ministrations on the battlefield justify her entrepreneurship, while the fact that her business endeavours in the Crimea were not financially successful evidently counts in her favour. Indeed, the bankruptcy of the firm of Seacole and Day after the Crimean campaign proved beyond a doubt that Seacole was a true and altruistic British patriot whose national service led to her financial ruin.

Wonderful Adventures was published in London the year after the Crimean War ended, and the narrative reaches an abrupt conclusion with only passing reference to further adventures ‘in yet other lands’. Rhetorically at least, Seacole makes the most of her ‘fallen fortunes’, claiming that poverty brought her into contact with a community of well-wishers in London. ‘Now, would all this have happened if I had returned to England a rich woman? Surely not.’ It is indeed unlikely that Seacole would have received such extensive press coverage had her parlous financial situation not kept her in the public eye. In July 1855 the *Morning Advertiser*’s special correspondent from the Crimea had dedicated an article to the ‘lady of colour in Balaclava’, and *Punch* published its ‘A Stir for Seacole’ (quoted three times in *Wonderful Adventures*, Chapters XII, XIII) after her return to England.⁵⁷ In July 1856 *The Times* noted her intention to set up a store in Aldershot, but in October the same newspaper reported Seacole and Day’s forthcoming appearance in London’s bankruptcy courts.⁵⁸ This inspired one ‘D. A. Meritis’ to write a letter to *The Times* in which he urged fellow-Crimeans not to forget Mary Seacole. ‘While the benevolent deeds of Florence Nightingale are being handed down to posterity with blessings and imperishable renown, are the humbler actions of Mrs Seacole to be entirely forgotten, and will none now substantially testify to the worth of those services of the late mistress of Spring Hill?’⁵⁹ Lieutenant-General Lord Rokeby, Commander of the First Division, responded to this letter with a statement of personal support for Seacole,

eliciting a grateful reply from Seacole which was published in *The Times* on 29 November 1856 (see [Appendix](#)).

Meritis's letter prompted other 'Crimeans' to take action: a fund was established, and in July 1857 a series of money-raising benefits took place in the Royal Surrey Gardens. The *Illustrated London News* reported the publication of *Wonderful Adventures* and the Surrey Gardens benefits,⁶⁰ and *Punch* had already appealed to its readers to assist 'Mother Seacole' in her 'declining circumstances'. 'Who would give a guinea to see a mimic sutler-woman, and a foreigner, frisk and amble about the stage, when he might bestow the money on a genuine English one, reduced to a two-pair back, and in imminent danger of being obliged to climb into an attic?'⁶¹ Seacole's circumstances were also considered newsworthy in Jamaica. In January 1857, her letter to Lord Rokeby was published in Kingston's *Daily Advertiser and Lawton's Commercial Gazette*, and the newspaper also carried reports from *The Times* and *Punch* concerning Seacole's bank-ruptcy and the Surrey Gardens benefit.⁶² This extensive, transatlantic publicity may have helped Seacole's cause: *Wonderful Adventures* ran to a second edition in 1858, leading Alexander and Dewjee to speculate that the book was a 'bestseller' in a market that was already saturated with Crimean journals and memoirs.⁶³ Hugh Small, Florence Nightingale's biographer, notes a striking contrast between Seacole's prominent media image in the late 1850s and Nightingale's relative reclusiveness:

Immediately after the war Seacole was sporting her Crimea Medal proudly and living the high life in London, deservedly feted by the war's veterans and publishing to wide acclaim her account of her exploits. But where was Mrs Florence Nightingale? She was not recounting her experiences as a lesson to the nation's youth, or basking with Mother Seacole on the music-hall stage. She appeared to be in hiding.⁶⁴

Seacole was not exactly living 'the high life' in the bankruptcy courts, but she does appear to have been universally lauded, and she was eventually decorated with four medals for her services in the Crimea.⁶⁵ It is difficult to track exactly what happened once the press flurry surrounding Seacole's bankruptcy and her public appearances in 1857 died down. *The Times's* account of the second Surrey Gardens benefit reports Seacole's comment to the Secretary of War that she intended to set out for India immediately, presumably to assist the imperial cause in the aftermath of the so-called 'mutiny' of 1857. "Give me", said the excellent old lady, "my needles and thread, my probe and scissors, and I'm off."⁶⁶ Years later when he stayed at Blundell Hall in Kingston, Anthony Trollope heard of Seacole's patriotic wish from her sister, Louisa Grant: "My sister wanted to go to India," said my landlady, "with the army, you know. But Queen Victoria would not let her; her life was too precious." So that Mrs Seacole is a prophet, even in her own country.⁶⁷

We do not know what Seacole was doing in the ten years following the publication of *Wonderful Adventures*, but it seems that the Seacole Fund did not raise enough money to rescue Seacole from

her financial distress, and by 1867 another committee in England was engaged in further fundraising efforts ‘to ensure for MRS SEACOLE in her declining years, the means of obtaining remunerative employment, whereby competence would, to her, be secured’.⁶⁸ A file of papers at the National Library of Jamaica contains several uncorroborated but intriguing glimpses of Seacole in later life. A letter to Jamaica’s *Daily Gleaner* from a Mrs K. Stewart in 1939 suggests that Seacole remained in England and procured iced Jamaican mangoes for the Princess of Wales, to whom she delivered them personally at Marlborough House, and the same writer, who appears to have been a contemporary of Seacole, implies that she was based in Jamaica after the Crimean War.⁶⁹ Two letters from a Major A. C. Whitehorne, published in the *Sunday Times* and reprinted in the *Daily Gleaner*, report that thirty years after the Crimean War, Seacole was making a living as a ‘rubber’ or a masseuse, and that she used this skill on the Princess of Wales when the latter suffered from lameness.⁷⁰ Another account claims that Seacole returned to Jamaica to help Louisa Grant with the running of Blundell Hall.⁷¹ Again, this report asserts that Seacole was on informal visiting terms with the British Royal Family: ‘Once she just walked over to Buckingham Palace and rang the bell. Rebuked by the guard for having come without an appointment, she said: “Cho, me son, the Riyal Family is glad any time to ask me up for tea.” And so it proved to be – on that occasion.’⁷²

Perhaps what is most striking about these anecdotal reports (besides the unprecedented vernacular of the last one, and the fact that Seacole was dead within thirty years of the end of the Crimean war) is the mythology that has steadily accreted since Louisa Grant's death in Kingston in 1905. Many of the 'facts' are unsubstantiated, but from official records we know for certain that Seacole died in London in 1881 (not in Kingston, as some of her Jamaican commentators claim).⁷³ The 1881 Census lists Seacole as a 'lodger' in Paddington, Marylebone, and her stated profession is 'Independent'. Her age is given as seventy-one years old on the census, but the death certificate issued within three days of her death on 17 May 1881 at Cambridge Street confirms that Seacole was seventy-six years old when she died after a two-week coma following an apoplectic episode. Seacole's will, made in London in September 1876, reveals that she owned property in Jamaica – two freehold houses in Staunton Street, Kingston, which were left to her executors to sell. She also stipulated that she wished to be buried in the Catholic section of the cemetery at Kensal Rise. *The Times* obituary published on 21 May 1881 reported that the money raised from the Mary Seacole Fund allowed Seacole to end her days in comfort, but the reporter finds it strange that Seacole bequeathed all her property to 'persons of title' (see [Appendix](#)). This is not quite accurate: although Seacole left numerous bequests to counts, colonels and lords, her legacies to relatives include £100 to a nephew, Edward Ambleton, and smaller bequests to various members of her husband's family. Louisa Grant received a legacy of

£300 along with her sister's household linen, her watch, jewellery, trinkets and ornaments. Count Gleichen was bequeathed the diamond ring given to her late husband by his godfather Viscount Nelson, while Thomas Day was allotted the comparatively small sum of £19.9 shillings.⁷⁴ One Spencer H. Curtis, responding to *The Times* obituary in a letter published on 24 May 1881, claimed that Louisa Grant was still living in Blundell Hall 'in very straitened circumstances', and he urged the "persons of title" to whom [Seacole] has bequeathed all her property... to help Miss Grant'. In fact, Louisa Grant was living at Seacole Cottage, Duke Street, Kingston, when she died in 1905, a property that very probably belonged to Seacole, although it is not mentioned in her will.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, it is perhaps odd that Seacole left so much to non-family and titled people. We do not know her reasons – though it seems plausible that sycophancy played a part in them.

The *Daily Gleaner* for 22 May 1905 carried an obituary for Louisa Grant, but it was not primarily on her own merit that the 'sister of the late Mrs Seacole' was of interest to the public. Grant's death prompted the *Gleaner* to publish two articles reminding Jamaicans of Mary Seacole's life and work, and although Seacole is described as 'English to the backbone' and 'staunchly patriotic' towards England, she is also claimed as 'a native of Kingston Jamaica' who is said to exemplify 'an old Jamaica character who was quite a notable figure in her day and who was representative of a class of Jamaica women which have almost wholly passed away.'⁷⁶ The highly

caricatured 'character' may have faded, but Seacole has never been forgotten in Jamaica where she is regarded as a Jamaican rather than a Crimean (or indeed an English) 'heroine'. Her importance as a figure of national pride for Jamaicans has remained consistent in the century that has passed since Louisa Grant's death. An article in the *Daily Gleaner* by one R. A. Walcott (published in 1905) insists on Seacole's 'Jamaican' qualities, and it concludes by exhorting her country-people to preserve their heritage and history.⁷⁷ This early article sets the tone for subsequent Jamaican commentaries on Seacole. In Britain it was only in 1973 that Jamaican nurses revived Seacole's memory with the restoration of her grave in St Mary's Catholic Cemetery, London, followed eleven years later by Alexander and Dewjee's edition of *Wonderful Adventures*, but as the Jamaican *Daily Gleaner* commented in 1973, 'in Jamaica, [Seacole's] memory has been kept green'.⁷⁸ Since the early twentieth century, her name has regularly appeared in Jamaican newspapers, and several buildings have been named after her: in 1954, the centenary of the Crimean War, the Jamaican General Trained Nurses' Association (now the Jamaican Nurses' Association) decided to call their headquarters Mary Seacole House; there is a Mary Seacole Hall at the University of the West Indies Mona Campus, and a Mary Seacole Ward at Kingston General Hospital. In 1986 a locally-sculpted replica of Count Gleichen's bust was placed in the foyer of the Jamaican Nurses' Association, and a Seacole commemorative stamp was issued in 1991.⁷⁹

Reporting on the publication of Alexander and Dewjee's edition of *Wonderful Adventures*, the *Jamaican Daily Gleaner* comments: 'It is not surprising that the editors have adopted Mrs Seacole as a "Black British woman", rather than as a Jamaican, although Mrs Seacole herself opens her story with the unequivocal words, "I was born in the town of Kingston in the island of Jamaica."'”⁸⁰ All the same, it might seem ironic that Seacole, who expressed a wish to leave Jamaica, who did not re-settle there permanently, and who aligned herself with the British imperial cause, should have acquired a posthumous identity as a Jamaican heroine and role model. Such national representations contrast markedly with postcolonial descriptions of Seacole as a liminal, melancholic subject (Gikandi), a hybrid (Whitlock), or even a 'minstrel' (McKenna), but it is possible to move beyond these polarized critical discussions of authenticity and inauthenticity, roots and routes.⁸¹ If *Wonderful Adventures* demonstrates anything, it is that racial/cultural/ national identities are myriad and shifting, while contemporary responses to the text only exemplify and perpetuate the multiplicity that it displays. Seacole's narrative lends itself to a number of critical canons and agendas – it is at once 'Jamaican', 'black British', a woman's narrative, a nurse's testimony – but the fact that it does not slot neatly into a single one of these categories throws the unstable nature of these designations into sharp relief. Perhaps this is why a number of commentators have responded to *Wonderful Adventures* with disappointment, even distaste, and yet the text's complexity constitutes at least part of its importance. A critic of American

racism and slavery, Seacole is also an unapologetic enthusiast for the British Empire. Her desire to travel to India in the service of the British army in 1857 is enough to give any postcolonial critic pause, but *Wonderful Adventures* simultaneously infiltrates and underpins the *imperium* in ways that overdetermined 'racialized' readings or celebrations of national 'rootedness' might overlook. If Seacole described herself using the discursive terms available to her, she has also been represented in ways that do not always correlate with her self-representations, and critics will undoubtedly continue to read and reinvent her according to widely differing agendas. This edition aims to situate *Wonderful Adventures* within its constitutive political, historical and critical apparatuses both past and present, in order further to challenge the notion that 'Seacole' is a black/black British/Jamaican subject who may be recruited for service in a single canon or national cause.

NOTES

1. Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Vintage, 1988/1998), p. 292.
2. *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole, in Many Lands*, ed. Ziggi Alexander and Audrey Dewjee (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1984).
3. For example, an article in the Kingston *Sunday Gleaner Magazine* claims that '[Seacole] was nothing short of a Jamaican heroine, and her statue should be today in Heroes' Park' (1 April 1984).
4. It is noticeable that Seacole identifies as 'Creole' rather than using one of the numerous (now extremely problematic) designations for 'mixed race' people of colour – 'Samboes, Mulattoes, Quadroons, Mestizes' – as listed, for example, in Bryan Edwards's *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies*, 5 vols, 1793 (New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. 2, p. [18](#). *The Times* obituary of Seacole describes her as a Creole (see [Appendix](#)).
5. W. J. Gardner, *A History of Jamaica, From Its Discovery By Christopher Columbus to the Year 1872* (London: Frank Cass., 1873, repr. 1971), pp. [164](#), 381.
6. Seacole frequently uses the word 'Creole' to describe herself, and in the Panama section of the narrative, she describes herself as 'yellow' – the epithet used by Americans.
7. *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 6 December 1856, p. [221](#); 30 May 1857, p. 221.

8. See also *Masterpieces of the J. Paul Getty Museum. European Sculpture*, where Henry Weekes's bust of a black woman is listed as 'Bust of Mary Seacole 1859': 'Seacole's identification in this bust is based on its close resemblance in facial [for which read 'racial'] type and hairstyle to documented portraits of her' (J. Paul Getty Museum: Los Angeles, 1998), p. [42](#). In fact, the bust does not at all resemble Seacole, and the figure represented looks much younger than Seacole, who would have been fifty-four years old in 1859. Nor does the figure resemble visual depictions of Seacole, which are themselves quite strikingly divergent.
9. Seacole's pre-married name is not listed as 'Grant' on any of the extant documents (her will, the 1881 Census, her death certificate), but since her sister Louisa's name was Grant, and there is no evidence of the latter having married, it is probable that Seacole was born Mary Jane Grant. From consulting indexes of baptisms in the parish of Kingston, I conclude there is no extant record of Seacole's birth, but her age is specified on the London Census form of 1881 and the death certificate issued that year. On the death certificate she is cited as 'Mary Jane Seacole', while the census and her will refer to 'Mary Seacole'.
10. In her will, Edwin Horatio Seacole is identified as Seacole's 'husband'.
11. The Island Record Office in Jamaica has records of Mary Grant and Edwin Seacole's marriage, as well as Edwin Seacole's burial. The Index for Marriages in Kingston (Parish Register Vol. 1, Folio

65, 1836, p. [65](#), entry 92) records that Edwin Seacole and Mary, both of the city of Kingston, were married by license on 10 November 1836 by John Magrath, Officiating Minister. Rev. J. Magrath L.L.D. was the secretary of the Jamaica Branch of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, which had been established 20 May earlier that year. In the Index of Burials for Kingston (copy of Register Vol. 4, Folio 350, 1844, p. 350, entry 541) it is recorded that Edward (*sic*) Horatio Seacole, aged thirty-five, of the Parish of St Elizabeth, abode East Queen Street, was buried on 26 October 1844 at New Burial Ground. Research of parish registers in the UK has revealed that Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole was baptised at Prittlewell in Essex on 18 September 1803. He was the son of Thomas and Ann Seacole. I am grateful to Paul Kerr for supplying all this information.

12. For a description of the fire, see Frank Cundall, *Historic Jamaica* (London: West India Committee, 1915, repr. 1971): 'Many of the best dwellings and much valuable property were consumed, and a large number of persons were left in utter destitution' (P. [153](#))
13. Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness. Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), pp. [127](#), [131](#).
14. Ibid., p. [139](#); Sandra Pouchet Paquet, 'The Enigma of Arrival: *The [sic] Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole...*', *African American Review* 26:4 (1992).

15. The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807 when Seacole was two years old, and in 1838 slavery was fully abolished in Jamaica.
16. Philip D. Curtin, *Two Jamaicas. The Role of Ideas in a Tropical Colony, 1830–1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1955, 1972), p. [45](#).
17. Orlando Patterson, *The Sociology of Slavery. An analysis of the origins, development and structure of Negro slave society in Jamaica* (London: MacGibbon & Kee Ltd, 1967), p. [146](#). See also Gad Heuman, *Between Black and White. Race, Politics and the Free Coloureds in Jamaica, 1792-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. [11](#)–12.
18. Elizabeth McLean Petras, *Jamaican Labour Migration. White Capital and Black Labour, 1850-1930* (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1988), p. [59](#).
19. Velma Newton, *The Silver Men. West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850-1914* (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies), p. [26](#).
20. See, for example, the *Daily Advertiser and Lawton's Commercial Gazette*, 17 and 18 April 1854.
21. Petras, *Jamaican Labour Migration*, p. [74](#).
22. Newton, *Silver Men*, p. [91](#).
23. Ibid., p. [22](#).
24. She nicknames the boy she employs at the British Hotel 'Jew Johnny', an 'honest, lynx-eyed fellow' (even though he is 'the best

and faithfulest servant I had in the Crimea'). Turks are indolent, cowardly, without English 'pluck', while Greeks are 'villainous-looking' people with whom Seacole would rather not identify ([Chapter XI](#)).

25. Although Alexander and Dewjee are troubled by occurrences of the word 'nigger' in *Wonderful Adventures*, it seems clear that Seacole is using it to imply American racism rather than displaying her own prejudice. For example, when she is ill with cholera she describes how, on entering her room, an American visitor would '[look] at me curiously and inquisitively, as he would eye a horse or a nigger he had some thoughts of making a bid for', and later she uses the word in the context of American outrage that 'a nigger' holds the office of Governor of New Grenada and therefore has authority ([Chapter V](#)). While the effect of this appropriation is certainly ambivalent, it is obvious that Seacole did not share American racist attitudes, which were often directed against her.

26. Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War*, 1853-1856 (London: Arnold, 1999), pp. [14](#)-15.

27. In April 1854, Prussia and Austria also joined forces with Turkey against Russia along the Danube. *Ibid.*, p. [16](#).

28. *Ibid.*, p. [83](#); Martha Vicinus and Bea Nergaard (eds), *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 77. 18.

29. Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. [15](#).

30. Ibid., p. [141](#); Trevor Royle, *Crimea. The Great Crimean War*, 1854-1856 (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1999), pp. 114-15; John Black Atkins, *The Life of Sir William Howard Russell, C.V.O, LL.D, the First Special Correspondent*, 2 vols (London: John Murray, 1911), vol. 1, p. 190.
31. The Crimean War was extensively reported in Jamaican newspapers in 1854. See, for example, the *Daily Advertiser*, 9 May 1854.
32. Nearly a thousand soldiers died before a single shot was fired, but the 'enemy' in this case was cholera, not the Russians or the harsh climate.
33. Vicinus and Nergaard, *Ever Yours*, pp. [80](#), 81; Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens. British Women as Military Nurses, 1854-1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1988), p. 36; Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 248-9.
34. Summers, *Angels and Citizens*, pp. [38](#)-9, 40; Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 256-7.
35. Peter Fryer notes that there were black drummers in the Second Life Guards Regiment until just before the Crimean War, but he does not specify whether black soldiers took part in the conflict. See Fryer, *Staying Power. The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. [84](#).
36. See, for example, Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians. English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-nineteenth*

Century (Leicester: Leicester University Press, Holmes & Meier Publishers Inc., 1978), pp. [26](#), 68.

37. Thomas Carlyle, 'Occasional Discourse on the Negro Question', *Fraser's Magazine* (London, 1849), pp. 670-79; John Stuart Mill, 'The Negro Question', *Eraser's Magazine* (London, 1850), pp. 25-31.
38. Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 236.
39. Lorimer calls this 'uncle-tom mania'; see *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, pp. [81](#)-90, 47, 56.
40. Summers, *Angels and Citizens*, p. [40](#). See Paul Kerr, Georgina Pye, Teresa Cherfas, Mick Gold, *The Crimean War* (London: Boxtree, 1997), p. 89.
41. 'Spring Hill' is Seacole and Day's sobriquet.
42. Intriguingly, Alexis Soyer, the renowned French chef who assisted Florence Nightingale in her hospital kitchens, assumes that Seacole is a *biological* mother. On almost every one of his encounters with the 'mère noire', as he calls 'the illustrious Mrs Seacole', he mentions Sally or Sarah, 'the Egyptian beauty' whom he assumes is Seacole's daughter. The sobriquet 'mother' with which Sally/Sarah evidently addressed Seacole may have introduced an element of confusion regarding their relationship, but whether the girl was Seacole's daughter or not, her omission from *Wonderful Adventures* seems pointed. See Soyer, *Soyer's Culinary Campaign Being Historical Reminiscences of the Late War With the Plain Art of Cookery for Military and Civil Institutions, the*

Army, Navy, Public, etc. etc. (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1857), pp. 269, 334, 434, 482.

43. For a discussion of the role of women in war situations, see Lois Ann Lorentzen and Jennifer Turpin (eds), *The Women and War Reader* (New York and London: New York University Press, 1998), p. xi, where the editors state that ‘many women express their citizenship, even nationalism by proudly sending sons to war or fighting those wars themselves’. As another contributor points out (p.3), this challenges the essentialist view that men make war and women make peace.
44. Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments. The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1988).
45. See Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire. Reading Women’s Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000), pp. 86-7, 93 for a similar argument.
46. Soyer, *Culinary Campaign*, pp. 435, 233.
47. Wellcome Library for the History and Understanding of Medicine, MS 9004, Letter from Florence Nightingale to Sir Harry Verney (5 August 1870). Extract reproduced in the [Appendix](#).
48. Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 187.
49. Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle. A Visual History of the Crimean War* (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 2001), pp. ix, x.

50. Paul Gilroy, *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. [139](#).
51. See, for example, Kerr et al., *Crimean War*, pp. [94](#), 99. See also H. and A. Gernsheim (eds), *Roger Fenton. Photographer of the Crimean War. His Photographs and Letters from the Crimea* (London: Seeker & Warburg, 1954).
52. Keller, *Ultimate Spectacle*, p. [159](#).
53. Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, pp. [121](#), 122; Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, p. [85](#).
54. Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 265-78. Seacole alludes briefly to ‘the terrible Light Cavalry charge’ in [Chapter XV](#).
55. In [Chapter XIX](#), Seacole describes how she smashes up cases of wine in a fit of patriotic fury prior to leaving the Crimea. ‘It may have been wrong,’ she admits, but, ‘I would rather not present it to our old foes.’
56. Alicia Blackwood, *A Narrative of Personal Experiences and Impressions During a Residence on the Bosphorus Throughout the Crimean War* (London: Hatchard, 1881), p. 262.
57. *Morning Advertiser*, 19 July 1855; *Punch*, 6 December 1856, p. [221](#).
58. *The Times*, 5 July 1856; 29 October 1856; 7 November 1856.
59. *Ibid.*, 24 November 1856.
60. *Illustrated London News*, 25 July 1857.

61. *Punch*, 30 May 1857.
62. *Daily Advertiser*, 12 January 1857; 10 February 1857; 27, 29 August 1857; 28 October 1857. These reports are unprefaced by introductions or explanations, implying that Seacole was already a well-known figure in Kingston.
63. Alexander and Dewjee, *Wonderful Adventures*, p. [31](#).
64. Hugh Small, *Florence Nightingale, Avenging Angel* (London: Constable, 1998), p. [200](#).
65. Alexander and Dewjee have identified two of the awards – one a Turkish honour, the Order of the Medijie, and the other the French Legion of Honour – but they are less certain than Hugh Small that a third might have been the Crimea medal, since it was reserved for military personnel (Alexander and Dewjee, *Wonderful Adventures*, p. [36](#)). The Jamaica National Library has a photograph of two of the medals awarded to Seacole (the medals were said to be in the Jamaica National Institute, but staff there were unable to locate them when I visited). Comparing the medals with images in *Ribbons and Medals* I conclude that one of the medals is undoubtedly the Order of the Medijie, and the other resembles the description and image of the French Legion of Honour (see Captain H. Taprell Dorling, *Ribbons and Medals. Naval, Military, Air Force and Civil* (London: George Philip and Son Ltd, 1944), pp. [119](#), [122](#)). In *The Times*, Seacole is described as ‘a lady of colour, [who] has been honoured with four Government medals for her kindness to the British soldiery. She was present in person and

attracted much attention, the gaily coloured decorations on her breast being in perfect harmony with the rest of her attire' (7 November 1856). The medals also appear on the 'Seacole' bust by Gleichen.

66. *The Times*, 30 July 1857.

67. Anthony Trollope, *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1867), p. [23](#).

68. Printed leaflet for the Seacole Fund, January 1867. Royal Archives, Windsor Castle (RA PP/VIC/1867/23078).

69. *Daily Gleaner*, 29 August 1939.

70. Ibid., 5 February 1938; *Sunday Times*, 16 January 1938.

71. Blundell Hall was a boarding house run by Louisa Grant. It is not clear whether it was a family property inherited by Louisa, although this is suggested by Anthony Trollope, who mentions it in *The West Indies and the Spanish Main*: 'I took up my abode at Blundle [sic] Hall and found that the land-lady in whose custody I had placed myself was a sister of the good Mrs Seacole...'

72. Notes in National Library of Jamaica, unreferenced: 1951?

73. *Sunday Magazine*, 1 December 1963; *Jamaican Nurse* 25:1–3 (August 1986), notes in the National Library of Jamaica.

74. Seacole and Day evidently fell out after they returned from the Crimea: see [Chapter VIII](#), note 17 and [Appendix](#).

75. K. Stewart's letter states that 'After the Rebellion, Mrs Seacole bought a piece of land in Duke Street – between Charles and

North Streets... and there she built herself a charming little bungalow.’ *Daily Gleaner*, 29 August 1939. In *Historic Jamaica*, Frank Cundall says that ‘Seacole Cottage in Duke Street was named after [Seacole]’ (p. [182](#)).

[76](#). *Daily Gleaner*, 27 July 1905.

[77](#). Ibid.

[78](#). Ibid., 18 December 1973.

[79](#). The bust is by local sculptor, Curtis Johnson (*The Jamaican Nurse*, 25:2-3 (August 1986). In England, numerous institutions now bear Seacole’s name. For example, there is a Mary Seacole Centre for Nursing Practice at Thames Valley University; a Mary Seacole Research Centre at De Montfort University; and a Department of Health Mary Seacole Leadership Award. For a fuller list of these, see the ‘Mary Seacole Resource Page’, <http://www.chriswillis.freemove.co.uk/seacole.htm>. A report in the *Independent* noted that in the 1990s, there was talk of naming a small road after Seacole in London, but the plan turned into ‘an ugly brawl’ because local residents objected to the ‘political correctness’ 66. of the gesture (22 January 2001). See Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, http://www.yasminalibhaibrown.com/story/_/story=115487).

[80](#). *Daily Gleaner*, 2 April 1984.

[81](#). Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness*, p. [126](#); Whitlock, *Intimate Empire*, p. 92; Bernard McKenna, “‘Fancies of Exclusive Possession’:

Validation and Dissociation in Mary Seacole's England and Caribbean', *Philological Quarterly* 17:2 (1997), p. 224.

Further Reading

Helen M. Cooper, “Tracing the Route to England”: Nineteenth-century Caribbean interventions into English debates on race and slavery’ in Shearer West (ed.), *The Victorians and Race* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1996), pp. 194-212

Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness. Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996), pp. 125-43

Lyn Innes, ‘Travellers and reformers: Mary Seacole and B. M. Malabari’ in *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 126-41

Bernard McKenna, “Fancies of Exclusive Possession”: Validation and Dissociation in Mary Seacole’s England and Caribbean’, *Philological Quarterly* 17:2 (1997), pp. 219-39

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, ‘Mrs Seacole’s *Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands* and the Consciousness of Transit’ in Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina (ed.), *Black Victorians, Black Victoriana* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), pp.71-87

Sandra Pouchet Paquet, ‘The Enigma of Arrival: *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole, in Many Lands*’, *African American Review*

26:4 (1992), pp. 651-63

Amy Robinson, 'Authority and the Public Display of Identity: *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole, in Many Lands*', *Feminist Studies* 20:3 (Fall 1994), pp. 537-57

Ivette Romero-Cesareo, 'Women adrift, madwomen, matriarchs, and the Caribbean' in *Women at Sea. Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse*, ed. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 135-60

Gillian Whitlock, *The Intimate Empire. Reading Women's Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000), 'The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole', pp. 83-96

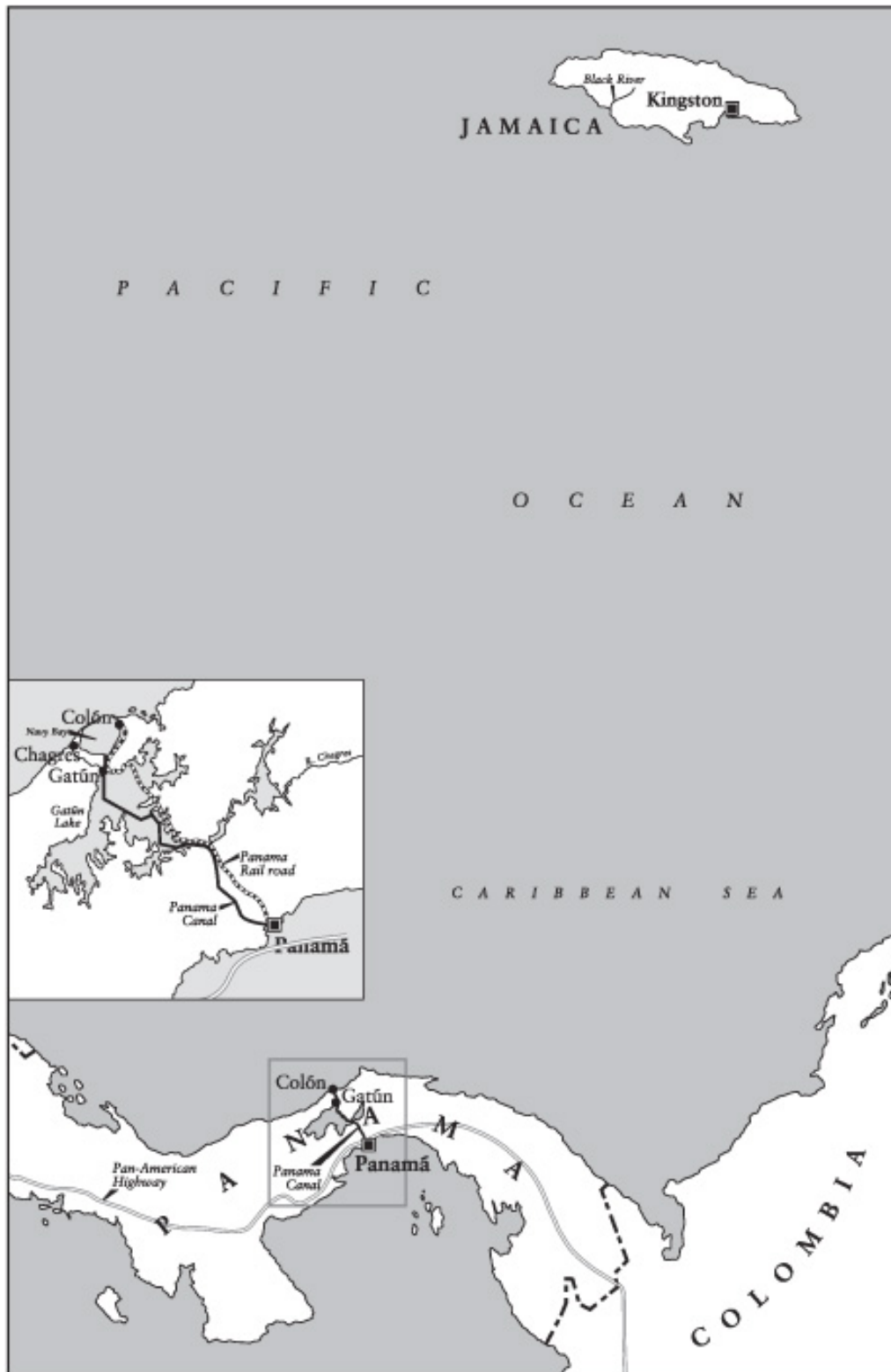
A Note on the Text

Wonderful Adventures was first published in 1857 by the publisher James Blackwood. Like the more famous publishing firm of William Blackwood, James Blackwood operated from Paternoster Row near St Paul's in London, which was the book trade's district at this time. Despite the identical surnames and the similar locations, the two firms do not appear to have been connected.

A second edition of *Wonderful Adventures* was published in 1858, also by James Blackwood, but it contains only a few very minor typographical changes. Cambridge University Library holds both the first and second editions of the text, and the latter is listed as the author's edition although the signature on the first blank page is indecipherable.

This text has been set from the first edition of 1857. House style has been only lightly applied: double quote marks have been changed to single; 'ize' spellings for 'realize', 'organize', etc., have been standardized; word-spaced en rules for dashes have replaced the em rules used in the original text; and ships' names and book titles have been changed from roman in quotes to italics. No attempt has been made to standardize hyphenation or capitalization, and

grammatical errors and anachronistic spellings have not been corrected. Corrections have been made only where sense is affected (for example, a missing 'I' has been inserted on p. 43; a final hyphen has been added to the attributive 'out-of-the-way' on p. 94; 'awhile' has been amended to 'a while' (p. 28); 'latter' to 'later' on p. 168; and 'it's' to 'its' twice on p. 143.





WONDERFUL

ADVENTURES OF MRS. SEACOLE

IN MANY LANDS.

EDITED BY W. J. S.



WITH AN INTRODUCTORY PREFACE

BY

W. H. RUSSELL, ESQ.,

THE "TIMES" CORRESPONDENT IN THE CRIMEA.

LONDON:

JAMES BLACKWOOD, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1857.

DEDICATED, BY PERMISSION,

TO

MAJOR-GENERAL LORD ROKEBY, K.C.B.¹

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S

HUMBLE AND MOST GRATEFUL SERVANT,

MARY SEACOLE

TO THE READER

I should have thought that no preface would have been required to introduce Mrs Seacole to the British public, or to recommend a book which must, from the circumstances in which the subject of it was placed, be unique in literature.

If singleness of heart, true charity, and Christian works; if trials and sufferings, dangers and perils, encountered boldly by a helpless woman on her errand of mercy in the camp and in the battle-field, can excite sympathy or move curiosity, Mary Seacole will have many friends and many readers.

She is no Anna Comnena,¹ who presents us with a verbose history, but a plain truth-speaking woman, who has lived an adventurous life amid scenes which have never yet found a historian among the actors on the stage where they passed.

I have witnessed her devotion and her courage; I have already borne testimony to her services to all who needed them. She is the first who has redeemed the name of 'sutler'² from the suspicion of worthlessness, mercenary baseness, and plunder; and 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.

W.H.RUSSELL³.

CONTENTS

Chapter I

My Birth and Parentage – Early Tastes and Travels – Marriage, and Widowhood

Chapter II

Struggles for Life – The Cholera in Jamaica – I leave Kingston for the Isthmus of Panama – Chagres, Navy Bay, and Gatun – Life in Panama – Up the River Chagres to Gorgona and Cruces

Chapter III

My Reception at the Independent Hotel – A Cruces Table d'Hôte – Life in Cruces – Amusements of the Crowds – A Novel Four-post Bed

Chapter IV

An Unwelcome Visitor in Cruces – The Cholera – Success of the Yellow Doctress – Fearful Scene at the Mule-owner's – The Burying Parties – The Cholera attacks me

Chapter V

American Sympathy – I take an Hotel in Cruces – My Customers –
Lola Montes – Miss Hayes and the Bishop – Gambling in Cruces –
Quarrels amongst the Travellers – New Granada Military – The
Thieves of Cruces – A Narrow Escape

Chapter VI

Migration to Gorgona – Farewell Dinners and Speeches – A
Building Speculation – Life in Gorgona – Sympathy with
American Slaves – Dr Casey in Trouble – Floods and Fires –
Yankee Independence and Freedom

Chapter VII

The Yellow Fever in Jamaica – My Experience of Death-bed
Scenes – I leave again for Navy Bay, and open a Store there – I
am attacked with the Gold Fever, and start for Escribanos – Life
in the Interior of the Republic of New Granada – A Revolutionary
Conspiracy on a small scale – The Dinner Delicacies of Escribanos
– Journey up the Palmilla River – A Few Words on the Present
Aspect of Affairs on the Isthmus of Panama

Chapter VIII

I long to join the British Army before Sebastopol – My
Wanderings about London for that purpose – How I failed –
Establishment of the Firm of 'Day and Martin' -I Embark for
Turkey

Chapter IX

Voyage to Constantinople – Malta – Gibraltar – Constantinople,
and what I thought of it – Visit to Scutari Hospital – Miss
Nightingale

Chapter X

‘Jew Johnny’ – I Start for Balaclava – Kindness of my old Friends
– On Board the *Medora*– My Life on Shore – The Sick Wharf

Chapter XI

Alarms in the Harbour – getting the Stores on Shore – Robbery
by Night and Day – The Predatory Tribes of Balaclava – Activity
of the Authorities – We obtain leave to erect our Store, and fix
upon Spring Hill as its Site – The Turkish Pacha – The Flood –Our
Carpenters –I become an English Schoolmistress Abroad

Chapter XII

The British Hotel – Domestic Difficulties – Our Enemies – The
Russian Rats – Adventures in Search of a Cat – Light-fingered
Zouaves – Crimean Thieves – Powdering a Horse

Chapter XIII

My Work in the Crimea

Chapter XIV

My Customers at the British Hotel

Chapter XV

My First Glimpse of War – Advance of my Turkish Friends on Kamara – Visitors to the Camp – Miss Nightingale – Mons. Soyer and the Cholera – Summer in the Crimea – ‘Thirsty Souls’ – Death busy in the Trenches

Chapter XVI

Under Fire on the fatal 18th of June – Before the Redan – At the Cemetery – The Armistice – Deaths at Head-quarters – Depression in the Camp – Plenty in the Crimea – The Plague of Flies – Under Fire at the Battle of the Tchernaya – Work on the Field – My Patients

Chapter XVII

Inside Sebastopol – The Last Bombardment of Sebastopol – On Cathcart’s Hill – Rumours in the Camp – The Attack on the Malakhoff – The Old Work again – A Sunday Excursion – Inside ‘Our’ City – I am taken for a Spy, and thereat lose my Temper – I Visit the Redan, etc. – My Share of the Plunder

Chapter XVIII

Holiday in the Camp – A New Enemy, Time – Amusements in the Crimea – My share in them – Dinner at Spring Hill – At the Races – Christmas Day in the British Hotel – New Year’s Day in the Hospital

Chapter XIX

New Year in the Crimea – Good News – The Armistice – Barter with the Russians – War and Peace – Tidings of Peace – Excursions into the Interior of the Crimea – To Simpheropol, Baktchiserai, etc. – The Troops begin to leave the Crimea – Friends' Farewells – The Cemeteries – We remove from Spring Hill to Balaclava – Alarming Sacrifice of our Stock – A Last Glimpse of Sebastopol – Home!

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER I

My Birth and Parentage –Early Tastes and Travels – Marriage, and Widowhood

I was born in the town of Kingston, in the island of Jamaica, some time in the present century. As a female, and a widow, I may be well excused giving the precise date of this important event. But I do not mind confessing that the century and myself were both young together, and that we have grown side by side into age and consequence. I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins.¹ My father was a soldier, of an old Scotch family;² and to him I often trace my affection for a camp-life, and my sympathy with what I have heard my friends call ‘the pomp, pride, and circumstance of glorious war.’ Many people have also traced to my Scotch blood that energy and activity which are not always found in the Creole race, and which have carried me to so many varied scenes: and perhaps they are right. I have often heard the term ‘lazy Creole’ applied to my country people;³ but I am sure I do not know

what it is to be indolent. All my life long I have followed the impulse which led me to be up and doing; and so far from resting idle anywhere, I have never wanted inclination to rove, nor will powerful enough to find a way to carry out my wishes. That these qualities have led me into many countries, and brought me into some strange and amusing adventures, the reader, if he or she has the patience to get through this book, will see. Some people, indeed, have called me quite a female Ulysses.⁴ I believe that they intended it as a compliment; but from my experience of the Greeks, I do not consider it a very flattering one.

It is not my intention to dwell at any length upon the recollections of my childhood. My mother kept a boarding-house in Kingston,⁵ and was, like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress,⁶ in high repute with the officers of both services, and their wives, who were from time to time stationed at Kingston. It was very natural that I should inherit her tastes; and so I had from early youth a yearning for medical knowledge and practice which has never deserted me. When I was a very young child I was taken by an old lady, who brought me up in her household among her own grandchildren, and who could scarcely have shown me more kindness had I been one of them; indeed, I was so spoiled by my kind patroness that, but for being frequently with my mother, I might very likely have grown up idle and useless. But I saw so much of her, and of her patients, that the ambition to become a doctress early took firm root in my mind; and I was very young when I began

to make use of the little knowledge I had acquired from watching my mother, upon a great sufferer – my doll. I have noticed always what actors children are. If you leave one alone in a room, how soon it clears a little stage; and, making an audience out of a few chairs and stools, proceeds to act its childish griefs and blandishments upon its doll. So I also made good use of my dumb companion and confidante; and whatever disease was most prevalent in Kingston, be sure my poor doll soon contracted it. I have had many medical triumphs in later days, and saved some valuable lives; but I really think that few have given me more real 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.

Before long it was very natural that I should seek to extend my practice; and so I found other patients in the dogs and cats around me. Many luckless brutes were made to simulate diseases which were raging among their owners, and had forced down their reluctant throats the remedies which I deemed most likely to suit their supposed complaints. And after a time I rose still higher in my ambition; and despairing of finding another human patient, I proceeded to try my simples and essences upon – myself.

When I was about twelve years old I was more frequently at my mother's house, and used to assist her in her duties; very often sharing with her the task of attending upon invalid officers or their

wives, who came to her house from the adjacent camp at Up-Park, or the military station at Newcastle.⁷

As I grew into womanhood, I began to indulge that longing to travel which will never leave me while I have health and vigour. I was never weary of tracing upon an old map the route to England; and never followed with my gaze the stately ships homeward bound without longing to be in them, and see the blue hills of Jamaica fade into the distance.⁸ At that time it seemed most improbable that these girlish wishes should be gratified; but circumstances, which I need not explain, enabled me to accompany some relatives to England while I was yet a very young woman.

I shall never forget my first impressions of London. Of course, I am not going to bore the reader with them; but they are as vivid now as though the year 18 – (I had very nearly let my age slip then) had not been long ago numbered with the past. Strangely enough, some of the most vivid of my recollections are the efforts of the London street-boys to poke fun at my and my companion's complexion. I am only a little brown – a few shades duskier than the brunettes whom you all admire so much; but my companion was very dark, and a fair (if I can apply the term to her) subject for their rude wit. She was hot-tempered, poor thing! and as there were no policemen to awe the boys and turn our servants' heads in those days, our progress through the London streets was sometimes a rather chequered one.

I remained in England, upon the occasion of my first visit, about a year; and then returned to Kingston. Before long I again started for London, bringing with me this time a large stock of West Indian preserves and pickles for sale. After remaining two years here, I again started home; and on the way my life and adventures were very nearly brought to a premature conclusion. Christmas-day had been kept very merrily on board our ship the *Velusia*; and on the following day a fire broke out in the hold. I dare say it would have resisted all the crew's efforts to put it out, had not another ship appeared in sight; upon which the fire quietly allowed itself to be extinguished. Although considerably alarmed, I did not lose my senses; but during the time when the contest between fire and water was doubtful, I entered into an amicable arrangement with the ship's cook, whereby, in consideration of two pounds – which I was not, however, to pay until the crisis arrived – he agreed to lash me on to a large hen-coop.

Before I had been long in Jamaica I started upon other trips, many of them undertaken with a view to gain. Thus I spent some time in New Providence, bringing home with me a large collection of handsome shells and rare shell-work, which created quite a sensation in Kingston, and had a rapid sale; I visited also Hayti⁹ and Cuba. But I hasten onward in my narrative.

Returned to Kingston, I nursed my old indulgent patroness in her last long illness. After she died, in my arms, I went to my mother's house, where I stayed, making myself useful in a variety of ways,

and learning a great deal of Creole medicinal art,¹⁰ until I couldn't find courage to say 'no' to a certain arrangement timidly proposed by Mr Seacole,¹¹ but married him, and took him down to Black River,¹² where we established a store. Poor man! he was very delicate; and before I undertook the charge of him, several doctors had expressed most unfavourable opinions of his health. I kept him alive by kind nursing and attention as long as I could; but at last he grew so ill that we left Black River, and returned to my mother's house at Kingston. Within a month of our arrival there he died. This was my first great trouble, and I felt it bitterly. For days I never stirred – lost to all that passed around me in a dull stupor of despair. If you had told me that the time would soon come when I should remember this sorrow calmly, I should not have believed it possible: and yet it was so. I do not think that we hot-blooded Creoles sorrow less for showing it so impetuously; but I do think that the sharp edge of our grief wears down sooner than theirs who preserve an outward demeanour of calmness, and nurse their woe secretly in their hearts.

CHAPTER II

Struggles for Life – The Cholera in Jamaica – I leave Kingston for the Isthmus of Panama – Chagres, Navy Bay, and Gatun – Life in Panama – Up the River Chagres to Gorgona and Cruces

I had one other great grief to master – the loss of my mother, and then I was left alone to battle with the world as best I might. The struggles which it cost me to succeed in life were sometimes very trying; nor have they ended yet. But I have always turned a bold front to fortune, and taken, and shall continue to take, as my brave friends in the army and navy have shown me how, ‘my hurts before.’ Although it was no easy thing for a widow to make ends meet, I never allowed myself to know what repining or depression was, and so succeeded in gaining not only my daily bread, but many comforts besides, from the beginning. Indeed, my experience of the world – it is not finished yet, but I do not think it will give me reason to change my opinion – leads me to the conclusion that it is

by no means the hard bad world which some selfish people would have us believe it. It may be as my editor¹ says –

That gently comes the world to those

That are cast in gentle mould;²

hinting at the same time, politely, that the rule may apply to me personally. And perhaps he is right, for although I was always a hearty, strong woman – plain-spoken people might say stout – I think my heart is soft enough.

How slowly and gradually I succeeded in life, need not be told at length. My fortunes underwent the variations which befall all. Sometimes I was rich one day, and poor the next. I never thought too exclusively of money, believing rather that we were born to be happy, and that the surest way to be wretched is to prize it overmuch. Had I done so, I should have mourned over many a promising speculation proving a failure, over many a pan of preserves or guava jelly burnt in the making; and perhaps lost my mind when the great fire of 1843, which devastated Kingston, burnt down my poor home.³ As it was, I very nearly lost my life, for I would not leave my house until every chance of saving it had gone, and it was wrapped in flames. But, of course, I set to work again in a humbler way, and rebuilt my house by degrees, and restocked it, succeeding better than before; for I had gained a reputation as a skilful nurse and doctress, and my house was always full of invalid officers and their wives from Newcastle, or the adjacent Up-Park Camp. Sometimes I had a naval or military surgeon under my roof,

from whom I never failed to glean instruction, given, when they learned my love for their profession, with a readiness and kindness I am never likely to forget. Many of these kind friends are alive now. I met with some when my adventures had carried me to the battle-fields of the Crimea;⁴ and to those whose eyes may rest upon these pages I again offer my acknowledgements for their past kindness, which helped me to be useful to my kind in many lands.⁵

And here I may take the opportunity of explaining that it was from a confidence in my own powers, and not at all from necessity, that I remained an unprotected female. Indeed, I do not mind confessing to my reader, in a friendly confidential way, that one of the hardest struggles of my life in Kingston was to resist the pressing candidates for the late Mr Seacole's shoes.

Officers of high rank sometimes took up their abode in my house. Others of inferior rank were familiar with me, long before their bravery, and, alas! too often death, in the Crimea, made them world famous. There were few officers of the 97th to whom Mother Seacole was not well known, before she joined them in front of Sebastopol;⁶ and among the best known was good-hearted, loveable, noble H— V—, ⁷ whose death shocked me so terribly, and with whose useful heroic life the English public have become so familiar. I can hear the ring of his boyish laughter even now.

In the year 1850, the cholera swept over the island of Jamaica with terrible force.⁸ Our idea – perhaps an unfounded one – was, that a steamer from New Orleans was the means of introducing it

into the island.⁹ Anyhow, they sent some clothes on shore to be washed, and poor Dolly Johnson, the washerwoman, whom we all knew, sickened and died of the terrible disease. While the cholera raged, I had but too many opportunities of watching its nature, and from a Dr B—, who was then lodging in my house, received many hints as to its treatment which I afterwards found invaluable.

Early in the same year my brother had left Kingston for the Isthmus of Panama, then the great high-road to and from golden California, where he had established a considerable store and hotel.¹⁰ Ever since he had done so, I had found some difficulty in checking my reviving disposition to roam, and at last persuading myself that I might be of use to him (he was far from strong), I resigned my house into the hands of a cousin, and made arrangements to journey to Chagres.¹¹ Having come to this conclusion, I allowed no grass to grow beneath my feet, but set to work busily, for I was not going to him empty-handed. My house was full for weeks, of tailors, making up rough coats, trousers, etc., and sempstresses cutting out and making shirts. In addition to these, my kitchen was filled with busy people, manufacturing preserves, guava jelly, and other delicacies, while a considerable sum was invested in the purchase of preserved meats, vegetables, and eggs. It will be as well, perhaps, if I explain, in as few words as possible, the then condition of the Isthmus of Panama.

All my readers must know – a glance at the map will show it to those who do not – that between North America and the envied

shores of California stretches a little neck of land, insignificant-looking enough on the map, dividing the Atlantic from the Pacific. By crossing this, the travellers from America avoided a long, weary, and dangerous sea voyage round Cape Horn, or an almost impossible journey by land.

But that journey across the Isthmus, insignificant in distance as it was, was by no means an easy one. It seemed as if nature had determined to throw every conceivable obstacle in the way of those who should seek to join the two great oceans of the world. I have read and heard many accounts of old endeavours to effect this important and gigantic work, and how miserably they failed. It was reserved for the men of our age to accomplish what so many had died in attempting, and iron and steam, twin giants, subdued to man's will, have put a girdle over rocks and rivers, so that travellers can glide as smoothly, if not as inexpensively, over the once terrible Isthmus of Darien,¹² as they can from London to Brighton. Not yet, however, does civilization rule at Panama. The weak sway of the New Granada Republic, despised by lawless men, and respected by none, is powerless to control the refuse of every nation¹³ which meet together upon its soil. Whenever they feel inclined now they overpower the law easily; but seven years ago, when I visited the Isthmus of Panama,¹⁴ things were much worse, and a licence existed, compared to which the present lawless state of affairs is enviable.

When, after passing Chagres, an old-world, tumble-down town, for about seven miles, the steamer reached Navy Bay, I thought I had never seen a more luckless, dreary spot.¹⁵ Three sides of the place were a mere swamp, and the town itself stood upon a sand-reef, the houses being built upon piles,¹⁶ which some one told me rotted regularly every three years. The railway, which now connects the bay with Panama, was then building, and ran, as far as we could see, on piles, connected with the town by a wooden jetty. It seemed as capital a nursery for ague and fever as Death could hit upon anywhere, and those on board the steamer who knew it confirmed my opinion. As we arrived a steady down-pour of rain was falling from an inky sky; the white men who met us on the wharf appeared ghostly and wraith-like, and the very negroes seemed pale and wan. The news which met us did not tempt me to lose any time in getting up the country to my brother. According to all accounts, fever and ague, with some minor diseases, especially dropsy, were having it all their own way at Navy Bay, and, although I only stayed one night in the place, my medicine chest was called into requisition. But the sufferers wanted remedies which I could not give them – warmth, nourishment, and fresh air. Beneath leaky tents, damp huts, and even under broken railway waggons, I saw men dying from sheer exhaustion. Indeed, I was very glad when, with the morning, the crowd, as the Yankees called the bands of pilgrims to and from California, made ready to ascend to Panama.

The first stage of our journey was by railway to Gatun, about twelve miles distant. For the greater portion of that distance the

lines ran on piles, over as unhealthy and wretched a country as the eye could well grow weary of; but, at last, the country improved, and you caught glimpses of distant hills and English-like scenery. Every mile of that fatal railway cost the world thousands of lives.¹⁷ I was assured that its site was marked thickly by graves, and that so great was the mortality among the labourers that three times the survivors struck in a body,¹⁸ and their places had to be supplied by fresh victims from America, tempted by unheard-of rates of wages. It is a gigantic undertaking, and shows what the energy and enterprise of man can accomplish. Everything requisite for its construction, even the timber, had to be prepared in, and brought from, America.

The railway then ran no further than Gatun, and here we were to take water and ascend the River Chagres to Gorgona,¹⁹ the next stage on the way to Cruces, where my brother was. The cars landed us at the bottom of a somewhat steep cutting through a reddish clay, and deposited me and my suite, consisting of a black servant, named 'Mac,' and a little girl, in safety in the midst of my many packages, not altogether satisfied with my prospects; for the rain was falling heavily and steadily, and the Gatun porters were possessing themselves of my luggage with that same avidity which distinguishes their brethren on the pier of Calais or the quays of Pera.²⁰ There are two species of individuals whom I have found alike wherever my travels have carried me – the reader can guess their professions – porters and lawyers.

It was as much as I could do to gather my packages together, sit in the midst with a determined look to awe the hungry crowd around me, and send 'Mac' up the steep slippery bank to report progress. After a little while he returned to say that the river-side was not far off, where boats could be hired for the upward journey. The word given, the porters threw themselves upon my packages; a pitched battle ensued, out of which issued the strongest Spanish Indians,²¹ with their hardly earned prizes, and we commenced the ascent of the clayey bank. Now, although the surveyors of the Darien highways had considerably cut steps up the steep incline, they had become worse than useless, so I floundered about terribly, more than once losing my footing altogether. And as with that due regard to personal appearance, which I have always deemed a duty as well as a pleasure to study, I had, before leaving Navy Bay, attired myself in a delicate light blue dress, a white bonnet prettily trimmed, and an equally chaste shawl, the reader can sympathize with my distress. However, I gained the summit, and after an arduous descent, of a few minutes duration, reached the river-side; in a most piteous plight, however, for my pretty dress, from its contact with the Gatun clay, looked as red as if, in the pursuit of science, I had passed it through a strong solution of muriatic acid.

By the water-side I found my travelling companions arguing angrily with the shrewd boatmen, and bating down their fares. Upon collecting my luggage, I found, as I had expected, that the porters had not neglected the glorious opportunity of robbing a woman, and that several articles were missing. Complaints, I knew,

would not avail me, and stronger measures seemed hazardous and barely advisable in a lawless out-of-the-way spot, where

The simple plan,
That they should take who have the power,
And they should keep who can,²²

seemed universally practised, and would very likely have been defended by its practitioners upon principle.

It was not so easy to hire a boat as I had been led to expect. The large crowd had made the boatmen somewhat exorbitant in their demands, and there were several reasons why I should engage one for my own exclusive use, instead of sharing one with some of my travelling companions. In the first place, my luggage was somewhat bulky; and, in the second place, my experience of travel had not failed to teach me that Americans (even from the Northern States) are always uncomfortable in the company of coloured people, and very often show this feeling in stronger ways than by sour looks and rude words. I think, if I have a little prejudice against our cousins across the Atlantic – and I do confess to a little – it is not unreasonable. I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related – and I am proud of the relationship – to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns. And having this bond, and knowing what slavery is; having seen with my eyes and heard with my ears proof positive enough of its horrors – let others affect to doubt them if they will – is it surprising that I should be somewhat impatient of

the airs of superiority which many Americans have endeavoured to assume over me? Mind, I am not speaking of all. I have met with some delightful exceptions.

At length I succeeded in hiring a boat for the modest consideration of ten pounds, to carry me and my fortunes to Cruces.²³ My boat was far from uncomfortable. Large and flat-bottomed, with an awning, dirty it must be confessed, beneath which swung a hammock, of which I took immediate possession. By the way, the Central Americans should adopt the hammock as their national badge; but for sheer necessity they would never leave it. The master of the boat, the padrone, was a fine tall negro, his crew were four common enough specimens of humanity, with a marked disregard of the prejudices of society with respect to clothing. A dirty handkerchief rolled over the head, and a wisp of something, which might have been linen, bound round the loins, formed their attire. Perhaps, however, the thick coating of dirt which covered them kept them warmer than more civilized clothing, besides being indisputably more economical.

The boat was generally propelled by paddles, but when the river was shallow, poles were used to punt us along, as on English rivers; the black padrone, whose superior position was indicated by the use of decent clothing, standing at the helm, gesticulating wildly, and swearing Spanish oaths with a vehemence that would have put Corporal Trim's comrades in Flanders²⁴ to the blush. Very much shocked, of course, but finding it perfectly useless to remonstrate

with him, I swung myself in my hammock and leisurely watched the river scene.

The river Chagres rolled with considerable force, now between low marshy shores, now narrowing, between steep, thickly wooded banks. It was liable, as are all rivers in hilly districts, to sudden and heavy floods; and although the padrone, on leaving Gatun, had pledged his soul to land me at Cruces that night, I had not been long afloat before I saw that he would forfeit his worthless pledge; for the wind rose to a gale, ruffling the river here and there into a little sea; the rain came down in torrents, while the river rose rapidly, bearing down on its swollen stream trunks of trees, and similar waifs and strays, which it tossed about like a giant in sport, threatening to snag us with its playthings every moment. And when we came to a sheltered reach, and found that the little fleet of boats which had preceded us had laid to there, I came to the conclusion that, stiff, tired, and hungry, I should have to pass a night upon the river Chagres. All I could get to eat was some guavas, which grew wild upon the banks, and then I watched the padrone curl his long body up among my luggage, and listened to the crew, who had rolled together at the bottom of the boat, snore as peacefully as if they slept between fair linen sheets, in the purest of calico night-gear, and the most unexceptionable of nightcaps, until somehow I fell into a troubled, dreamy sleep.

At daybreak we were enabled to pursue our journey, and in a short time reached Gorgona. I was glad enough to go on shore, as

you may imagine. Gorgona was a mere temporary town of bamboo and wood houses, hastily erected to serve as a station for the crowd. In the present rainy season, when the river was navigable up to Cruces, the chief part of the population migrated thither, so that Gorgona was almost deserted, and looked indescribably damp, dirty, and dull. With some difficulty I found a bakery and a butcher's shop. The meat was not very tempting, for the Gorgona butchers did not trouble themselves about joints, but cut the flesh into strips about three inches wide, and of various lengths. These were hung upon rails, so that you bought your meat by the yard, and were spared any difficulty in the choice of joint. I cannot say that I was favourably impressed with this novel and simple way of avoiding trouble, but I was far too hungry to be particular, and buying a strip for a quarter of a real, carried it off to Mac to cook.

Late that afternoon, the padrone and his crew landed me, tired, wretched, and out of temper, upon the miserable wharf of Cruces.

CHAPTER III

My Reception at the Independent Hotel – A Cruces Table
d' Hôte – Life in Cruces – Amusements of the Crowds –
A Novel Four-post Bed

The sympathizing reader, who very likely has been laughing heartily at my late troubles, can fancy that I was looking forward with no little pleasurable anticipation to reaching my brother's cheerful home at Cruces. After the long night spent on board the wretched boat in my stiff, clayey dress, and the hours of fasting, the warmth and good cheer of the Independent Hotel could not fail to be acceptable. My brother met me on the rickety wharf with the kindest welcome in his face, although he did not attempt to conceal a smile at my forlorn appearance, and giving the necessary instructions about my luggage, led the way at once to his house, which was situated at the upper end of the street. A capital site, he said, when the rest of the town was under water – which agreeable variety occurred twice or thrice a year unexpectedly. On our way,

he rather damped my hopes by expressing his fears that he should be unable to provide his sister with the accommodation he could wish. For you see, he said, the crowd from Panama has just come in, meeting your crowd from Navy Bay; and I shouldn' t be at all surprised if very many of them have no better bed than the store floors. But, despite this warning, I was miserably unprepared for the reception that awaited me. To be sure, I found Cruces as like Gorgona, in its dampness, dirt, and confusion, as it well could be; but the crowd from the gold-fields of California had just arrived, having made the journey from Panama on mules, and the street was filled with motley groups in picturesque variety of attire. The hotels were also full of them, while many lounged in the verandahs after their day's journey. Rude, coarse gold-diggers, in gay-coloured shirts, and long, serviceable boots, elbowed, in perfect equality, keen Yankee speculators, as close shaven, neat, and clean on the Isthmus of Panama as in the streets of New York or New Orleans. The women alone kept aloof from each other, and well they might; for, while a very few seemed not ashamed of their sex, it was somewhat difficult to distinguish the majority from their male companions, save by their bolder and more reckless voice and manner. I must say, however, that many of them adopted male attire for the journey across the Isthmus only, as it spared them many compliments which their husbands were often disposed to resent, however flattering they might be to their choice.

Through all these I pressed on, stiff, cold, and hungry, to the Independent Hotel, eagerly anticipating the comforts which awaited

me there. At length we reached it. But, rest! warmth! comfort! – miserable delusions! Picture to yourself, sympathizing reader, a long, low hut, built of rough, unhewn, unplaned logs, filled up with mud and split bamboo; a long, sloping roof and a large verandah, already full of visitors. And the interior: a long room, gaily hung with dirty calico, in stripes of red and white; above it another room, in which the guests slept, having the benefit of sharing in any orgies which might be going on below them, through the broad chinks between the rough, irregular planks which formed its floor. At the further end, a small corner, partitioned roughly off, formed a bar, and around it were shelves laden with stores for the travellers, while behind it was a little room used by my brother as his private apartment; but three female travellers had hired it for their own especial use for the night, paying the enormous sum of £ 10 for so exclusive a luxury. At the entrance sat a black man, taking toll of the comers-in, giving them in exchange for coin or gold-dust (he had a rusty pair of scales to weigh the latter) a dirty ticket, which guaranteed them supper, a night's lodging, and breakfast. I saw all this very quickly, and turned round upon my brother in angry despair.

‘What am I to do? Why did you ever bring me to this place? See what a state I am in – cold, hungry, and wretched. I want to wash, to change my clothes, to eat, to—’

But poor Edward could only shrug his shoulders and shake his head, in answer to my indignant remonstrances. At last he made

room for me in a corner of the crowded bar, set before me some food, and left me to watch the strange life I had come to; and before long I soon forgot my troubles in the novelty of my position.

The difference between the passengers to and from California was very distinguishable. Those bound for the gold country were to a certain extent fresh from civilization, and had scarcely thrown off its control; whereas the homeward bound revelled in disgusting excess of licence. Although many of the women on their way to California showed clearly enough that the life of licence they sought would not be altogether unfamiliar to them, they still retained some appearance of decency in their attire and manner; but in many cases (as I have before said) the female companions of the successful gold-diggers appeared in no hurry to resume the dress or obligations of their sex. Many were clothed as the men were, in flannel shirt and boots; rode their mules in unfeminine fashion, but with much ease and courage; and in their conversation successfully rivalled the coarseness of their lords. I think, on the whole, that those French lady writers¹ who desire to enjoy the privileges of man, with the irresponsibility of the other sex, would have been delighted with the disciples who were carrying their principles into practice in the streets of Cruces.

The chief object of all the travellers seemed to be dinner or supper; I do not know what term they gave it. Down the entire length of the Independent Hotel ran a table covered with a green oilskin cloth, and at proper intervals were placed knives and forks,

plates, and cups and saucers turned down; and when a new-comer received his ticket, and wished to secure his place for the coming repast, he would turn his plate, cup, and saucer up; which mode of reserving seats seemed respected by the rest. And as the evening wore on, the shouting and quarrelling at the doorway in Yankee twang increased momentarily; while some seated themselves at the table, and hammering upon it with the handles of their knives, hallooed out to the excited nigger cooks² to make haste with the slapjack. Amidst all this confusion, my brother was quietly selling shirts, boots, trousers, etc., to the travellers; while above all the din could be heard the screaming voices of his touters without, drawing attention to the good cheer of the Independent Hotel. Over and over again, while I cowered in my snug corner, wishing to avoid the notice of all, did I wish myself safe back in my pleasant home in Kingston; but it was too late to find out my mistake now.

At last the table was nearly filled with a motley assemblage of men and women, and the slapjack, hot and steaming, was carried in by the black cooks. The hungry diners welcomed its advent with a shout of delight; and yet it did not seem particularly tempting. But beyond all doubt it was a capital *pièce de résistance* for great eaters; and before the dinner was over, I saw ample reasons to induce any hotel-keeper to give it his patronage. In truth, it was a thick substantial pancake of flour, salt, and water – eggs were far too expensive to be used in its composition; and by the time the supply had disappeared, I thought the largest appetites must have been stayed. But it was followed by pork, strips of beef stewed with hard

dumplings, hams, great dishes of rice, jugs of molasses and treacle for sauce; the whole being washed down with an abundance of tea and coffee. Chickens and eggs were provided for those who were prepared to pay for these luxuries of Panama life. But, so scarce and expensive were they, that, as I afterwards discovered, those hotel-keepers whose larders were so stocked would hang out a chicken upon their signposts, as a sure attraction for the richer and more reckless diggers; while the touter's cry of 'Eggs and chickens here' was a very telling one. Wine and spirits were also obtainable, but were seldom taken by the Americans, who are abstemious abroad as well as at home.

After dinner the store soon cleared. Gambling was a great attraction; but my brother, dreading its consequences with these hot-brained armed men, allowed none to take place in his hotel. So some lounged away to the faro and monte tables, which were doing a busy trade; others loitered in the verandah, smoking, and looking at the native women, who sang and danced fandangos before them. The whole of the dirty, woe-begone place, which had looked so wretched by the light of day, was brilliantly illuminated now. Night would bring no rest to Cruces, while the crowds were there to be fed, cheated, or amused. Daybreak would find the faro-tables, with their piles of silver and little heaps of gold-dust, still surrounded by haggard gamblers; day-break would gleam sickly upon the tawdry finery of the poor Spanish singers and dancers, whose weary night's work would enable them to live upon the travellers' bounty for the next week or so. These few hours of gaiety and excitement were to

provide the Cruces people with food and clothing for as many days; and while their transitory sun shone, I will do them the justice to say they gathered in their hay busily. In the exciting race for gold, we need not be surprised at the strange groups which line the race-course. All that I wondered at was, that I had not foreseen what I found, or that my rage for change and novelty had closed my ears against the warning voices of those who knew somewhat of the high-road to California; but I was too tired to moralize long, and begged my brother to find me a bed somewhere. He failed to do so completely, and in despair I took the matter in my own hands; and stripping the green oilskin cloth from the rough table – it would not be wanted again until to-morrow's breakfast – pinned up some curtains round the table's legs, and turned in with my little servant beneath it. It was some comfort to know that my brother, his servants, and Mac brought their mattresses, and slept upon it above us. It was a novel bed, and required some slight stretch of the imagination to fancy it a four-poster; but I was too tired to be particular, and slept soundly.

We were up right early on the following morning; and refreshed with my night's sleep, I entered heartily into the preparations for breakfast. That meal over, the homeward-bound passengers took boats *en route* for Gorgona, while those bound for California hired mules for the land journey to Panama. So after a while all cleared away, and Cruces was left to its unhealthy solitude.

CHAPTER IV

An Unwelcome Visitor in Cruces – The Cholera – Success
of the Yellow Doctress – Fearful Scene at the
Mule-owner's – The Burying Parties – The Cholera
attacks me

I do not think I have ever known what it is to despair, or even to despond (if such were my inclination, I have had some opportunities recently), and it was not long before I began to find out the bright side of Cruces life, and enter into schemes for staying there. But it would be a week or so before the advent of another crowd would wake Cruces to life and activity again; and in the meanwhile, and until I could find a convenient hut for my intended hotel, I remained my brother's guest.

But it was destined that I should not be long in Cruces before my medicinal skill and knowledge were put to the test. Before the passengers for Panama had been many days gone, it was found that they had left one of their number behind them, and that one – the

cholera.¹ I believe that the faculty have not yet come to the conclusion that the cholera is contagious, and I am not presumptuous enough to forestal them; but my people have always considered it to be so, and the poor Cruces folks did not hesitate to say that this new and terrible plague had been a fellow-traveller with the Americans from New Orleans or some other of its favoured haunts. I had the first intimation of its unwelcome presence in the following abrupt and unpleasant manner: –

A Spaniard, an old and intimate friend of my brother, had supped with him one evening, and upon returning home had been taken ill, and after a short period of intense suffering had died. So sudden and so mysterious a death gave rise to the rumour that he had been poisoned, and suspicion rested for a time, perhaps not unnaturally, upon my brother, in whose company the dead man had last been. Anxious for many reasons – the chief one, perhaps, the position of my brother – I went down to see the corpse. A single glance at the poor fellow showed me the terrible truth. The distressed face, sunken eyes, cramped limbs, and discoloured shrivelled skin were all symptoms which I had been familiar with very recently; and at once I pronounced the cause of death to be cholera. The Cruces people were mightily angry with me for expressing such an opinion; even my brother, although it relieved him of the odium of a great crime, was as annoyed as the rest. But by twelve o' clock that morning one of the Spaniard's friends was attacked similarly, and the very people who had been most angry with me a few hours previously, came to me now eager for advice. There was no doctor

in Cruces; the nearest approach to one was a little timid dentist, who was there by accident, and who refused to prescribe for the sufferer, and I was obliged to do my best. Selecting from my medicine chest – I never travel anywhere without it – what I deemed necessary, I went hastily to the patient, and at once adopted the remedies I considered fit. It was a very obstinate case, but by dint of mustard emetics, warm fomentations, mustard plasters on the stomach and the back, and calomel,² at first in large then in gradually smaller doses, I succeeded in saving my first cholera patient in Cruces.

For a few days the terrible disease made such slow progress amongst us that we almost hoped it had passed on its way and spared us; but all at once it spread rapidly, and affrighted faces and cries of woe soon showed how fatally the destroyer was at work. And in so great request were my services, that for days and nights together I scarcely knew what it was to enjoy two successive hours' rest.

And here I must pause to set myself right with my kind reader. He or she will not, I hope, think that, in narrating these incidents, I am exalting my poor part in them unduly. I do not deny (it is the only thing indeed that I have to be proud of) that I *am* pleased and gratified when I look back upon my past life, and see times now and then, and places here and there, when and where I have been enabled to benefit my fellow-creatures suffering from ills my skill could often remedy. Nor do I think that the kind reader will

consider this feeling an unworthy one. If it be so, and if, in the following pages, the account of what Providence has given me strength to do on larger fields of action be considered vain or egotistical, still I cannot help narrating them, for my share in them appears to be the one and only claim I have to interest the public ear. Moreover I shall be sadly disappointed, if those years of life which may be still in store for me are not permitted by Providence to be devoted to similar usefulness. 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 greater or higher privilege than to minister to it. After this explanation, I resume more freely the account of my labours in Cruces.

It was scarcely surprising that the cholera should spread rapidly, for fear is its powerful auxiliary, and the Cruces people bowed down before the plague in slavish despair. The Americans and other foreigners in the place showed a brave front, but the natives, constitutionally cowardly, made not the feeblest show of resistance. Beyond filling the poor church, and making the priests bring out into the streets figures of tawdry dirty saints, supposed to possess some miraculous influence which they never exerted, before which they prostrated themselves, invoking their aid with passionate prayers and cries, they did nothing. Very likely the saints would have got the credit of helping them if they had helped themselves; but the poor cowards never stirred a finger to clean out their close, reeking huts, or rid the damp streets of the rotting accumulation of

months. I think their chief reliance was on ‘the yellow woman³ from Jamaica with the cholera medicine.’ Nor was this surprising; for the Spanish doctor, who was sent for from Panama, became nervous and frightened at the horrors around him, and the people soon saw that he was not familiar with the terrible disease he was called upon to do battle with, and preferred trusting to one who was.

It must be understood that many of those who could afford to pay for my services did so handsomely, but the great majority of my patients had nothing better to give their doctress than thanks. The best part of my practice lay amongst the American store and hotel keepers, the worst among the native boatmen and muleteers. These latter died by scores, and among them I saw some scenes of horror I would fain forget, if it were possible. One terrible night, passed with some of them, has often haunted me. I will endeavour to narrate it, and should the reader be supposed to think it highly coloured and doubtful, I will only tell him that, terrible as it seems, I saw almost as fearful scenes on the Crimean peninsula among British men, a few thousand miles only from comfort and plenty.

It was late in the evening when the largest mule-owner in Cruces came to me and implored me to accompany him to his kraal, a short distance from the town, where he said some of his men were dying. One in particular, his head muleteer, a very valuable servant, he was most selfishly anxious for, and, on the way thither, promised me a large remuneration if I should succeed in saving him. Our journey was not a long one, but it rained hard, and the fields were

flooded, so that it took us some time to reach the long, low hut which he called his home. I would rather not see such another scene as the interior of that hut presented. Its roof scarcely sheltered its wretched inmates from the searching rain; its floor was the damp, rank turf, trodden by the mules' hoofs and the muleteers' feet into thick mud. Around, in dirty hammocks, and on the damp floor, were the inmates of this wretched place, male and female, the strong and the sick together, breathing air that nearly choked me, accustomed as I had grown to live in impure atmosphere; for beneath the same roof the mules, more valuable to their master than his human servants, were stabled, their fore-feet locked, and beside them were heaps of saddles, packs, and harness. The groans of the sufferers and the anxiety and fear of their comrades were so painful to hear and witness, that for a few minutes I felt an almost uncontrollable impulse to run out into the stormy night, and flee from this plague-spot. But the weak feeling vanished, and I set about my duty. The mule-owner was so frightened that he did not hesitate to obey orders, and, by my directions, doors and shutters were thrown open, fires were lighted, and every effort made to ventilate the place; and then, with the aid of the frightened women, I applied myself to my poor patients. Two were beyond my skill. Death alone could give them relief. The others I could help. But no words of mine could induce them to bear their terrible sufferings like men. They screamed and groaned, not like women, for few would have been so craven-hearted, but like children; calling, in the intervals of violent pain, upon Jesu, the Madonna, and all the saints of heaven whom

their lives had scandalized. I stayed with them until midnight, and then got away for a little time. But I had not long been quiet, before the mule-master was after me again. The men were worse; would I return with him. The rain was drifting heavily on the thatched roof, as it only does in tropical climates, and I was tired to death; but I could not resist his appeal. He had brought with him a pair of tall, thick boots, in which I was to wade through the flooded fields; and with some difficulty I again reached the kraal. I found the worst cases sinking fast, one of the others had relapsed, while fear had paralysed the efforts of the rest. At last I restored some order; and, with the help of the bravest of the women, fixed up rude screens around the dying men. But no screens could shut out from the others their awful groans and cries for the aid that no mortal power could give them. So the long night passed away; first a deathlike stillness behind one screen, and then a sudden silence behind the other, showing that the fierce battle with death was over, and who had been the victor. And, meanwhile, I sat before the flickering fire, with my last patient in my lap – a poor, little, brown-faced orphan infant, scarce a year old, was dying in my arms, and I was powerless to save it. It may seem strange, but it is a fact, that I thought more of that little child than I did of the men who were struggling for their lives, and prayed very earnestly and solemnly to God to spare it. But it did not please Him to grant my prayer, and towards morning the wee spirit left this sinful world for the home above it had so lately left, and what was mortal of the little infant lay dead in my arms. Then it was that I began to think – how the idea first

arose in my mind I can hardly say – that, if it were possible to take this little child and examine it, I should learn more of the terrible disease which was sparing neither young nor old, and should know better how to do battle with it. I was not afraid to use my baby patient thus. I knew its fled spirit would not reproach me, for I had done all I could for it in life – had shed tears over it, and prayed for it.

It was cold grey dawn, and the rain had ceased, when I followed the man who had taken the dead child away to bury it, and bribed him to carry it by an unfrequented path down to the river-side, and accompany me to the thick retired bush on the opposite bank. Having persuaded him thus much, it was not difficult, with the help of silver arguments to convince him that it would be for the general benefit and his own, if I could learn from this poor little thing the secret inner workings of our common foe; and ultimately he stayed by me, and aided me in my first and last *post mortem* examination. It seems a strange deed to accomplish, and I am sure I could not wield the scalpel or the substitute I then used now, but at that time the excitement, had strung my mind up to a high pitch of courage and determination; and perhaps the daily, almost hourly, scenes of death had made me somewhat callous. I need not linger on this scene, nor give the readers the results of my operation; although novel to me, and decidedly useful, they were what every medical man well knows.

We buried the poor little body beneath a piece of luxuriant turf, and stole back into Cruces like guilty things. But the knowledge I had obtained thus strangely was very valuable to me, and was soon put into practice. But that I dreaded boring my readers, I would fain give them some idea of my treatment of this terrible disease. I have no doubt that at first I made some lamentable blunders, and, may be, lost patients which a little later I could have saved. I know I came across, the other day, some notes of cholera medicines which made me shudder, and I dare say they have been used in their turn and found wanting. The simplest remedies were perhaps the best. Mustard plasters, and emetics, and calomel; the mercury applied externally, where the veins were nearest the surface, were my usual resources. Opium⁴ I rather dreaded, as its effect is to incapacitate the system from making any exertion, and it lulls the patient into a sleep which is often the sleep of death. When my patients felt thirsty, I would give them water in which cinnamon had been boiled.⁵ One stubborn attack succumbed to an additional dose of ten grains of sugar of lead,⁶ mixed in a pint of water, given in doses of a table-spoonful every quarter of an hour. Another patient, a girl, I rubbed over with warm oil, camphor, and spirits of wine.⁷ Above all, I never neglected to apply mustard poultices⁸ to the stomach, spine, and neck, and particularly to keep my patient warm about the region of the heart. Nor did I relax my care when the disease had passed by, for danger did not cease when the great foe was beaten off. The patient was left prostrate; strengthening medicines had to be given cautiously, for fever, often of the brain, would follow. But,

after all, one great conclusion, which my practice in cholera cases enabled me to come to, was the old one, that few constitutions permitted the use of exactly similar remedies, and that the course of treatment which saved one man, would, if persisted in, have very likely killed his brother.

Generally speaking, the cholera showed premonitory symptoms; such as giddiness, sickness, diarrhoea, or sunken eyes and distressed look; but sometimes the substance followed its forecoming shadow so quickly, and the crisis was so rapid, that there was no time to apply any remedies. An American carpenter complained of giddiness and sickness – warning signs – succeeded so quickly by the worst symptoms of cholera, that in less than an hour his face became of an indigo tint,⁹ his limbs were doubled up horribly with violent cramps, and he died.

To the convicts – and if there could be grades of wretchedness in Cruces, these poor creatures were the lowest – belonged the terrible task of burying the dead; a duty to which they showed the utmost repugnance. Not unfrequently, at some fancied alarm, they would fling down their burden, until at last it became necessary to employ the soldiers to see that they discharged the task allotted to them. Ordinarily, the victims were buried immediately after death, with such imperfect rites of sepulture as the harassed frightened priests would pay them, and very seldom was time afforded by the authorities to the survivors to pay those last offices to the departed which a Spaniard and a Catholic considers so important. Once I was

present at a terrible scene in the house of a New Granada grandee, whose pride and poverty justified many of the old Spanish proverbs levelled at his caste.

It was when the cholera was at its height, and yet he had left – perhaps on important business – his wife and family, and gone to Panama for three days. On the day after his departure, the plague broke out in his house, and my services were required promptly. I found the miserable household in terrible alarm, and yet confining their exertions to praying to a coarse black priest in a black surplice, who, kneeling beside the couch of the Spanish lady, was praying (in his turn) to some favourite saint in Cruces. The sufferer was a beautiful woman, suffering from a violent attack of cholera, with no one to help her, or even to take from her arms the poor little child they had allowed her to retain. In her intervals of comparative freedom from pain, her cries to the Madonna and her husband were heart-rending to hear. I had the greatest difficulty to rout the stupid priest and his as stupid worshippers, and do what I could for the sufferer. It was very little, and before long the unconscious Spaniard was a widower. Soon after, the authorities came for the body. I never saw such passionate anger and despair as were shown by her relatives and servants, old and young, at the intrusion – rage that she, who had been so exalted in life, should go to her grave like the poor, poor clay she was. Orders were given to bar the door against the convict gang who had come to discharge their unpleasant duty, and while all were busy decking out the unconscious corpse in gayest attire, none paid any heed to me bending over the fire with

the motherless child, journeying fast to join its dead parent. I had made more than one effort to escape, for I felt more sick and wretched than at any similar scene of woe; but finding exit impossible, I turned my back upon them, and attended to the dying child. Nor did I heed their actions until I heard orders given to admit the burial party, and then I found that they had dressed the corpse in rich white satin, and decked her head with flowers.

The agitation and excitement of this scene had affected me as no previous horror had done, and I could not help fancying that symptoms were showing themselves in me with which I was familiar enough in others. Leaving the dying infant to the care of its relatives (when the Spaniard returned he found himself widowed and childless), I hastened to my brother's house. When there, I felt an unpleasant chill come over me, and went to bed at once. Other symptoms followed quickly, and, before nightfall, I knew full well that my turn had come at last, and that the cholera had attacked me, perhaps its greatest foe in Cruces.

CHAPTER V

American Sympathy – I take an Hotel in Cruces – My
Customers – Lola Montes – Miss Hayes and the Bishop –
Gambling in Cruces – Quarrels amongst the Travellers –
New Granadan Military – The Thieves of Cruces –
A Narrow Escape

When it became known that their ‘yellow doctress’ had the cholera, I must do the people of Cruces the justice to say that they gave her plenty of sympathy, and would have shown their regard for her more actively, had there been any occasion. Indeed, when I most wanted quiet, it was difficult to keep out the sympathizing Americans and sorrowing natives who came to inquire after me; and who, not content with making their inquiries, and leaving their offerings of blankets, flannel, etc., must see with their own eyes what chance the yellow woman had of recovery. The rickety door of my little room could never be kept shut for many minutes together. A visitor would open it silently, poke his long face in with an expression of sympathy that almost made me laugh in spite of my

pain, draw it out again, between the narrowest possible opening, as if he were anxious to admit as little air as he could; while another would come in bodily, and after looking at me curiously and inquisitively, as he would eye a horse or nigger he had some thoughts of making a bid for, would help to carpet my room, with the result perhaps of his meditations,¹ and saying, gravely, 'Air you better, Auntie Seacole, now? Isn't there a something we can du for you, ma' am?' would as gravely give place to another and another yet, until I was almost inclined to throw something at them, or call them bad names, like the Scotch king does the ghosts in the play.* But, fortunately, the attack was a very mild one, and by the next day all danger had gone by, although I still felt weak and exhausted.

After a few weeks, the first force of the cholera was spent, and although it lingered with us, as though loath to leave so fine a resting-place, for some months, it no longer gave us much alarm; and before long, life went on as briskly and selfishly as ever with the Cruces survivors, and the terrible past was conveniently forgotten. Perhaps it is so everywhere; but the haste with which the Cruces people buried their memory seemed indecent. Old houses found new masters; the mules new drivers; the great Spaniard chose another pretty woman, and had a grand, poor, dirty wedding, and was married by the same lazy black priest who had buried his wife, dead a few months back; and very likely they would all have hastened as quickly to forget their doctress, had circumstances permitted them: but every now and then one of them sickened and died of the old complaint; and the reputation I had established

founded for me a considerable practice. The Americans in the place gladly retained me as their medical attendant, and in one way or other gave me plenty to do; but, in addition to this, I determined to follow my original scheme of keeping an hotel in Cruces.

Right opposite my brother's Independent Hotel there was a place to let which it was considered I could adapt to my purpose. It was a mere tumble down hut, with wattled sides, and a rotten thatched roof, containing two rooms, one small enough to serve as a bedroom. For this charming residence – very openly situated, and well ventilated – twenty pounds a month was considered a fair and by no means exorbitant rent. And yet I was glad to take possession of it; and in a few days had hung its rude walls with calico of gayest colour in stripes, with an exuberance of fringes, frills, and bows (the Americans love show dearly), and prepared it to accommodate fifty dinner guests. I had determined that it should be simply a *table d'hôte*, and that I would receive no lodgers. Once, and once only, I relaxed this rule in favour of two American women, who sent me to sleep by a lengthy quarrel of words, woke me in the night to witness its crisis in a fisticuff *duello*, and left in the morning, after having taken a fancy to some of my moveables which were most easily removeable. I had on my staff my black servant Mac, the little girl I have before alluded to, and a native cook. I had had many opportunities of seeing how my brother conducted his business; and adopted his tariff of charges. For an ordinary dinner my charge was four shillings; eggs and chickens were, as I have before said, distinct luxuries, and fetched high prices.

Four crowds generally passed through Cruces every month. In these were to be found passengers to and from Chili, Peru, and Lima, as well as California and America. The distance from Cruces to Panama was not great – only twenty miles, in fact; but the journey, from the want of roads and the roughness of the country, was a most fatiguing one. In some parts – as I found when I made the journey, in company with my brother – it was almost impassable; and for more than half the distance, three miles an hour was considered splendid progress. The great majority of the travellers were rough, rude men, of dirty, quarrelsome habits; the others were more civilized and more dangerous. And it was not long before I grew very tired of life in Cruces, although I made money rapidly, and pressed my brother to return to Kingston. Poor fellow! it would have been well for him had he done so; for he stayed only to find a grave on the Isthmus of Panama.³

The company at my *table d'ôte* was not over select; and it was often very difficult for an unprotected female to manage them, although I always did my best to put them in good humour. Among other comforts, I used to hire a black barber, for the rather large consideration of two pounds, to shave my male guests. You can scarcely conceive the pleasure and comfort an American feels in a clean chin; and I believe my barber attracted considerable custom to the British Hotel at Cruces. I had a little outhouse erected for his especial convenience; and there, well provided with towels, and armed with plenty of razors, a brush of extraordinary size, and a foaming sea of lather, José shaved the new-comers. The rivalry to

get within reach of his huge brush was very great; and the threats used by the neglected, when the grinning black was considered guilty of any interested partiality, were of the fiercest description.

This duty over, they and their coarser female companions – many of them well known to us, for they travelled backwards and forwards across the Isthmus, hanging on to the foolish gold-finders – attacked the dinner, very often with great lack of decency. It was no use giving them carving-knives and forks, for very often they laid their own down to insert a dirty hairy hand into a full dish; while the floor soon bore evidences of the great national American habit of expectoration. Very often quarrels would arise during the progress of dinner; and more than once I thought the knives, which they nearly swallowed at every mouthful, would have been turned against one another. It was, I always thought, extremely fortunate that the reckless men rarely stimulated their excitable passions with strong drink. Tea and coffee were the common beverages of the Americans; Englishmen, and men of other nations, being generally distinguishable by their demand for wine and spirits. But the Yankee's capacity for swilling tea and coffee was prodigious. I saw one man drink ten cups of coffee; and finding his appetite still unsatisfied, I ran across to my brother for advice. There was a merry twinkle in his eyes as he whispered, 'I always put in a good spoonful of salt after the sixth cup. It chokes them off admirably.'

It was no easy thing to avoid being robbed and cheated by the less scrupulous travellers; although I think it was only the' cutest⁴

Yankee who stood any fair chance of outwitting me. I remember an instance of the biter bit, which I will narrate, hoping it may make my reader laugh as heartily as its recollection makes me. He was a tall, thin Yankee, with a furtive glance of the eyes, and an amazing appetite, which he seemed nothing loath to indulge: his appetite for eggs especially seemed unbounded. Now, I have more than once said how expensive eggs were; and this day they happened to be eightpence apiece. Our plan was to charge every diner according to the number of shells found upon his plate. Now, I noticed how eagerly my thin guest attacked my eggs, and marvelled somewhat at the scanty pile of shells before him. My suspicions once excited, I soon fathomed my Yankee friend's dodge. As soon as he had devoured the eggs, he conveyed furtively the shells beneath the table, and distributed them impartially at the feet of his companions. I gave my little black maid a piece of chalk, and instructions; and creeping under the table, she counted the scattered shells, and chalked the number on the tail of his coat. And when he came up to pay his score, he gave up his number of eggs in a loud voice; and when I contradicted him, and referred to the coat-tale⁵ in corroboration of *my* score, there was a general laugh against him. But there was a nasty expression in his cat-like eyes, and an unpleasant allusion to mine, which were not agreeable, and dissuaded me from playing any more practical jokes upon the Yankees.

I followed my brother's example closely, and forbade all gambling in my hotel. But I got some idea of its fruits from the cases brought

to me for surgical treatment from the faro and monte tables. Gambling at Cruces, and on the Isthmus generally, was a business by which money was wormed out of the gold-seekers and gold-finders. No attempt was made to render it attractive, as I have seen done elsewhere. The gambling-house was often plainer than our hotels; and but for the green tables, with their piles of money and gold-dust, watched over by a well-armed determined banker, and the eager gamblers around, you would not know that you were in the vicinity of a spot which the English at home designate by a very decided and extreme name. A Dr Casey – everybody familiar with the Americans knows their fondness for titles – owned the most favoured table in Cruces; and this, although he was known to be a reckless and unscrupulous villain. Most of them knew that he had been hunted out of San Francisco; and at that time – years before the Vigilance Committee commenced their labours of purification⁶ – a man too bad for that city must have been a prodigy of crime: and yet, and although he was violent-tempered, and had a knack of referring the slightest dispute to his revolver; his table was always crowded; probably because – the greatest rogues have some good qualities – he was honest in his way, and played fairly.

Occasionally some distinguished passengers passed on the upward and downward tides of rascality and ruffianism, that swept periodically through Cruces. Came one day, Lola Montes, in the full zenith of her evil fame, bound for California, with a strange suite.⁷ A good-looking, bold woman, with fine, bad eyes, and a determined bearing; dressed ostentatiously in perfect male attire, with shirt-

collar turned down over a velvet lapelled coat, richly worked shirt-front, black hat, French unmentionables, and natty, polished boots with spurs. She carried in her hand a handsome riding-whip, which she could use as well in the streets of Cruces as in the towns of Europe; for an impertinent American, presuming – perhaps not unnaturally – upon her reputation, laid hold jestingly of the tails of her long coat, and as a lesson received a cut across his face that must have marked him for some days. I did not wait to see the row that followed, and was glad when the wretched woman rode off on the following morning. A very different notoriety followed her at some interval of time – Miss Catherine Hayes, on her successful singing tour,⁸ who disappointed us all by refusing to sing at Cruces; and after her came an English bishop from Australia, who need have been a member of the church militant to secure his pretty wife from the host of admirers she had gained during her day's journey from Panama.

Very quarrelsome were the majority of the crowds, holding life cheap, as all bad men strangely do – equally prepared to take or lose it upon the slightest provocation. Few tales of horror in Panama could be questioned on the ground of improbability. Not less partial were many of the natives of Cruces to the use of the knife; preferring, by the way, to administer sly stabs in the back, when no one was by to see the dastard blow dealt. Terribly bullied by the Americans were the boatmen and muleteers, who were reviled, shot, and stabbed by these free and independent filibusters, who would fain whop all creation abroad as they do their slaves at home.⁹

Whenever any Englishmen were present, and in a position to interfere with success, this bullying was checked; and they found, instead of the poor Spanish Indians, foemen worthy of their steel or lead. I must do them credit to say, that they were never loath to fight any one that desired that passing excitement, and thought little of ending their journey of life abruptly at the wretched wayside town of Cruces. It very often happened so, and over many a hasty head and ready hand have I seen the sod roughly pressed down, their hot hearts stilled suddenly in some senseless quarrel. And so in time I grew to have some considerable experience in the treatment of knife and gun-shot wounds.

One night I heard a great noise outside my window, and on rising found a poor boatman moaning piteously, and in a strange jumble of many languages begging me to help him. At first I was afraid to open the door, on account of the noisy mob which soon joined him, for villainy was very shrewd at Cruces; but at last I admitted him, and found that the poor wretch's ears had been cruelly split by some hasty citizen of the United States. I stitched them up as well as I could, and silenced his cries. And at any time, if you happened to be near the river when a crowd were arriving or departing, your ears would be regaled with a choice chorus of threats, of which ear-splitting, eye-gouging, cow-hiding, and the application of revolvers were the mildest. Against the negroes, of whom there were many in the Isthmus, and who almost invariably filled the municipal offices, and took the lead in every way, the Yankees had a strong prejudice; but it was wonderful to see how freedom and equality elevate 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.

When more than ordinary squabbles occurred in the street or at the gambling-tables, the assistance of the soldier-police of New Granada was called in, and the affair sometimes assumed the character of a regular skirmish. The soldiers – I wish I could speak better of them – were a dirty, cowardly, indolent set, more prone to use their knives than their legitimate arms, and bore old rusty muskets, and very often marched unshod. Their officers were in outward appearance a few shades superior to the men they commanded, but, as respects military proficiency, were their equals. Add to this description of their *personnel* the well-known fact, that you might commit the grossest injustice, and could obtain the simplest justice only by lavish bribery, and you may form some idea of our military protectors.

Very practised and skilful in thieving were the native population of Cruces - I speak of the majority, and except the negroes – always more inclined to do a dishonest night's labour at great risk, than an honest day's work for fair wages; for justice was always administered strictly to the poor natives – it was only the foreigners who could evade it or purchase exemption. Punishment was severe; and in extreme cases the convicts were sent to Carthagena,¹⁰ there to suffer imprisonment of a terrible character. Indeed, from what I

heard of the New Granada prisons, I thought no other country could match them, and continued to think so until I read how the ingenuity in cruelty of his Majesty the King of Naples¹¹ put the torturers of the New Granada Republic to the blush.

I generally avoided claiming the protection of the law whilst on the Isthmus, for I found it was – as is the case in civilized England from other causes – rather an expensive luxury. Once only I took a thief caught in the act before the *alcalde*, and claimed the administration of justice. The court-house was a low bamboo shed, before which some dirty Spanish-Indian soldiers were lounging; and inside, the *alcalde*, a negro, was reclining in a dirty hammock, smoking coolly, hearing evidence, and pronouncing judgment upon the wretched culprits, who were trembling before his dusky majesty. I had attended him while suffering from an attack of cholera, and directly he saw me he rose from his hammock, and received me in a ceremonious, grand manner, and gave orders that coffee should be brought to me. He had a very pretty white wife, who joined us; and then the *alcalde* politely offered me a *cigarito* – having declined which, he listened to my statement with great attention. All this, however, did not prevent my leaving the necessary fee in furtherance of justice, nor his accepting it. Its consequence was, that the thief, instead of being punished as a criminal, was ordered to pay me the value of the stolen goods; which, after weeks of hesitation and delay, she eventually did, in pearls, combs, and other curiosities.

Whenever an American was arrested by the New Granada authorities, justice had a hard struggle for the mastery, and rarely obtained it. Once I was present at the court-house, when an American was brought in heavily ironed, charged with having committed a highway robbery – if I may use the term where there were no roads – on some travellers from Chili. Around the frightened soldiers swelled an angry crowd of brother Americans, abusing and threatening the authorities in no measured terms, all of them indignant that a nigger should presume to judge one of their countrymen. At last their violence so roused the sleepy alcalde, that he positively threw himself from his hammock, laid down his cigarito, and gave such very determined orders to his soldiers that he succeeded in checking the riot. Then, with an air of decision that puzzled everybody, he addressed the crowd, declaring angrily, that since the Americans came the country had known no peace, that robberies and crimes of every sort had increased, and ending by expressing his determination to make strangers respect the laws of the Republic, and to retain the prisoner; and if found guilty, punish him as he deserved. The Americans seemed too astonished at the audacity of the black man, who dared thus to beard them, to offer any resistance; but I believe that the prisoner was allowed ultimately to escape.

I once had a narrow escape from the thieves of Cruces. I had been down to Chagres for some stores, and returning, late in the evening, too tired to put away my packages, had retired to rest at once. My little maid, who was not so fatigued as I was, and slept more lightly,

woke me in the night to listen to a noise in the thatch, at the further end of the store; but I was so accustomed to hear the half-starved mules of Cruces munching my thatch, that I listened lazily for a few minutes, and then went unsuspectingly into another heavy sleep. I do not know how long it was before I was again awoken by the child's loud screams and cries of 'Hombro – landro';¹² and sure enough, by the light of the dying fire, I saw a fellow stealing away with my dress, in the pocket of which was my purse. I was about to rush forward, when the fire gleamed on a villainous-looking knife in his hand; so I stood still, and screamed loudly, hoping to arouse my brother over the way. For a moment the thief seemed inclined to silence me, and had taken a few steps forward, when I took up an old rusty horse-pistol which my brother had given me that I might look determined, and snatching down the can of ground coffee, proceeded to prime it, still screaming as loudly as my strong lungs would permit, until the rascal turned tail and stole away through the roof. The thieves usually buried their spoil like dogs, as they were; but this fellow had only time to hide it behind a bush, where it was found on the following morning, and claimed by me.

CHAPTER VI

Migration to Gorgona – Farewell dinners and Speeches –
A Building Speculation – Life in Gorgona – Sympathy
with American Slaves – Dr Casey in Trouble – Floods and
Fires – Yankee Independence and Freedom

I remained at Cruces until the rainy months came to an end, and the river grew too shallow to be navigable by the boats higher up than Gorgona; and then we all made preparations for a flitting to that place. But before starting, it appeared to be the custom for the store and hotel keepers to exchange parting visits, and to many of these parties I, in virtue of my recent services to the community, received invitations. The most important social meeting took place on the anniversary of the declaration of American independence,¹ at my brother's hotel, where a score of zealous Americans dined most heartily – as they never fail to do; and, as it was an especial occasion, drank champagne liberally at twelve shillings a bottle. And, after the usual patriotic toasts had been duly honoured, they

proposed ‘the ladies,’ with an especial reference to myself, in a speech which I thought worth noting down at the time. The spokesman was a thin, sallow-looking American, with a pompous and yet rapid delivery, and a habit of turning over his words with his quid before delivering them, and clearing his mouth after each sentence, perhaps to make room for the next. I shall beg the reader to consider that the blanks express the time expended on this operation. He dashed into his work at once, rolling up and getting rid of his sentences as he went on: –

‘Well, gentlemen, I expect you’ll all support me in a drinking of this toast that I du —. Aunty Seacole, gentlemen; I give you, Aunty Seacole —. We can’t du less for her, after what she’s done for us —, when the cholera was among us, gentlemen —, not many months ago —. So, I say, God bless the best yaller woman He ever made —, from Jamaica, gentlemen —, from the Isle of Springs² – Well, gentlemen, I expect there are only tu 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 —, that Providence made her a yaller woman. I calculate, gentlemen, you’re all as vexed as I am that she’s not wholly white —, but I du reckon on your rejoicing with me that she’s so many shades removed from being entirely black³ —; and I guess, if we could bleach her by any means we would —, and thus make her as acceptable in any company as she deserves to be —. Gentlemen, I give you Aunty Seacole!’

And so the orator sat down amidst much applause. It may be supposed that I did not need much persuasion to return thanks, burning, as I was, to tell them my mind on the subject of my colour. Indeed, if my brother had not checked me, I should have given them my thoughts somewhat too freely. As it was, I said: –

‘Gentlemen, – I return you my best thanks for your kindness in drinking my health. As for what I have done in Cruces, Providence evidently made me to be useful, and I can’t help it. But, I must say, that I don’t altogether appreciate your friend’s kind wishes with respect to my complexion. If it had been as 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. As to the society which the process might gain me admission into, all I can say is, that, judging from the specimens I have met with here and elsewhere, I don’t think that I shall lose much by being excluded from it. So, gentlemen, I drink to you and the general reformation of American manners.’

I do not think that they altogether admired my speech, but I was a somewhat privileged person, and they laughed at it good-naturedly enough. Perhaps (for I was not in the best humour myself) I should have been better pleased if they had been angry.

Rightly, I ought to have gone down to Gorgona a few weeks before Cruces was deserted, and secured an hotel; but I did not give up all hope of persuading my brother to leave the Isthmus until the very

last moment, and then, of course, a suitable house was not to be hired in Gorgona for love or money. Seeing his fixed determination to stay, I consented to remain with him, for he was young and often ill, and set hard to work to settle myself somewhere. With the aid of an old Jamaica friend, who had settled at Gorgona, I at last found a miserable little hut for sale, and bought it for a hundred dollars. It consisted of one room only, and was, in its then condition, utterly unfit for my purpose; but I determined to set to work and build on to it – by no means the hazardous speculation in Gorgona, where bricks and mortar are unknown, that it is in England. The alcalde's permission to make use of the adjacent ground was obtained for a moderate consideration, and plenty of material was procurable from the opposite bank of the river. An American, whom I had cured of the cholera at Cruces, lent me his boat, and I hired two or three natives to cut down and shape the posts and bamboo poles. Directly these were raised, Mac and my little maid set to work and filled up the spaces between them with split bamboo canes and reeds, and before long my new hotel was ready to be roofed. The building process was simple enough, and I soon found myself in possession of a capital dining-room some thirty feet in length, which was gaily hung with coloured calico, concealing all defects of construction, and lighted with large oil lamps; a store-room, bar, and a small private apartment for ladies. Altogether, although I had to pay my labourers four shillings a day, the whole building did not cost me more than my brother paid for three months' rent of his hotel. I gave the travelling world to understand that I intended to devote

my establishment principally to the entertainment of ladies, and the care of those who might fall ill on the route, and I found the scheme answer admirably. And yet, although the speculation paid well, I soon grew as weary of my life in Gorgona as I had been at Cruces; and when I found my brother proof against all persuasion to quit the Isthmus, I began to entertain serious thoughts of leaving him.

Nor was it altogether my old roving inclination which led me to desire a change, although I dare say it had something to do with it. My present life was not agreeable for a woman with the least delicacy or refinement; and of female society I had none. Indeed, the females who crossed my path were about as unpleasant specimens of the fair sex as one could well wish to avoid. With very few exceptions, those who were not bad were very disagreeable, and as the majority came from the Southern States of America, and showed an instinctive repugnance against any one whose countenance claimed for her kindred with their slaves, my position was far from a pleasant one. Not that it ever gave me any annoyance; they were glad of my stores and comforts, I made money out of their wants; nor do I think our bond of connection was ever closer; only this, if any of them came to me sick and suffering (I say this out of simple justice to myself), I forgot everything, except that she was my sister, and that it was my duty to help her.

I may have before said that the citizens of the New Granada Republic had a strong prejudice against all Americans. It is not difficult to assign a cause for this. In the first place, many of the

negroes, fugitive from the Southern States, had sought refuge in this and the other States of Central America, where every profession was open to them; and as they were generally superior men – evinced perhaps by their hatred of their old condition and their successful flight – they soon rose to positions of eminence in New Granada. In the priesthood, in the army, in all municipal offices, the self-liberated negroes were invariably found in the foremost rank; and the people, for some reason – perhaps because they recognized in them superior talents for administration – always respected them more than, and preferred them to, their native rulers. So that, influenced naturally by these freed slaves, who bore themselves before their old masters bravely and like men, the New Granada people were strongly prejudiced against the Americans. And in the second and third places, they feared their quarrelsome, bullying habits – be it remembered that the crowds to California were of the lowest sorts, many of whom have since fertilized Cuban and Nicaraguan soil – and dreaded their schemes for annexation.⁴ To such an extent was this amusingly carried, that when the American Railway Company took possession of Navy Bay, and christened it Aspinwall, after the name of their Chairman,⁵ the native authorities refused to recognize their right to name any portion of the Republic, and pertinaciously returned all letters directed to Aspinwall, with ‘no such place known’ marked upon them in the very spot for which they were intended. And, in addition to this, the legal authorities refused to compel any defendant to appear who was described as of

Aspinwall, and put every plaintiff out of court who described himself as residing in that unrecognized place.

Under these circumstances, my readers can easily understand that when any Americans crossed the Isthmus, accompanied by their slaves, the Cruces and Gorgona people were restlessly anxious to whisper into their ears offers of freedom and hints how easy escape would be. Nor were the authorities at all inclined to aid in the recapture of a runaway slave. So that, as it was necessary for the losers to go on with the crowd, the fugitive invariably escaped. It is one of the maxims of the New Granada constitution – as it is, I believe, of the English – that on a slave touching its soil his chains fall from him.⁶ Rather than irritate so dangerous a neighbour as America, this rule was rarely supported; but I remember the following instance of its successful application.

A young American woman, whose character can be best described by the word ‘vicious,’ fell ill at Gorgona, and was left behind by her companions under the charge of a young negro, her slave, whom she treated most inhumanly, as was evinced by the poor girl’s frequent screams when under the lash. One night her cries were so distressing, that Gorgona could stand it no longer, but broke into the house and found the chattel bound hand and foot, naked, and being severely lashed. Despite the threats and astonishment of the mistress, they were both carried off on the following morning, before the alcalde, himself a man of colour, and of a very humane disposition. When the particulars of the case were laid before him,

he became strongly excited, and called upon the woman to offer an explanation of her cruelty. She treated it with the coolest unconcern – ‘The girl was her property, worth so many dollars, and a child at New Orleans; had misbehaved herself, and been properly corrected. The alcalde must be drunk or a fool, or both together, to interfere between an American and her property.’⁷ Her coolness vanished, however, when the alcalde turned round to the girl and told her that she was free to leave her mistress when she liked; and when she heard the irrepressible cheering of the crowded court-hut at the alcalde’s humanity and boldness, and saw the slave’s face flush with delight at the judge’s words, she became terribly enraged; made use of the most fearful threats, and would have wreaked summary vengeance on her late chattel had not the clumsy soldiery interfered. Then, with demoniac refinement of cruelty, she bethought herself of the girl’s baby at New Orleans still in her power, and threatened most horrible torture to the child if its mother dared to accept the alcalde’s offer.

The poor girl trembled and covered her face with her hands, as though to shut out some fearful sight, and, I think, had we not persuaded her to the contrary, that she would have sacrificed her newly won freedom for the child’s sake. But we knew very well that when the heat of passion had subsided, the threatener would be too ‘cute to injure her own property; and at once set afloat a subscription for the purchase of the child. The issue of the tale I do not know, as the woman was very properly removed into the interior of the country.

Life at Gorgona resembled life at Cruces so nearly that it does not need a separate description. Down with the store and hotel keepers came the muleteers and mules, porters and hangers-on, idlers and thieves, gamblers and dancing women; and soon the monte-tables were fitted up, and plying their deadly trade; and the dancers charmed the susceptible travellers as successfully in the dirty streets of Gorgona as they had previously done in the unwholesome precincts of Cruces. And Dr Casey was very nearly getting himself into serious trouble, from too great a readiness to use his revolver. Still, he had a better excuse for bloodshed this time than might have been found for his previous breaches of the sixth commandment.⁸ Among the desperadoes who frequented his gambling-hut, during their short stay in Gorgona, was conceived the desperate plan of putting out the lights, and upsetting Casey's table – trusting in the confusion to carry off the piles of money upon it. The first part of their programme was successfully carried out; but the second was frustrated by the Doctor promptly firing his revolver into the dark, and hitting an unoffending boy in the hip. And at this crisis the Gorgona police entered, carried off all the parties they could lay hands upon (including the Doctor) to prison, and brought the wounded boy to me.

On the following morning came a most urgent request that I would visit the imprisoned Doctor. I found him desperately angry, but somewhat nervous too, for the alcalde was known to be no friend to the Americans, owed Casey more than one grudge, and had shown recently a disposition to enforce the laws.

‘I say, Mrs Seacole, how’s that — boy?’

‘Oh, Dr Casey, how could you shoot the poor lad, and now call him bad names, as though he’d injured you? He is very ill indeed – may die; so I advise you to think seriously of your position.’

‘But, Madame Seacole’ (this in a very altered tone), ‘*you’ll* surely help me? *you’ll* surely tell the alcalde that the wound’s a slight one? He’s a friend of yours, and will let me out of this hole. Come, Madame Seacole, you’ll never leave me to be murdered by these bloodthirsty savages?’

‘What can I do or say, Dr Casey? I must speak the truth, and the ball is still in the poor lad’s hip,’ I answered, for I enjoyed the fellow’s fear too much to help him. However, he sent some of his friends to the boy’s father, and bribed him to take the lad from my care, and send him to Navy Bay, to a surgeon there. Of course, he never returned to prosecute Dr Casey; and he was left with the alcalde only to deal with, who, although he hated the man, could not resist his money, and so set him free.

Gorgona, lying lower than Cruces, its inhabitants more frequently enjoyed the excitement of a flood. After heavy rains, the river would rise so rapidly that in a few hours the chief part of the place would be under water. On such occasions the scene was unusually exciting. As the water crept up the street, the frightened householders kept removing their goods and furniture to higher ground; while here and there, where the waters had surrounded them unawares, boats were sent to their rescue. The houses, not made to resist much wind

or water, often gave way, and were carried down the Chagres. Meanwhile, the thieves were the busiest – the honest folks, forgetting the true old adage, ‘God helps those who help themselves,’⁹ confining their exertions to bringing down their favourite saints to the water’s edge, and invoking their interposition.

Fortunately my hotel was at the upper end of the town, where the floods had been rarely known to extend; and although there was a sufficient chance of the water reaching me to compel me to have all my stores, etc., ready packed for removal, I escaped. Some distressing losses occurred. A Frenchman, a near neighbour, whose house was surrounded by the waters before he could remove his goods, grew so frantic at the loss, that he obstinately refused to quit his falling house; and some force had to be used before they could save his life.

Scarcely had the ravages of the last flood been repaired when fire marked Gorgona for its prey. The conflagration began at a store by the river-side; but it spread rapidly, and before long all Gorgona was in danger. The town happened to be very full that night, two crowds having met there, and there was great confusion; but at last the lazy soldier-police, aided by the Americans, succeeded in pulling down some old crazy huts, and checking the fire’s progress. The travellers were in sore plight, many of them being reduced to sleep upon their luggage, piled in the drenched streets. My hotel had some interesting inmates, for a poor young creature, borne in from one of the burning houses, became a mother during the night; and a stout

little lassie opened its eyes upon this waesome world during the excitement and danger of a Gorgona conflagration.

Shortly after this, tired to death of life in Panama, I handed over my hotel to my brother, and returned to Kingston. On the way thither I experienced another instance of American politeness, which I cannot help recording; first reminding my readers of what I have previously said of the character of the Californian travellers. Anxious to get home quickly, I took my passage in the first steamer that left Navy Bay – an American one; and late in the evening said farewell to the friends I had been staying with, and went on board. A very kind friend, an American merchant, doing a large business at Navy Bay, had tried hard to persuade me to delay my journey until the English company's steamer called; without, however, giving any good reasons for his wish. So, with Mac and my little maid, I passed through the crowd of female passengers on deck, and sought the privacy of the saloon. Before I had been long there, two ladies came to me, and in their cool, straightforward manner, questioned me.

‘Where air you going?’

‘To Kingston.’

‘And how air you going?’

‘By sea.’

‘Don’t be impertinent, yaller woman. By what conveyance air you going?’

‘By this steamer, of course. I’ve paid for my passage.’

They went away with this information; and in a short time eight or nine others came and surrounded me, asking the same questions. My answers – and I was very particular – raised quite a storm of uncomplimentary remarks.

‘Guess a nigger woman don’t go along with us in this saloon,’ said one. ‘I never travelled with a nigger yet, and I expect I shan’;shan begin now,’ said another; while some children had taken my little servant Mary in hand, and were practising on her the politenesses which their parents were favouring me with – only, as is the wont of children, they were crueller. I cannot help it if I shock my readers; but the *truth* is, that one positively spat in poor little Mary’s frightened yellow face.

At last an old American lady came to where I sat, and gave me some staid advice. ‘Well, now, I tell you for your good, you’d better quit this, and not drive my people to extremities. If you do, you’ll be sorry for it, I expect.’ Thus harassed, I appealed to the stewardess – a tall sour-looking woman, flat and thin as a dressed-up broomstick. She asked me sundry questions as to how and when I had taken my passage; until, tired beyond all endurance, I said, ‘My good woman, put me anywhere – under a boat – in your store-room, so that I can get to Kingston somehow.’ But the stewardess was not to be moved.

‘There’;There nowhere but the saloon, and you can’t expect to stay with the white people, that’s clear. Flesh and blood can stand a good deal of aggravation; but not that. If the Britishers is so took up with coloured people, that’s their business; but it won’t do here.’

This last remark was in answer to an Englishman, whose advice to me was not to leave my seat for any of them. He made matters worse; until at last I lost my temper, and calling Mac, bade him get my things together, and went up to the captain – a good honest man. He and some of the black crew and the black cook, who showed his teeth most viciously, were much annoyed. Muttering about its being a custom of the country, the captain gave me an order upon the agent for the money I had paid; and so, at twelve o'clock at night, I was landed again upon the wharf of Navy Bay.

My American friends were vastly annoyed, but not much surprised; and two days later, the English steamer, the *Eagle*, in charge of my old friend, Captain B—, touched at Navy Bay, and carried me to Kingston.

CHAPTER VII

The Yellow Fever in Jamaica – My Experience of
Death-bed Scenes – I leave again for Navy Bay, and open
a Store there – I am attacked with the Gold Fever, and
start for Escribanos – Life in the Interior of the Republic
of New Granada – A revolutionary Conspiracy on a small
Scale – The Dinner Delicacies of Escribanos – Journey up
the Palmilla River – A Few Words on the Present Aspect
of Affairs on the Isthmus of Panama

I stayed in Jamaica eight months out of the year 1853, still remembered in the island for its suffering and gloom. I returned just in time to find my services, with many others, needful; for the yellow fever never made a more determined effort to exterminate the English in Jamaica than it did in that dreadful year.¹ So violent was the epidemic, that some of my people fell victims to its fury, a thing rarely heard of before. My house was full of sufferers – officers, their wives and children. Very often they were borne in from the ships in the harbour – sometimes in a dying state, sometimes – after long and distressing struggles with the grim foe –

to recover. Habituated as I had become with death in its most harrowing forms, I found these scenes more difficult to bear than any I had previously borne a part in; and for this reason perhaps, that I had not only to cheer the death-bed of the sufferer, but, far more trying task, to soothe the passionate grief of wife or husband left behind. It was a terrible thing to see young people in the youth and bloom of life suddenly stricken down, not in battle with an enemy that threatened their country, but in vain contest with a climate that refused to adopt them. Indeed, the mother country pays a dear price for the possession of her colonies.

I think all who are familiar with the West Indies will acknowledge that Nature has been favourable to strangers in a few respects, and that one of these has been in instilling into the hearts of the Creoles an affection for English people and an anxiety for their welfare, which shows itself warmest when they are sick and suffering. I can safely appeal on this point to any one who is acquainted with life in Jamaica. Another benefit has been conferred upon them by inclining the Creoles to practise the healing art, and inducing them to seek out the simple remedies which are available for the terrible diseases by which foreigners are attacked, and which are found growing under the same circumstances which produce the ills they minister to. So true is it that beside the nettle ever grows the cure for its sting.

I do not willingly care to dwell upon scenes of suffering and death, but it is with such scenes that my life's experience has made me

most familiar, and it is impossible to avoid their description now and then; and here I would fain record, in humble spirit, my conclusions, drawn from the bearing of those whom I have now and then accompanied a little distance on their way into the Valley of the Shadow of Death,² on the awful and important question of religious feeling. Death is always terrible – no one need be ashamed to fear it. How we bear it depends much upon our constitutions. I have seen some brave men, who have smiled at the cruellest amputation, die trembling like children; while others, whose lives have been spent in avoidance of the least danger or trouble, have drawn their last painful breath like heroes, striking at their foe to the last, robbing him of his victory, and making their defeat a triumph. But I cannot trace *all* the peace and resignation which I have witnessed on many death-beds to temperament alone, although I believe it has much more to do with them than many teachers will allow. I have stood by receiving the last blessings of Christians; and closing the eyes of those who had nothing to trust to but the mercy of a God who will be far more merciful to us than we are to one another; and I say decidedly that the Christian's death is the glorious one, as is his life. You can never find a good man who is not a worker; he is no laggard in the race of life. Three, two, or one score years of life have been to him a season of labour in his appointed sphere; and as the work of the hands earns for us sweet rest by night, so does the heart's labour of a lifetime make the repose of heaven acceptable. This is my experience; and I remember one death, of a man whom I grew to love in a few short weeks, the

thought of which stirs my heart now, and has sustained me in seasons of great danger; for before that time, if I had never feared death, I had not learnt to meet him with a brave, smiling face, and this he taught me.

I must not tell you his name, for his friends live yet, and have been kind to me in many ways. One of them we shall meet on Crimean soil. He was a young surgeon, and as busy, light-hearted, and joyous as a good man should be; and when he fell ill they brought him to my house, where I nursed him, and grew fond of him – almost as fond as the poor lady his mother in England far away. For some time we thought him safe, but at last the most terrible symptoms of the cruel disease showed themselves, and he knew that he must die. His thoughts were never for himself, but for those he had to leave behind; all his pity was for them. It was trying to see his poor hands tremblingly penning the last few words of leave-taking – trying to see how piteously the poor worn heart longed to see once more the old familiar faces of the loved ones in unconscious happiness at home; and yet I had to support him while this sad task was effected, and to give him all the help I could. I think he had some fondness for me, or, perhaps, his kind heart feigned a feeling that he saw would give me joy; for I used to call him ‘My son – my dear child,’ and to weep over him in a very weak and silly manner perhaps.

He sent for an old friend, Captain S—; and when he came, I had to listen to the dictation of his simple will – his dog to one friend, his

ring to another, his books to a third, his love and kind wishes to all; and that over, my poor son prepared himself to die – a child in all save a man's calm courage. He beckoned me to raise him in the bed, and, as I passed my arms around him, he saw the tears I could not repress, rolling down my brown cheeks, and thanked me with a few words. 'Let me lay my head upon your breast'; and so he rested, now and then speaking lowly to himself, 'It's only that I miss my mother; but Heaven's will be done.' He repeated this many times, until the Heaven he obeyed sent him in its merey forgetfulness, and his thoughts no longer wandered to his earthly home. I heard glad words feebly uttered as I bent over him – words about 'Heaven – rest – rest' – a holy Name many times repeated; and then with a smile and a stronger voice, 'Home! home!' And so in a little while my arms no longer held him.

I have a little gold brooch with his hair in it now. I wonder what inducement could be strong enough to cause me to part with that memorial, sent me by his mother some months later, with the following letter:–

MY DEAR MADAM, – Will you do me the favour to accept the enclosed trifle, in remembrance of that dear son whose last moments were soothed by your kindness, and as a mark of the gratitude of, my dear Madam,

'Your ever sincere and obliged,

'M— S—'.

After this, I was sent for by the medical authorities to provide nurses for the sick at Up-Park Camp, about a mile from Kingston; and leaving some nurses and my sister³ at home, I went there and did my best; but it was little we could do to mitigate the severity of the epidemic.

About eight months after my return to Jamaica, it became necessary that some one should go to the Isthmus of Panama to wind up the affairs of my late hotel; and having another fit of restlessness, I prepared to return there myself. I found Navy Bay but little altered. It was evening when I arrived there; and my friend Mr H—, who came to meet me on the wharf, carefully piloted me through the wretched streets, giving me especial warning not to stumble over what looked like three long boxes, loosely covered with the *débris* of a fallen house. They had such a peculiar look about them that I stopped to ask what they were, receiving an answer which revived all my former memories of Darien life, ‘Oh, they’re only three Irishmen killed in a row a week ago, whom its nobody’s business to bury.’

I went to Gorgona, wound up the affairs of the hotel, and, before returning to Navy Bay, took the occasion of accompanying my brother to the town of Panama. We did not go with the crowd, but rode alone on mules, taking with us three native guides on foot; and although the distance was not much over twenty miles, and we started at daybreak, we did not reach Panama until nightfall. But far from being surprised at this, my chief wonder was that we ever

succeeded in getting over the journey. Through sand and mud, over hill and plain – through thick forests, deep gulleys, and over rapid streams, ran the track; the road sometimes being made of logs of wood laid transversely, with faggots stuffed between; while here and there we had to work our way through a tangled network of brushwood, and over broken rocks that seemed to have been piled together as stones for some giant's sling. We found Panama an old-fashioned, irregular town, with queer stone houses, almost all of which had been turned by the traders into stores.

On my return to Navy Bay – or Colon, as the New Granadans would have it called – I again opened a store, and stayed there for three months or so. I did not find that society had improved much in my absence; indeed, it appeared to have grown more lawless. Endless quarrels, often resulting in bloodshed, took place between the strangers and the natives, and disturbed the peace of the town. Once the Spanish were incensed to such an extent, that they planned a general rising against the foreigners; and but for the opportune arrival of an English war-steamer, the consequences might have been terrible. The Americans were well armed and ready; but the native population far outnumbered them.

Altogether, I was not sorry when an opportunity offered itself to do something at one of the stations of the New Granada Gold-mining Company, Escribanos, about seventy miles from Navy Bay. I made the journey there in a little vessel, all communication by land from Navy Bay being impossible, on account of the thick, dense

forests, that would have resisted the attempts of an army to cut its way through them. As I was at this place for some months altogether, and as it was the only portion of my life devoted to gold-seeking, I shall make no apologies for endeavouring to describe the out-of-the-way village-life of New Granada.

Escribanos is in the province of Veraguas, in the State of New Granada – information uninteresting enough, I have little doubt, to all but a very few of my readers. It lies near the mouth of a rivulet bearing that name, which, leaving the river Belen, runs away to the sea on its own account, about a mile from the mouth of that river. It is a great neighbourhood for gold-mines; and about that time companies and private individuals were trying hard to turn them to good account. Near it is the Fort Bowen mine, and several others; some yielding silver, others gold ore, in small quantities. Others lie in the vicinity of the Palmilla – another river, which discharges itself into the sea about ten miles from Escribanos; and there were more eastward of it, near a similar river, the Coquelet. Legends were rife at that time, and they may be revived at no distant date, of the treasures to be found at Cucuyo, Zapetero, Pananomé, and many other Indian villages on their banks, which in times gone by had yielded up golden treasures to the Old World. But at this time the yield of gold did not repay the labour and capital necessary to extract it from the quartz; and it can only prove successful if more economical methods can be discovered than those now used for that purpose.

Carlos Alexander, the alcalde of Escribanos, had made a good thing out of the gold mania. The mine had belonged to him; had been sold at a fine price, and, passing through several hands, had at last come into possession of the Company who were now working it; its former owner settling down as ruler over the little community of two hundred souls that had collected at Escribanos. He was a black man; was fond of talking of his early life in slavery, and how he had escaped; and possessed no ordinary intellect. He possessed, also, a house, which in England a well-bred hound would not have accepted as a kennel; a white wife, and a pretty daughter, with a whity-brown complexion and a pleasant name – Juliana.

Of this mine Mr Day – by whose invitation, when I saw him at Navy Bay, I went there – was at that time superintendent. He was a distant connection of my late husband, and treated me with great kindness. Strangely enough, we met again in a far different part of the world, and became more closely connected. But I am anticipating.

The major part of the population of Escribanos, including even the women and children, worked at the mine. The labour was hard and disagreeable. I often used to watch them at their work; and would sometimes wander about by myself, thinking it possible that I might tumble across some gold in my rambles. And I once did come upon some heavy yellow material, that brought my heart into my mouth with that strange thrilling delight which all who have hunted for the precious metal understand so well. I think it was very wrong; but I

kept the secret of the place from the alcalde and every one else, and filled some bottles with the precious dust, to carry down to Navy Bay. I did not go for some time; but when I did, one of my first visits was to a gold-buyer; and you can imagine my feelings when he coolly laughed, and told me it was some material (I forget its name) very like gold, but – valueless. The worst part of it was that, in my annoyance and shame, I threw all I had away, and among it some which I had reason to believe subsequently was genuine.

The landing at Escribanos was very difficult, and when the surf ran high, impossible; and I was once witness to a harrowing scene there. A little boat, manned by three sailors, grounded on a rock not far from shore, at a terrible season, when to reach it from the land was, after many attempts, found impossible. The hapless crew lingered on for two days, suffering cruelly from hunger and thirst, their cries ringing in our ears above the storm's pitiless fury. On the third day, two of them took to the sea, and were drowned; the third was not strong enough to leave the boat, and died in it.

I did not stay long at Escribanos, on my first visit, as the alcalde's guest; but, having made arrangements for a longer sojourn, I went back to Navy Bay, where I laid in a good stock of the stores I should have most use for, and returned to Escribanos in safety. I remained there some months, pleased with the novelty of the life, and busy with schemes for seeking for – or, as the gold-diggers call it, prospecting for – other mines.

The foreigners were just as troublesome in this little out-of-the-way place as they were, and are, in every other part of Central America; and quarrels were as frequent in our little community as at Cruces or Navy Bay. Indeed, Alexander had hard work to maintain peace in his small kingdom; and although ably seconded by Mr Day, more than once American disregard of his sway was almost too strong for him. Very often the few foreigners would quarrel among themselves; and once when they came to blows, and an Irishman was stabbed by an American named Campfield, the alcalde roused himself to punish the culprit. The native population were glad enough to have an American in their power; and when I heard Alexander give his men instructions to shoot the culprit if he resisted, I started off to his hut, and reached it in time to prevent bloodshed. He was taken and kept in confinement; and soft-hearted Juliana and I had enough to do to prevent his being made a stern example of. But we got him off for a fine of five hundred dollars.

Again the little community of Escribanos was very near getting up a revolution against its constituted government – a very common amusement in Central America. Twelve sailors, deserters from an American ship, found their way there, and before long plotted to dethrone Alexander, and take possession of the mine. Mr Day gained information of their plan. The whole population of Escribanos were roused and warned; and arming a score of the boldest natives, he surrounded the house in which they were, and captured the conspirators, who were too much taken by surprise to offer

resistance, and sent them down to Navy Bay, there to be handed over to the Government whose service they had left.

Of course, my medical skill did not rust for want of practice at Escribanos. The place was not healthy, and strangers to the climate suffered severely. A surgeon himself, sent there by the West Granada Gold-mining Company, was glad to throw *his* physic to the dogs, and be cured in my way by mine; while I was fortunately able to nurse Mr Day through a sharp attack of illness.

In consequence of the difficulty of communication with Navy Bay, our fare was of the simplest at Escribanos. It consisted mainly of salt meat, rice, and roasted Indian corn. The native fare was not tempting, and some of their delicacies were absolutely disgusting. With what pleasure, for instance, could one foreign to their tastes and habits dine off a roasted monkey, whose grilled head bore a strong resemblance to a negro baby's? And yet the Indians used to bring them to us for sale, strung on a stick. They were worse still stewed in soup, when it was positively frightful to dip your ladle in unsuspectingly, and bring up what closely resembled a brown baby's limb. I got on better with the parrots, and could agree with the 'senorita, buono buono'⁴ with which the natives recommended them; and yet their flesh, what little there was of it, was very coarse and hard. Nor did I always refuse to concede praise to a squirrel, if well cooked. But although the flesh of the iguana – another favourite dish – was white and tender as any chicken, I never could stomach it. These iguanas are immense green lizards, or rather

moderate-sized crocodiles, sometimes three feet in length, but weighing generally about seven or eight pounds. The Indians used to bring them down in boats, alive, on their backs, with their legs tied behind them; so that they had the most comical look of distress it is possible to imagine. The Spanish Indians have a proverb referring to an iguana so bound, the purport of which has slipped from my memory, but which shows the habit to be an old one. Their eggs are highly prized, and their captors have a cruel habit of extracting these delicacies from them while alive, and roughly sewing up the wound, which I never could muster sufficient courage to witness.

The rivers near Escribanos were well stocked with crocodiles, the sea had its fair share of sharks, while on land you too often met with snakes and other venomous reptiles. The sting of some of them was very dangerous. One man, who was bitten when I was there, swelled to an enormous size, and bled even at the roots of his hair. The remedy of the natives appeared to be copious bleeding.

Before I left Escribanos I made a journey, in company with a gentleman named Little, my maid, and the alcalde's daughter, into the interior of the country, for a short distance, following the course of the Palmilla river. This was for the purpose of prospecting a mine⁵ on that river, said to be obtainable at an easy price. Its course was a very winding one; and we often had to leave the canoe and walk through the shallow waters, that every now and then interfered with our progress. As we progressed, Little carefully

sounded the channel of the river, with the view of ascertaining to what extent it was navigable.

The tropical scenery was very grand; but I am afraid I only marked what was most curious in it – at least, that is foremost in my memory now. I know I wondered much what motive Nature could have had in twisting the roots and branches of the trees into such strange fantastic contortions. I watched with unfailing interest the birds and animals we disturbed in our progress, from the huge peccary or wild boar, that went tearing through the brushwood, to the tiniest bright-hued bird that dashed like a flash of many-coloured fire before our eyes. And very much surprised was I when the Indians stopped before a large tree, and on their making an incision in the bark with a matcheto (hatchet), there exuded a thick creamy liquid, which they wished me to taste, saying that this was the famous milk-tree. I needed some persuasion at first; but when I had tasted some upon a biscuit, I was so charmed with its flavour that I should soon have taken more than was good for me had not Mr Little interfered with some judicious advice. We reached the mine, and brought back specimens of the quartz, some of which I have now.

Soon after this I left Escribanos, and stopping but a short time at Navy Bay, came on direct to England. I had claims on a Mining Company which are still unsatisfied; I had to look after my share in the Palmilla Mine speculation; and, above all, I had long been troubled with a secret desire to embark in a very novel speculation,

about which I have as yet said nothing to the reader. But before I finally leave the republic of New Granada, I may be allowed to write a few words on the present aspect of affairs on the Isthmus of Panama.

Recent news from America bring the intelligence that the Government of the United States has at length succeeded in finding a reasonable excuse for exercising a protectorate over, or in other words annexing, the Isthmus of Panama.⁶ To any one at all acquainted with American policy in Central America, this intelligence can give no surprise; our only wonder being that some such excuse was not made years ago. At this crisis, then, a few remarks from the humblest observer of life in the republic of New Granada must possess some interest for the curious, if not value.

I found something to admire in the people of New Granada, but not much; and I found very much more to condemn most unequivocally. Whatever was of any worth in their institutions, such as their comparative freedom, religious toleration, etc., was owing mainly to the negroes who had sought the protection of the republic. I found the Spanish Indians treacherous, passionate, and indolent, with no higher aim or object but simply to enjoy the present after their own torpid, useless fashion. Like most fallen nations, they are very conservative in their habits and principles; while the blacks are enterprising, and in their opinions incline not unnaturally to democracy. But for their old antipathy, there is no doubt that the negroes would lean towards America; but they gladly

encourage the prejudice of the New Granadans, and foster it in every way. Hence the ceaseless quarrels which have disturbed Chagres and Panama, until it has become necessary for an American force to garrison those towns. For humanity and civilization's sake, there can be little doubt as to the expediency of this step; but I should not be at all surprised to hear that the republic was preparing to make some show of resistance against its powerful brother; for, as the reader will have perceived, the New Granadans' experiences of American manners have not been favourable; and they do not know, as we do, how little real sympathy the Government of the United States has with the extreme class of its citizens who have made themselves so conspicuous in the great high-road to California.⁷

CHAPTER VIII

I long to join the British Army before Sebastopol –
My Wanderings about London for that purpose – How
I failed – Establishment of the Firm of ‘Day and Martin’
– I Embark for Turkey

Before I left Jamaica for Navy Bay, as narrated in the last chapter, war had been declared against Russia, and we were all anxiously expecting news of a descent upon the Crimea. Now, no sooner had I heard of war somewhere, than I longed to witness it; and when I was told that many of the regiments I had known so well in Jamaica had left England for the scene of action, the desire to join them became stronger than ever. I used to stand for hours in silent thought before an old map of the world, in a little corner of which some one had chalked a red cross, to enable me to distinguish where the Crimea was; and as I traced the route thither, all difficulties would vanish. But when I came to talk over the project with my friends, the best scheme I could devise seemed so wild and

improbable, that I was fain to resign my hopes for a time, and so started for Navy Bay.

But all the way to England, from Navy Bay, I was turning my old wish over and over in my mind; and when I found myself in London, in the autumn of 1854, just after the battle of Alma¹ had been fought, and my old friends were fairly before the walls of Sebastopol, how to join them there took up far more of my thoughts than that visionary gold-mining speculation on the river Palmilla, which seemed so feasible to us in New Granada, but was considered so wild and unprofitable a speculation in London. And, as time wore on, the inclination to join my old friends of the 97th, 48th, and other regiments,² battling with worse foes than yellow fever or cholera, took such exclusive possession of my mind, that I threw over the gold speculation altogether, and devoted all my energies to my new scheme.

Heaven knows it was visionary enough! I had no friends who could help me in such a project – nay, who would understand why I desired to go, and what I desired to do when I got there. My funds, although they might, carefully husbanded, carry me over the three thousand miles, and land me at Balaclava,³ would not support me there long; while to persuade the public that an unknown Creole woman would be useful to their army before Sebastopol was too improbable an achievement to be thought of for an instant. Circumstances, however, assisted me.

As the winter wore on, came hints from various quarters of mismanagement, want, and suffering in the Crimea;⁴ and after the battles of Balaclava and Inkermann, and the fearful storm of the 14th of November,⁵ the worst anticipations were realized. Then we knew that the hospitals were full to suffocation, that scarcity and exposure were the fate of all in the camp, and that the brave fellows for whom any of us at home would have split our last shilling, and shared our last meal, were dying thousands of miles away from the active sympathy of their fellow-countrymen. Fast and thick upon the news of Inkermann, fought by a handful of fasting and enfeebled men against eight times their number of picked Russians,⁶ brought fresh and animated to the contest, and while all England was reeling beneath the shock of that fearful victory, came the sad news that hundreds were dying whom the Russian shot and sword had spared, and that the hospitals of Scutari were utterly unable to shelter, or their inadequate staff to attend to, the ship-loads of sick and wounded which were sent to them across the stormy Black Sea.⁷

But directly England knew the worst, she set about repairing her past neglect. In every household busy fingers were working for the poor soldier – money flowed in golden streams wherever need was – and Christian ladies, mindful of the sublime example, ‘I was sick, and ye visited me,’⁸ hastened to volunteer their services by those sick-beds which only women know how to soothe and bless.

Need I be ashamed to confess that I shared in the general enthusiasm, and longed more than ever to carry my busy (and the

reader will not hesitate to add experienced) fingers where the sword or bullet had been busiest, and pestilence most rife. I had seen much of sorrow and death elsewhere, but they had never daunted me; and if I could feel happy binding up the wounds of quarrelsome Americans and treacherous Spaniards, what delight should I not experience if I could be useful to my own 'sons,' suffering for a cause it was so glorious to fight and bleed for! I never stayed to discuss probabilities, or enter into conjectures as to my chances of reaching the scene of action. I made up my mind that if the army wanted nurses, they would be glad of me, and with all the ardour of my nature, which ever carried me where inclination prompted, I decided that I *would* go to the Crimea; and go I did, as all the world knows.

Of course, had it not been for my old strong-mindedness (which has nothing to do with obstinacy, and is in no way related to it – the best term I can think of to express it being 'judicious decisiveness'), I should have given up the scheme a score of times in as many days; so regularly did each successive day give birth to a fresh set of rebuffs and disappointments. I shall make no excuse to my readers for giving them a pretty full history of my struggles to become a Crimean *heroine*!

My first idea (and knowing that I was well fitted for the work, and would be the right woman in the right place, the reader can fancy my audacity) was to apply to the War Office⁹ for the post of hospital nurse. Among the diseases which I understood were most prevalent

in the Crimea were cholera, diarrhoea, and dysentery,¹⁰ all of them more or less known in tropical climates; and with which, as the reader will remember, my Panama experience had made me tolerably familiar. Now, no one will accuse me of presumption, if I say that I thought (and so it afterwards proved) that my knowledge of these human ills would not only render my services as a nurse more valuable, but would enable me to be of use to the overworked doctors. That others thought so too, I took with me ample testimony. I cannot resist the temptation of giving my readers one of the testimonials I had, it seems so eminently practical and to the point: –

I became acquainted with Mrs Seacole through the instrumentality of T. B. Cowan, Esq., H. B. M. Consul at Colon, on the Isthmus of Panama, and have had many opportunities of witnessing her professional zeal and ability in the treatment of aggravated forms of tropical diseases.

I am myself personally much indebted for her indefatigable kindness and skill at a time when I am apt to believe the advice of a practitioner qualified in the North would have little availed.

Her peculiar fitness, in a constitutional point of view,¹¹ for the duties of a medical attendant, needs no comment.

(Signed)

A. G. M.,

‘Late Medical Officer, West Granada
Gold-mining Company.

So I made long and unwearied application at the War Office, in blissful ignorance of the labour and time I was throwing away. I have reason to believe that I considerably interfered with the repose

of sundry messengers, and disturbed, to an alarming degree, the official gravity of some nice gentlemanly young fellows, who were working out their salaries in an easy, off-hand way. But my ridiculous endeavours to gain an interview with the Secretary-at-War of course failed, and glad at last to oblige a distracted messenger, I transferred my attentions to the Quartermaster-General's department.¹² Here I saw another gentleman, who listened to me with a great deal of polite enjoyment, and – his amusement ended – hinted, had I not better apply to the Medical Department; and accordingly I attached myself to their quarters with the same unwearying ardour. But, of course, I grew tired at last, and then I changed my plans.

Now, I am not for a single instant going to blame the authorities who would not listen to the offer of a motherly yellow woman to go to the Crimea and nurse her 'sons' there, suffering from cholera, diarrhoea, and a host of lesser ills. In my country, where people know our use, it would have been different; but here it was natural enough – although I had references, and other voices spoke for me – that they should laugh, good-naturedly enough, at my offer. War, I know, is a serious game, but sometimes very humble actors are of great use in it, and if the reader, when he comes in time to peruse the evidence of those who had to do with the Sebastopol drama, of my share in it, will turn back to this chapter, he will confess perhaps that, after all, the impulse which led me to the War Department was not unnatural.

My new scheme was, I candidly confess, worse devised than the one which had failed. Miss Nightingale had left England for the Crimea, but other nurses were still to follow, and my new plan was simply to offer myself to Mrs H— as a recruit.¹³ Feeling that I was one of the very women they most wanted, experienced and fond of the work, I jumped at once to the conclusion that they would gladly enrol me in their number. To go to Cox's, the army agents,¹⁴ who were most obliging to me, and obtain the Secretary-at - War's private address, did not take long; and that done, I laid the same pertinacious siege to his great house in — Square, as I had previously done to his place of business.

Many a long hour did I wait in his great hall, while scores passed in and out; many of them looking curiously at me. The flunkeys, noble creatures! marvelled exceedingly at the yellow woman whom no excuses could get rid of, nor impertinence dismay, and showed me very clearly that they resented my persisting in remaining there in mute appeal from their sovereign will. At last I gave that up, after a message from Mrs H. that the full complement of nurses had been secured, and that my offer could not be entertained. Once again I tried, and had an interview this time with one of Miss Nightingale's companions. She gave me the same reply, and I read in her face the fact, that had there been a vacancy, I should not have been chosen to fill it.

As a last resort, I applied to the managers of the Crimean Fund¹⁵ to know whether they would give me a passage to the camp – once

there I would trust to something turning up. But this failed also, and one cold evening I stood in the twilight, which was fast deepening into wintry night, and looked back upon the ruins of my last castle in the air. The disappointment seemed a cruel one. I was so conscious of the unselfishness of the motives which induced me to leave England – so certain of the service I could render among the sick soldiery, and yet I found it so difficult to convince others of these facts. Doubts and suspicions arose in my heart for the first and last time, thank Heaven. Was it possible that American prejudices against colour had some root here? Did these ladies shrink from accepting my aid because my blood flowed beneath a somewhat duskier skin than theirs? Tears streamed down my foolish cheeks, as I stood in the fast thinning streets; tears of grief that any should doubt my motives – that Heaven should deny me the opportunity that I sought. Then I stood still, and looking upward through and through the dark clouds that shadowed London, prayed aloud for help. I dare say that I was a strange sight to the few passers-by, who hastened homeward through the gloom and mist of that wintry night. I dare say those who read these pages will wonder at me as much as they who saw me did; but you must all remember that I am one of an impulsive people,¹⁶ and find it hard to put that restraint upon my feelings which to you is so easy and natural.

The morrow, however, brought fresh hope. A good night's rest had served to strengthen my determination. Let what might happen, to the Crimea I would go. If in no other way, then would I upon my own responsibility and at my own cost. There were those there who

had known me in Jamaica, who had been under my care; doctors who would vouch for my skill and willingness to aid them, and a general who had more than once helped me, and would do so still. Why not trust to their welcome and kindness, and start at once? If the authorities had allowed me, I would willingly have given them my services as a nurse; but as they declined them, should I not open an hotel for invalids in the Crimea in my own way? I had no more idea of what the Crimea was than the home authorities themselves perhaps, but having once made up my mind, it was not long before cards were printed and speeding across the Mediterranean to my friends before Sebastopol. Here is one of them:—

BRITISH HOTEL.

MRS MARY SEACOLE

(Late of Kingston, Jamaica),

Respectfully announces to her former kind friends, and to
the Officers of the Army and Navy generally,

That she has taken her passage in the screw-steamer *Hollander*, to start from London on the 25th of January, intending on her arrival at Balaclava to establish a mess table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers.

This bold programme would reach the Crimea in the end of January, at a time when any officer would have considered a stall in an English stable luxurious quarters compared to those he possessed,

and had nearly forgotten the comforts of a mess-table. It must have read to them rather like a mockery, and yet, as the reader will see, I succeeded in redeeming my pledge.

While this new scheme was maturing, I again met Mr Day in England. He was bound to Balaclava upon some shipping business, and we came to the understanding that (if it were found desirable) we should together open a store as well as an hotel in the neighbourhood of the camp. So was originated the well-known firm of Seacole and Day (I am sorry to say, the camp wits dubbed it Day and Martin),¹⁷ which, for so many months, did business upon the now deserted high-road¹⁸ from the then busy harbour of Balaclava to the front of the British army before Sebastopol.

These new arrangements were not allowed to interfere in any way with the main object of my journey. A great portion of my limited capital was, with the kind aid of a medical friend, invested in medicines which I had reason to believe would be useful; with the remainder I purchased those home comforts which I thought would be most difficult to obtain away from England.

I had scarcely set my foot on board the *Hollander*, before I met a friend. The supercargo was the brother of the Mr S—, whose death in Jamaica the reader will not have forgotten, and he gave me a hearty welcome. I thought the meeting augured well, and when I told him my plans he gave me the most cheering encouragement. I was glad, indeed, of any support, for, beyond all doubt, my project was a hazardous one.

So cheered at the outset, I watched without a pang the shores of England sink behind the smooth sea, and turned my gaze hopefully to the as yet landless horizon, beyond which lay that little peninsula to which the eyes and hearts of all England were so earnestly directed.

So, cheerily! the good ship ploughed its way eastward ho! for Turkey.

CHAPTER IX

Voyage to Constantinople – Malta – Gibraltar
– Constantinople, and what I thought of it – Visit to
Scutari Hospital – Miss Nightingale

I am not going to risk the danger of wearying the reader with a long account of the voyage to Constantinople, already worn threadbare by book-making tourists. It was a very interesting one, and, as I am a good sailor, I had not even the temporary horrors of sea-sickness to mar it. The weather, although cold, was fine, and the sea good-humouredly calm, and I enjoyed the voyage amazingly. And as day by day we drew nearer to the scene of action, my doubts of success grew less and less, until I had a conviction of the rightness of the step I had taken, which would have carried me buoyantly through any difficulties.

On the way, of course, I was called up from my berth at an unreasonable hour to gaze upon the Cape of St Vincent, and expected to feel duly impressed when the long bay where Trafalgar's

fight was won¹ came in view, with the white convent walls on the cliffs above bathed in the early sunlight. I never failed to take an almost childish interest in the signals which passed between the *Hollander* and the fleet of vessels whose sails whitened the track to and from the Crimea, trying to puzzle out the language these children of the ocean spoke in their hurried course, and wondering whether any, or what sufficiently important thing *could* happen which would warrant their stopping on their busy way.

We spent a short time at Gibraltar, and you may imagine that I was soon on shore making the best use of the few hours' reprieve granted to the *Hollander's* weary engines. I had an idea that I should do better alone, so I declined all offers of companionship, and selecting a brisk young fellow from the mob of cicerones who offered their services, saw more of the art of fortification in an hour or so than I could understand in as many years. The pleasure was rather fatiguing, and I was not sorry to return to the market-place, where I stood curiously watching its strange and motley population. While so engaged, I heard for the first time an exclamation which became familiar enough to me afterwards.

'Why, bless my soul, old fellow, if this is not our good old Mother Seacole!' I turned round, and saw two officers, whose features, set in a broad frame of Crimean beard, I had some difficulty in recognizing. But I soon remembered that they were two of the 48th, who had been often in my house at Kingston. Glad were the kind-hearted fellows, and not a little surprised withal, to meet their old

hostess in the market-place of Gibraltar, bound for the scene of action which they had left invalided; and it was not long before we were talking old times over some wine – Spanish, I suppose – but it was very nasty.

‘And you are going to the front, old lady – you, of all people in the world?’

‘Why not, my sons? – won’t they be glad to have me there?’

‘By Jove! yes, mother,’ answered one, an Irishman. ‘It isn’t many women – God bless them! – we’ve had to spoil us out there. But it’s not the place even for you, who know what hardship is? You’ll never get a roof to cover you at Balaclava, nor on the road either.’ So they rattled on, telling me of the difficulties that were in store for me. But they could not shake my resolution.

‘Do you think I shall be of any use to you when I get there?’

‘Surely.’

‘Then I’ll go, were the place a hundred times worse than you describe it. Can’t I rig up a hut with the packing-cases, and sleep, if need be, on straw, like Margery Daw?’²

So they laughed, and drank success to me, and to our next meeting; for, although they were going home invalided, the brave fellows’ hearts were with their companions, for all the hardships they had passed through.

We stopped at Malta also, where, of course, I landed, and stared about me, and submitted to be robbed by the lazy Maltese with all a traveller’s resignation. Here, also, I met friends – some medical

officers who had known me in Kingston; and one of them, Dr F—, lately arrived from Scutari, gave me, when he heard my plans, a letter of introduction to Miss Nightingale, then hard at work, evoking order out of confusion, and bravely resisting the despotism of death, at the hospital of Scutari.

So, on, past beautiful islands and shores, until we are steaming against a swift current, and an adverse wind, between two tower-crested promontories of rock, which they tell me stand in Europe and in Asia, and are connected with some pretty tale of love in days long gone by.³ Ah! travel where a woman may, in the New World, or the Old, she meets this old, old tale everywhere. It is the one bond of sympathy which I have found existing in three quarters of the world alike. So on, until the cable rattles over the windlass, as the good ship's anchor plunges down fathoms deep into the blue waters of the Bosphorus⁴ – her voyage ended.

I do not think that Constantinople impressed me so much as I had expected; and I thought its streets would match those of Navy Bay not unfairly. The caicques, also, of which I had ample experience – for I spent six days here, wandering about Pera and Stamboul in the daytime, and returning to the *Hollander* at nightfall – might be made more safe and commodious for stout ladies, even if the process interfered a little with their ornament. Time and trouble combined have left me with a well-filled-out, portly form – the envy of many an angular Yankee female – and, more than once, it was in no slight danger of becoming too intimately, acquainted with the temperature

of the Bosphorus. But I will do the Turkish boatmen the justice to say that they were as politely careful of my safety as their astonishment and regard for the well-being of their caïcs (which they appear to love as an Arab does his horse, or an Esquimaux his dogs, and for the same reason perhaps) would admit. Somewhat surprised, also, seemed the cunning-eyed Greeks, who throng the streets of Pera, at the unprotected Creole woman who took Constantinople so coolly (it would require something more to surprise her); while the grave English raised their eyebrows wonderingly, and the more vivacious French shrugged their pliant shoulders into the strangest contortions. I accepted it all as a compliment to a stout female tourist, neatly dressed in a red or yellow dress, a plain shawl of some other colour, and a simple straw wide-awake, with bright red streamers. I flatter myself that I woke up sundry sleepy-eyed Turks, who seemed to think that the great object of life was to avoid showing surprise at anything; while the Turkish women gathered around me, and jabbered about me, in the most flattering manner.

How I ever succeeded in getting Mr Day's letters from the Post-office, Constantinople, puzzles me now; but I did – and I shall ever regard my success as one of the great triumphs of my life. Their contents were not very cheering. He gave a very dreary account of Balaklava and of camp life, and almost dissuaded me from continuing my journey; but his last letter ended by giving me instructions as to the purchases I had best make, if I still determined

upon making the adventure; so I forgot all the rest, and busied myself in laying in the stores he recommended.

But I found time, before I left the *Hollander*, to charter a crazy caicque, to carry me to Scutari, intending to present Dr F—'s letter to Miss Nightingale.

It was afternoon when the boatmen set me down in safety at the landing-place of Scutari, and I walked up the slight ascent, to the great dull-looking hospital. Thinking of the many noble fellows who had been borne, or had painfully crept along this path, only to die within that dreary building, I felt rather dull; and directly I entered the hospital, and came upon the long wards of sufferers, lying there so quiet and still, a rush of tears came to my eyes, and blotted out the sight for a few minutes. But I soon felt at home, and looked about me with great interest. The men were, many of them, very quiet. Some of the convalescent formed themselves into little groups around one who read a newspaper; others had books in their hands, or by their side, where they had fallen when slumber overtook the readers, while hospital orderlies moved to and fro, and now and then the female nurses, in their quiet uniform, passed noiselessly on some mission of kindness.

I was fortunate enough to find an old acquaintance, who accompanied me through the wards, and rendered it unnecessary for me to trouble the busy nurses. This was an old 97th man – a Sergeant T—, whom I had known in Kingston, and who was slowly recovering from an attack of dysentery, and making himself of use

here until the doctors should let him go back and have another ‘shy at the Rooshians.’⁵ He is very glad to meet me, and tells me his history very socially, and takes me to the bedsides of some comrades, who had also known me at Up-Park Camp. My poor fellows! how their eyes glisten when they light upon an old friend’s face in these Turkish barracks – put to so sad a use, three thousand miles from home. Here is one of them – ‘hurt in the trenches,’ says the Sergeant, with shaven bandaged head, and bright, restless, Irish eyes, who hallooos out, ‘Mother Seacole! Mother Seacole!’ in such an excited tone of voice; and when he has shaken hands a score of times, falls back upon his pillow very wearily. But I sit by his side, and try to cheer him with talk about the future, when he shall grow well, and see home, and hear them all thank him for what he has been helping to do, so that he grows all right in a few minutes; but, hearing that I am on the way to the front, gets excited again; for, you see, illness and weakness make these strong men as children, not least in the patient uncomplaining resignation with which they suffer. I think my Irish friend had an indistinct idea of a ‘muddle’ somewhere, which had kept him for weeks on salt meat and biscuit, until it gave him the ‘scurvy,’⁶ for he is very anxious that I should take over plenty of vegetables, of every sort. ‘And, oh! mother!’ – and it is strange to hear his almost plaintive tone as he urges this – ‘take them plenty of eggs, mother; we never saw eggs over there.’

At some slight risk of giving offence, I cannot resist the temptation of lending a helping hand here and there – replacing a slipped bandage, or easing a stiff one. But I do not think any one was

offended; and one doctor, who had with some surprise and, at first, alarm on his face, watched me replace a bandage, which was giving pain, said, very kindly, when I had finished, ‘Thank you, ma’am.’

One thought never left my mind as I walked through the fearful miles of suffering in that great hospital. If it is so here, what must it not be at the scene of war – on the spot where the poor fellows are stricken down by pestilence or Russian bullets, and days and nights of agony must be passed before a woman’s hand can dress their wounds. And I felt happy in the conviction that *I must* be useful three or four days nearer to their pressing wants than this.

It was growing late before I felt tired, or thought of leaving Scutari, and Dr S—, another Jamaica friend, who had kindly borne me company for the last half-hour, agreed with me that the caicque was not the safest conveyance by night on the Bosphorus, and recommended me to present my letter to Miss Nightingale, and perhaps a lodging for the night could be found for me. So, still under the Sergeant’s patient guidance, we thread our way through passages and corridors, all used as sick-wards, until we reach the corner tower of the building, in which are the nurses’ quarters.

I think Mrs B—,⁷ who saw me, felt more surprise than she could politely show (I never found women so quick to understand me as the men) when I handed her Dr F—’s kind letter respecting me, and apologized for troubling Miss Nightingale. There is that in the Doctor’s letter (he had been much at Scutari) which prevents my request being refused, and I am asked to wait until Miss Nightingale,

whose every moment is valuable, can see me. Meanwhile Mrs B. questions me very kindly, but with the same look of curiosity and surprise.

What object has Mrs Seacole in coming out? This is the purport of her questions. And I say, frankly, to be of use somewhere; for other considerations I had not, until necessity forced them upon me. Willingly, had they accepted me, I would have worked for the wounded, in return for bread and water. I fancy Mrs B— thought that I sought for employment at Scutari, for she said, very kindly –

‘Miss Nightingale has the entire management of our hospital staff, but I do not think that any vacancy –’

‘Excuse me, ma’am,’ I interrupt her with, ‘but I am bound for the front in a few days;’ and my questioner leaves me, more surprised than ever. The room I waited in was used as a kitchen. Upon the stoves were cans of soup, broth, and arrow-root, while nurses passed in and out with noiseless tread and subdued manner. I thought many of them had that strange expression of the eyes which those who have gazed long on scenes of woe or horror seldom lose.

In half an hour’s time I am admitted to Miss Nightingale’s presence. A slight figure, in the nurses’ dress; with a pale, gentle, and withal firm face, resting lightly in the palm of one white hand, while the other supports the elbow – a position which gives to her countenance a keen inquiring expression, which is rather marked. Standing thus in repose, and yet keenly observant – the greatest sign of impatience at any time* a slight, perhaps unwitting motion of the

firmly planted right foot – was Florence Nightingale – that Englishwoman whose name shall never die, but sound like music on the lips of British men until the hour of doom.

She has read Dr F—’s letter, which lies on the table by her side, and asks, in her gentle but eminently practical and business-like way, ‘What do you want, Mrs Seacole – anything that we can do for you? If it lies in my power, I shall be very happy.’

So I tell her of my dread of the night journey by caicque, and the improbability of my finding the *Hollander* in the dark; and, with some diffidence, threw myself upon the hospitality of Scutari, offering to nurse the sick for the night. Now unfortunately, for many reasons, room even for one in Scutari Hospital was at that time no easy matter to find; but at last a bed was discovered to be unoccupied at the hospital washerwomen’s quarters.

My experience of washerwomen, all the world over, is the same – that they are kind soft-hearted folks. Possibly the soapsuds they almost live in find their way into their hearts and tempers, and soften them. This Scutari washerwoman is no exception to the rule, and welcomes me most heartily. With her, also, are some invalid nurses; and after they have gone to bed, we spend some hours of the night talking over our adventures, and giving one another scraps of our respective biographies. I hadn’t long retired to my couch before I wished most heartily that we had continued our chat; for unbidden and most unwelcome companions took the washerwoman’s place, and persisted not only in dividing my bed, but my plump person

also. Upon my word, I believe the fleas are the only industrious creatures in all Turkey. Some of their relatives would seem to have migrated into Russia; for I found them in the Crimea equally prosperous and ubiquitous.

In the morning, a breakfast is sent to my mangled remains, and a kind message from Mrs B—, having reference to how I spent the night. And, after an interview with some other medical men, whose acquaintance I had made in Jamaica, I shake hands with the soft-hearted washerwoman, up to her shoulders in soap-suds already, and start for the *Hollander*.

CHAPTER X

‘Jew Johnny’ – I Start for Balaclava – Kindness of my old
Friends – On Board the *Medora* – My Life on Shore –
The Sick Wharf

During my stay in Constantinople, I was accustomed to employ, as a guide, a young Greek Jew, whose name it is no use my attempting to spell, but whom I called by the one common name there – ‘Johnny.’¹ Wishing, however, to distinguish my Johnny from the legion of other Johnnies, I prefixed the term Jew to his other name, and addressed him as Jew Johnny. How he had picked up his knowledge I cannot tell, but he could talk a little broken English, besides French, which, had I been qualified to criticize it, I should have found, perhaps, as broken as his English. He attached himself very closely to me, and seemed very anxious to share my fortunes; and after he had pleaded hard, many times, to be taken to the Crimea, I gave in, and formally hired him. He was the best and faithfulest servant I had in the Crimea, and, so far from regretting

having picked up Jew Johnny from the streets of Pera, I should have been very badly off without him.

More letters come from Mr Day, giving even worse accounts of the state of things at Balaclava; but it is too late for hesitation now. My plans are perfected, my purchases made, and passage secured in the *Albatross* – a transport laden with cattle and commissariat officers for Balaclava.² I thought I should never have transported my things from the *Hollander* to the *Albatross*. It was a terrible day, and against the strong current and hurricane of wind Turkish and Greek arms seemed of little avail; but at last, after an hour or more of terrible anxiety and fear, the *Albatross's* side was reached, and I clambered on deck, drenched and wretched.

My companions are cheerful, pleasant fellows, and the short, although somewhat hazardous, voyage across the Black Sea is safely made, and one morning we become excited at seeing a dark rock-bound coast, on which they tell us is Balaclava. As we steam on we see, away to the right, clouds of light smoke, which the knowing travellers tell us are not altogether natural, but show that Sebastopol is not yet taken, until the *Albatross* lays-to within sight of where the *Prince*, with her ill-fated companions, went down in that fearful November storm,³ four short months ago, while application is made to the harbour-master for leave to enter the port of Balaclava. It does not appear the simplest favour in the world that we are applying for – licence to escape from the hazards of the Black Sea. But at last it comes, and we slowly wind through a

narrow channel, and emerge into a small land-locked basin, so filled with shipping that their masts bend in the breeze like a wintry forest. Whatever might have been the case at one time, there is order in Balaclava Harbour now, and the *Albatross*, with the aid of her boats, moves along to her appointed moorings.

Such a busy scene as that small harbour presented could be rarely met with elsewhere. Crowded with shipping, of every size and variety, from the noble English steamer to the smallest long-shore craft, while between them and the shore passed and repassed innumerable boats; men-of-war's boats, trim and stern; merchant-ship's boats, laden to the gunwales; Greek and Maltese boats, carrying their owners everywhere on their missions of sharp dealing and roguery. Coming from the quiet gloomy sea into this little nook of life and bustle the transition is very sudden and startling, and gives one enough to think about without desiring to go on shore this afternoon.

On the following morning, Mr Day, apprised of my arrival, came on board the *Albatross*, and our plans were laid. I must leave the *Albatross*, of course, and, until we decide upon our future, I had better take up my quarters on board the *Medora*, which is hired by Government, at a great cost, as an ammunition ship. The proposal was not a very agreeable one, but I have no choice left me. Our stores, too, had to be landed at once. Warehouses were unheard of in Balaclava, and we had to stack them upon the shore and protect them as well as we were able.

My first task, directly I had become settled on board the *Medora*, was to send word to my friends of my arrival in the Crimea, and solicit their aid. I gave a Greek idler one pound to carry a letter to the camp of the 97th, while I sent another to Captain Peel who was hard at work battering the defences of Sebastopol about the ears of the Russians, from the batteries of the Royal Naval Brigade.⁴ I addressed others to many of the medical men who had known me in other lands; nor did I neglect to send word to my kind patron, Sir John Campbell, then commanding a division:⁵ and my old friends answered my letters most kindly. As the various officers came down on duty or business to Balaclava they did not fail to find me out, and welcome me to the Crimea, while Captain Peel and Sir J. Campbell sent the kindest messages; and when they saw me, promised me every assistance, the General adding that he is glad to see me where there is so much to do. Among others, poor H. Vicars,⁶ whose kind face had so often lighted up my old house in Kingston, came to take me by the hand in this out-of-the-way corner of the world. I never felt so sure of the success of any step as I did of this, before I had been a week in Balaclava. But I had plenty of difficulties to contend with on every side.

Among the first, one of the ships, in which were many of our stores, the *Nonpareil*,⁷ was ordered out of the harbour before we could land them all, and there was more than a probability that she would carry back to Constantinople many of the things we had most pressing occasion for. It became necessary, therefore, that some one

should see Admiral Boxer, and try to interest that mild-spoken and affable officer in our favour. When I mentioned it to Mr Day, he did not seem inclined to undertake the mission, and nothing was left but for me to face the terrible Port-Admiral.⁸ Fortunately, Captain H—, of the *Diamond*,⁹ was inclined to be my friend, and, not a little amused with his mission, carried me right off to the Admiral. I confess that I was as nearly frightened out of my wits as I ever have been, for the Admiral's kind heart beat under a decidedly rough husk; and when Captain H— told him that I wanted his permission for the *Nonpareil* to remain in the harbour for a few days, as there were stores on board, he let fly enough hard words to frighten any woman. But when I spoke up, and told him that I had known his son in the West Indies, he relented, and granted my petition. But it was not without more hard words, and much grumbling that a parcel of women should be coming out to a place where they were not wanted.

Now, the Admiral did not repeat this remark a few days afterwards, when he saw me attending the sick and wounded upon the sick wharf.

I remained six weeks in Balaclava, spending my days on shore, and my nights on board ship. Over our stores, stacked on the shore, a few sheets of rough tarpaulin were suspended; and beneath these – my sole protection against the Crimean rain and wind – I spent some portion of each day, receiving visitors and selling stores.

But my chief occupation, and one with which I never allowed any business to interfere, was helping the doctors to transfer the sick and wounded from the mules and ambulances into the transports that had to carry them to the hospitals of Scutari and Buyukdere.¹⁰ I did not forget the main object of my journey, to which I would have devoted myself exclusively had I been allowed; and very familiar did I become before long with the sick wharf of Balaclava. My acquaintance with it began very shortly after I had reached Balaclava. The very first day that I approached the wharf, a party of sick and wounded had just arrived. Here was work for me, I felt sure. With so many patients, the doctors must be glad of all the hands they could get. Indeed, so strong was the old impulse within me, that I waited for no permission, but seeing a poor artilleryman stretched upon a pallet, groaning heavily, I ran up to him at once, and eased the stiff dressings. Lightly my practised fingers ran over the familiar work, and well was I rewarded when the poor fellow's groans subsided into a restless uneasy mutter. God help him! He had been hit in the forehead, and I think his sight was gone. I stooped down, and raised some tea to his baked lips (here and there upon the wharf were rows of little pannikins containing this beverage). Then his hand touched mine, and rested there, and I heard him mutter indistinctly, as though the discovery had arrested his wandering senses –

‘Ha! this is surely a woman's hand.’

I couldn't say much, but I tried to whisper something about hope and trust in God; but all the while I think his thoughts were running on this strange discovery. Perhaps I had brought to his poor mind memories of his home, and the loving ones there, who would ask no greater favour than the privilege of helping him thus; for he continued to hold my hand in his feeble grasp, and whisper 'God bless you, *woman* – whoever you are, God bless you!' – over and over again.

I do not think that the surgeons noticed me at first, although, as this was my introduction to Balacava, I had not neglected my personal appearance, and wore my favourite yellow dress, and blue bonnet, with the red ribbons; but I noticed one coming to me, who, I think, would have laughed very merrily had it not been for the poor fellow at my feet. As it was, he came forward, and shook hands very kindly, saying, 'How do you do, ma'am? Much obliged to you for looking after my poor fellow; very glad to see you here.' And glad they always were, the kind-hearted doctors, to let me help them look after the sick and wounded sufferers brought to that fearful wharf.

I wonder if I can ever forget the scenes I witnessed there? Oh! they were heartrending. I declare that I saw rough bearded men stand by and cry like the softest-hearted women at the sights of suffering they saw; while some who scorned comfort for themselves, would fidget about for hours before the long trains of mules and ambulances came in, nervous lest the most trifling thing that could minister to

the sufferers' comfort should be neglected. I have often heard men talk and preach very learnedly and conclusively about the great wickedness and selfishness of the human heart; I used to wonder whether they would have modified those opinions if they had been my companions for one day of the six weeks I spent upon that wharf, and seen but one day's experience of the Christian sympathy and brotherly love shown by the strong to the weak. The task was a trying one, and familiarity, you might think, would have worn down their keener feelings of pity and sympathy; but it was not so.

I was in the midst of my sad work one day when the Admiral came up, and stood looking on. He vouchsafed no word nor look of recognition in answer to my salute, but stood silently by, his hands behind his back, watching the sick being lifted into the boats. You might have thought that he had little feeling, so stern and expressionless was his face; but once, when they raised a sufferer somewhat awkwardly, and he groaned deeply, that rough man broke out all at once with an oath, that was strangely like a prayer, and bade the men, for God's sake, take more care. And, coming up to me, he clapped me on the shoulder, saying, 'I am glad to see you here, old lady, among these poor fellows;' while, I am most strangely deceived if I did not see a tear-drop gathering in his eye. It was on this same day, I think, that bending down over a poor fellow whose senses had quite gone, and, I fear me, would never return to him in this world, he took me for his wife, and calling me 'Mary, Mary,' many times, asked me how it was he had got home so quickly, and why he did not see the children; and said he felt sure

he should soon get better now. Poor fellow! I could not undeceive him. I think the fancy happily caused by the touch of a woman's hand soothed his dying hour; for I do not fancy he could have lived to reach Scutari. I never knew it for certain, but I always felt sure that he would never wake from that dream of home in this world.

And here, lest the reader should consider that I am speaking too highly of my own actions, I must have recourse to a plan which I shall frequently adopt in the following pages, and let another voice speak for me in the kind letter received long after Balaclava had been left to its old masters, by one who had not forgotten his old companion on the sick-wharf. The writer, Major (then Captain) R—, had charge of the wharf while I was there

Glasgow, Sept. 1856

DEAR MRS SEACOLE, —I am very sorry to hear that you have been unfortunate in business;¹¹ but I am glad to hear that you have found friends in Lord R— and others, who are ready to help you. No one knows better than I do how much you did to help poor sick and wounded soldiers; and I feel sure you will find in your day of trouble that they have not forgotten it.

Major R— was a brave and experienced officer, but the scenes on the sick-wharf unmanned him often. I have known him nervously restless if the people were behindhand, even for a few minutes, in their preparations for the wounded. But in this feeling all shared alike. Only women could have done more than they did who attended to this melancholy duty; and they, not because their hearts could be softer, but because their hands are moulded for this work.

But it must not be supposed that we had no cheerful scenes upon the sick-wharf. Sometimes a light-hearted fellow – generally a sailor – would forget his pain, and do his best to keep the rest in good spirits. Once I heard my name eagerly pronounced, and turning round, recognized a sailor whom I remembered as one of the crew of the *Alarm*, stationed at Kingston, a few years back.

‘Why, as I live, if this ain’t Aunty Seacole, of Jamaica! Shiver all that’s left of my poor timbers’ – and I saw that the left leg was gone – ‘if this ain’t a rum go, mates!’

‘Ah! my man, I’m sorry to see you in this sad plight.’

‘Never fear for me, Aunty Seacole; I’ll make the best of the leg the Rooshians have left me. I’ll get at them soon again, never fear. You don’t think, messmates’ – he never left his wounded comrades alone – ‘that they’ll think less of us at home for coming back with a limb or so short?’

‘You bear your troubles well, my son.’

‘Eh! do I, Aunty?’ and he seemed surprised. ‘Why, look’ye, when I’ve seen so many pretty fellows knocked off the ship’s roll altogether, don’t you think I ought to be thankful if I can answer the bo’swain’s call anyhow?’

And this was the sailors’ philosophy always. And this brave fellow, after he had sipped some lemonade, and laid down, when he heard the men groaning, raised his head and comforted them in the same strain again; and, it may seem strange, but it quieted them.

I used to make sponge-cakes on board the *Medora*, with eggs brought from Constantinople. Only the other day, Captain S—, who had charge of the *Medora*, reminded me of them. These, with some lemonade, were all the doctors would allow me to give to the wounded. They all liked the cake, poor fellows, better than anything else: perhaps because it tasted of 'home.'

CHAPTER XI

Alarms in the Harbour – getting the Stores on Shore –
robbery by Night and Day – The Predatory Tribes of
Balaclava – Activity of the Authorities – We obtain
leave to erect our Store, and fix upon Spring Hill
as its Site – The Turkish Pacha – The Flood –
Our Carpenters – I become an English
Schoolmistress Abroad

My life in Balaclava could not but be a rough one. The exposure by day was enough to try any woman's strength; and at night one was not always certain of repose. Nor was it the easiest thing to clamber up the steep sides of the *Medora*; and more than once I narrowly escaped a sousing in the harbour. Why it should be so difficult to climb a ship's side, when a few more staves in the ladder, and those a little broader, would make it so easy, I have never been able to guess. And once on board the *Medora*, my berth would not altogether have suited a delicate female with weak nerves. It was an ammunition ship, and we slept over barrels of gunpowder and tons of cartridges, with the by no means impossible contingency of their

prematurely igniting, and giving us no time to say our prayers before launching us into eternity. Great care was enjoined, and at eight o'clock every evening Captain S— would come down, and order all lights out for the night. But I used to put my lantern into a deep basin, behind some boxes, and so evaded the regulation. I felt rather ashamed of this breach of discipline one night, when another ammunition ship caught fire in the crowded harbour, and threatened us all with speedy destruction. We all knew, if they failed in extinguishing the fire pretty quickly, what our chances of life were worth, and I think the bravest drew his breath heavily at the thought of our danger. Fortunately, they succeeded in extinguishing the firebrand before any mischief was done; but I do not think the crew of the *Medora* slept very comfortably that night. It was said that the Russians had employed an incendiary; but it would have been strange if in that densely crowded harbour some accidents had not happened without their agency.

Harassing work, indeed, was the getting our stores on shore, with the aid of the Greek and Maltese boatmen, whose profession is thievery. Not only did they demand exorbitant sums for the carriage, but they contrived to rob us by the way in the most ingenious manner. Thus many things of value were lost in the little journey from the *Albatross* and *Nonpareil* to the shore, which had made the long voyage from England safely. Keep as sharp a look out as I might, some package or box would be tipped overboard by the sudden swaying of the boat, or passing by of one of the boatmen – of course, accidentally – and no words could induce the rascals, in

their feigned ignorance of my language, to stop; and, looking back at the helpless waif, it was not altogether consolatory to see another boat dart from between some shipping, where it had been waiting, as accidentally, ready to pounce upon any such wind or waterfalls.¹

Still more harassing work was it to keep the things together on the shore: often in the open light of day, while I sat there (after my duties on the sick-wharf were over) selling stores, or administering medicine to the men of the Land Transport and Army Works Corps,² and others, who soon found out my skill, valuable things would be abstracted; while there was no limit to the depredations by night. Of course we hired men to watch; but our choice of servants was very limited, and very often those we employed not only shut their eyes to the plunder of their companions, but helped themselves freely. The adage, 'set a thief to catch a thief,'³ answered very badly in Balaclava.

Sometimes Jew Johnny would volunteer to watch for the night; and glad I was when I knew that the honest lynx-eyed fellow was there. One night he caught a great-limbed Turk making off with a firkin of butter and some other things. The fellow broke away from Johnny's grasp with the butter, but the lad marked him down to his wretched den, behind the engineers' quarters, and, on the following morning, quietly introduced me to the lazy culprit, who was making up for the partial loss of his night's rest among as evil-looking a set of comrades as I have ever seen. There was a great row, and much indignation shown at the purpose of my visit; but I considered

myself justified in calling in the aid of one of the Provost marshal's officers, and, in the presence of this most invaluable official, a confession was soon made. Beneath the fellow's dirty bed, the butter was found buried; and, in its company, a two-dozen case of sherry, which the rogue had, in flagrant defiance of the Prophet's injunction,⁴ stolen for his own private drinking, a few nights previously.

The thievery in this little out-of-the-way port was something marvellous; and the skill and ingenuity of the operators would have reflected credit upon the *élite* of their profession practising in the most civilized city of Europe. Nor was the thievery confined altogether to the professionals, who had crowded to this scene of action from the cities and islands of the Mediterranean. They robbed us, the Turks, and one another; but a stronger hand was sometimes laid on them. The Turk, however, was sure to be the victim, let who might be the oppressor.

In this predatory warfare, as in more honourable service, the Zouaves particularly distinguished themselves.⁵ These undoubtedly gallant little fellows, always restless for action, of some sort, would, when the luxury of a brush with the Russians was occasionally denied them, come down to Balaclava, in search of opportunities of waging war against society at large. Their complete and utter absence of conscientious scruples as to the rights of property was most amusing. To see a Zouave gravely cheat a Turk, or trip up a Greek street-merchant, or Maltese fruit-seller, and scud away with

the spoil, cleverly stowed in his roomy red pantaloons, was an operation, for its coolness, expedition, and perfectness, well worth seeing. And, to a great extent, they escaped scatheless, for the English Provost marshal's department was rather chary of interfering with the eccentricities of our gallant allies; while if the French had taken close cognizance of the Zouaves' amusements out of school, one-half of the regiments would have been always engaged punishing the other half.

The poor Turk! it is lamentable to think how he was robbed, abused, and bullied by his friends. Why didn't he show a little pluck? There wasn't a rough sailor, or shrewd boy – the English boy, in all his impudence and prejudice, flourished in Balaclava – who would not gladly have patted him upon the back if he would but have held up his head, and shown ever so little spirit. But the Englishman cannot understand a coward – will scarcely take the trouble to pity him; and even the craven Greek could lord it over the degenerate descendants of the fierce Arabs, who – so they told me on the spot – had wrested Constantinople from the Christians,⁶ in those old times of which I know so little. Very often an injured Turk would run up to where I sat, and stand there, wildly telegraphing his complaints against some villainous-looking Greek, or Italian, whom a stout English lad would have shaken out of his dirty skin in five minutes.

Once, however, I saw the tables turned. As the anecdote will help to illustrate the relative positions of the predatory tribes of

Balaclava, I will narrate it. Hearing one morning a louder hubbub than was usual upon the completion of a bargain, and the inevitable quarrelling that always followed, I went up to where I saw an excited crowd collected around a Turk, in whose hands a Greek was struggling vainly. This Greek had, it seemed, robbed his enemy, but the Turk was master this time, and had, in order to force from the robber a confession of the place where the stolen things were deposited (like dogs, as they were, these fellows were fond of burying their plunder), resorted to torture. This was effected most ingeniously and simply by means of some packthread, which, bound round the Greek's two thumbs, was tightened on the tourniquet principle, until the pain elicited a confession. But the Turk, stimulated to retaliation by his triumph, bagged the Greek's basket, which contained amongst other things two watches, which their present owner had no doubt stolen. Driven to the most ludicrous show of despair, the Greek was about to attempt another desperate struggle for the recovery of his goods, when two Zouaves elbowed their small persons upon the crowded stage, and were eagerly referred to by all the parties concerned in the squabble. How they contrived it, I cannot say, so prompt were their movements; but, in a very few minutes, the watches were in their possession, and going much faster than was agreeable either to Turk or Greek, who both combined to arrest this new movement, and thereby added a sharp thrashing to their other injuries. The Zouaves effected their escape safely, while the Greek, with a despair that had in it an equal share of the ludicrous and the tragic, threw himself upon the dusty

ground, and tore his thin hair out by handfuls. I believe that the poor wretch, whom we could not help pitying, journeyed to Kamiesch,⁷ to discover his oppressors; but I fear he didn't gain much information there.

Had it not been for the unremitting activity of the authorities, no life would have been safe in Balaclava, with its population of villains of every nation. As it was, murder was sometimes added to robbery, and many of the rascals themselves died suspicious deaths, with the particulars of which the authorities did not trouble themselves. But the officials worked hard, both in the harbour and on shore, to keep order; few men could have worked harder. I often saw the old grey-haired Admiral about before the sun had fairly shown itself; and those of his subordinates must have been somewhat heavy sleepers who could play the sluggard then.

At length the necessary preparations to establish our store were made. We hit upon a spot about two miles from Balaclava, in advance of Kadikoi, close to where the railway engines were stationed, and within a mile of head-quarters.⁸ Leave having been obtained to erect buildings here, we set to work briskly, and soon altered the appearance of Spring Hill – so we christened our new home.⁹ Sometimes on horseback, sometimes getting a lift on the commissariat carts, and occasionally on the ammunition railway-waggon, I managed to visit Spring Hill daily, and very soon fitted up a shed sufficiently large to take up my abode in. But the difficulty of building our store was immense. To obtain material was

next to impossible; but that collected (not a little was, by leave of the Admiral, gleaned from the floating rubbish in the harbour), to find workmen to make use of it was still more difficult. I spent days going round the shipping, offering great wages, even for an invalid able to handle saw and hammer, however roughly, and many a long ride through the camps did I take on the same errand. At length, by dint of hard canvassing, we obtained the aid of two English sailors, whom I nicknamed 'Big and Little Chips,' and some Turks, and set to work in good earnest.

I procured the Turks from the Pacha who commanded the division encamped in the neighbourhood of Spring Hill. It was decided that we should apply to him for help, and accordingly I became ambassadress on this delicate mission, and rode over to the Pacha's quarters, Jew Johnny attending me as interpreter. I was received by the Pacha with considerable kindness and no trifling amount of formality, and after taking coffee I proceeded, through Jew Johnny, to explain the object of my visit, while his Excellency, a tall man, with a dark pleasing face, smoked gravely, and took my request into his gracious consideration.

On the following day came the answer to my request, in the persons of two curious Turkish carpenters, who were placed at our orders. After a little while, too, a Turkish officer, whom I christened Captain Ali Baba,¹⁰ took so great an interest in our labours that he would work like any carpenter, and with a delight and zeal that were astonishing. To see him fall back, and look smilingly at every

piece of his workmanship, was a sight to restore the most severely tried temper. I really think that the good-hearted fellow thought it splendid fun, and never wearied of it. But for him I do not know how we should have managed with our other Turkish ‘chips’ – chips of the true old Turkish block they were – deliberate, slow, and indolent, breaking off into endless interruptions for the sacred duties of eating and praying,¹¹ and getting into out-of-the-way corners at all times of the day to smoke themselves to sleep.

In the midst of our work a calamity occurred, which was very nearly becoming a catastrophe. By the giving way of a dam, after some heavy rains, the little stream which threaded its silvery way past Spring Hill swelled without any warning into a torrent, which, sweeping through my temporary hut, very nearly carried us all away, and destroyed stores of between one and two hundred pounds in value. This calamity might have had a tragical issue for me, for seeing a little box which contained some things, valuable as relics of the past, being carried away, I plunged in after it, and losing my balance, was rolled over and over by the stream, and with some difficulty reached the shore. Some of Lord Raglan’s staff¹² passing our wreck on the following day, made inquiries respecting the loss we had sustained, and a messenger was sent from headquarters, who made many purchases, in token of their sympathy.

My visit to the Turkish Pacha laid the foundation of a lasting friendship. He soon found his way to Spring Hill, and before long became one of my best customers and most frequent visitors. It was

astonishing to note how completely, now that he was in the land of the Giaours, he adapted himself to the tastes and habits of the infidels. Like a Scotch Presbyterian, on the Continent for a holiday, he threw aside all the prejudices of his education, and drank bottled beer, sherry, and champagne with an appreciation of their qualities that no thirsty-souled Christian could have expressed more gratefully. He was very affable with us all, and would sometimes keep Jew Johnny away from his work for hours, chatting with us or the English officers who would lounge into our as yet unfinished store. Sometimes he would come down to breakfast, and spend the greater part of the day at Spring Hill. Indeed, the wits of Spring Hill used to laugh, and say that the crafty Pacha was throwing his pocket-handkerchief at Madame Seacole, widow; but as the honest fellow candidly confessed he had three wives¹³ already at home, I acquit him of any desire to add to their number.

The Pacha's great ambition was to be familiar with the English language, and at last nothing would do but he must take lessons of me. So he would come down, and sitting in my store, with a Turk or so at his feet, to attend to his most important pipe, by inserting little red-hot pieces of charcoal at intervals, would try hard to sow a few English sentences in his treacherous memory. He never got beyond half a dozen; and I think if we had continued in the relation of pupil and mistress until now, the number would not have been increased greatly. 'Madame Seacole,' 'Gentlemen, good morning,' and 'More champagne,' with each syllable much dwelt upon, were his favourite sentences. It was capital fun to hear him, when I was called away

suddenly to attend to a customer, or to give a sick man medicine, repeating gravely the sentence we had been studying, until I passed him, and started him with another.

Very frequently he would compliment me by ordering his band down to Spring Hill for my amusement. They played excellently well, and I used to think that I preferred their music to that of the French and English regimental bands. I laughed heartily one day, when, in compliance with the kind-hearted Anglo-Turkish Pacha's orders, they came out with a grand new tune, in which I with difficulty recognized a very distant resemblance to 'God save the Queen.'

Altogether he was a capital neighbour, and gave such strict orders to his men to respect our property that we rarely lost anything. On the whole, the Turks were the most honest of the nations there (I except the English and the Sardinians¹⁴), and the most tractable. But the Greeks hated them, and showed their hate in every way.¹⁵ In bringing up things for the Pacha's use they would let the mules down, and smash their loads most relentlessly. Now and then they suffered, as was the case one day when I passed through the camp and saw my friend superintending the correction of a Greek who was being bastinadoed. It seemed a painful punishment.

I was sorry, therefore, when my friend's division was ordered to Kamara,¹⁶ and we lost our neighbours. But my pupil did not forget his schoolmistress. A few days after they had left the neighbourhood of Spring Hill came a messenger, with a present of lambs, poultry,

and eggs, and a letter, which I could not decipher, as many of the interpreters could speak English far better than they could write it. But we discovered that the letter contained an invitation, to Mr Day and myself, to go over to Kamara, and select from the spoil of the village anything that might be useful in our new buildings. And a few days later came over a large araba, drawn by four mules, and laden with a pair of glass-doors, and some window-frames, which the thoughtful kind Pacha had judged – and judged rightly – would be a very acceptable present. And very often the good-natured fellow would ride over from Kamara, and resume his acquaintance with myself and my champagne, and practise his English sentences.

We felt the loss of our Turkish neighbours in more ways than one. The neighbourhood, after their departure, was left lonely and unprotected, and it was not until a division of the Land Transport Corps came and took up their quarters near us, that I felt at all secure of personal safety. Mr Day rarely returned to Spring Hill until nightfall relieved him from his many duties, and I depended chiefly upon two sailors, both of questionable character, two black servants, Jew Johnny, and my own reputation for determination and courage – a poor delusion, which I took care to heighten by the judicious display of a double-barrelled pistol, lent me for the purpose by Mr Day, and which I couldn't have loaded to save my life.

CHAPTER XII

The British Hotel – Domestic Difficulties – Our Enemies –
The Russian Rats – Adventures in Search of a Cat –
Light-fingered Zouaves – Crimean Thieves –
Powdering a Horse

Summer was fairly advanced before the British Hotel was anything like finished; indeed, it never was completed, and when we left the Hill, a year later, it still wanted shutters. But long before that time Spring Hill had gained a great reputation. Of course, I have nothing to do with what occurred in the camp, although I could not help hearing a great deal about it. Mismanagement and privation there might have been, but my business was to make things right in my sphere, and whatever confusion and disorder existed elsewhere, comfort and order were always to be found at Spring Hill. When there was no sun elsewhere, some few gleams – so its grateful visitors said – always seemed to have stayed behind, to cheer the weary soldiers that gathered in the British Hotel. And, perhaps, as

my kind friend *Punch* said,¹ after all these things had become pleasant memories of the past.

The cold without gave a zest, no doubt,
To the welcome warmth within;
But her smile, good old soul, lent heat to the coal,
And power to the pannikin.²

Let me, in a few words, describe the British Hotel. It was acknowledged by all to be the most complete thing there. It cost no less than £800. The buildings and yards took up at least an acre of ground, and were as perfect as we could make them. The hotel and storehouse consisted of a long iron room, with counters, closets, and shelves; above it was another low room, used by us for storing our goods, and above this floated a large union-jack. Attached to this building was a little kitchen, not unlike a ship's caboose – all stoves and shelves. In addition to the iron house were two wooden houses, with sleeping apartments for myself and Mr Day, outhouses for our servants, a canteen for the soldiery, and a large enclosed yard for our stock, full of stables, low huts, and sties. Everything, although rough and unpolished, was comfortable and warm; and there was a completeness about the whole which won general admiration. The reader may judge of the manner in which we had stocked the interior of our store from the remark, often repeated by the officers, that you might get everything at Mother Seacole's, from an anchor down to a needle.

In addition, we had for our transport service four carts, and as many horses and mules as could be kept from the thieves. To reckon upon being in possession of those, at any future time, was impossible; we have more than once seen a fair stud stabled at night-time, and on the following morning been compelled to borrow cattle from the Land Transport camp, to fetch our things up from Balaclava.

But it must not be supposed that my domestic difficulties came to an end with the completion of the hotel. True, I was in a better position to bear the Crimean cold and rain, but my other foes were as busy as ever they had been on the beach at Balaclava. Thieves, biped and quadruped, human and animal, troubled me more than ever; and perhaps the most difficult to deal with were the least dangerous. The Crimean rats, for instance, who had the appetites of London aldermen, and were as little dainty as hungry schoolboys. Whether they had left Sebastopol, guided by the instinct which leads their kindred in other parts of the world to forsake sinking ships, or because the garrison rations offended their palates, or whether they had patriotically emigrated, to make war against the English larders, I do not pretend to guess; but, whatever was their motive, it drew them in great abundance to Spring Hill. They occasionally did us damage, in a single night, to the tune of two or three pounds – wasting what they could not devour. You could keep nothing sacred from their strong teeth. When hard pressed they more than once attacked the live sheep; and at last they went so far as to nibble one of our black cooks, Francis, who slept among the

flour barrels. On the following morning he came to me, his eyes rolling angrily, and his white teeth gleaming, to show me a mangled finger, which they had bitten, and ask me to dress it. He made a great fuss; and a few mornings later he came in a violent passion this time, and gave me instant notice to quit my service, although we were paying him two pounds a week, with board and rations. This time the rats had, it appeared, been bolder, and attacked his head, in a spot where its natural armour, the wool,³ was thinnest, and the silly fellow had a notion that the souls of the slain Russian soldiers had entered the bodies of the rats, and made vengeful war upon their late enemies.⁴ Driven to such an extremity, I made up my mind to scour the camp, in search of a cat, and, after a long day's hunt, I came to the conclusion that the tale of Whittington was by no means an improbable one.⁵ Indeed, had a brisk young fellow with a cat, of even ordinary skill in its profession, made their appearance at Spring Hill, I would gladly have put them in the way – of laying the foundation, at least – of a fortune. At last I found a benefactor, in the Guards' camp, in Colonel D—, of the Coldstreams,⁶ who kindly promised me a great pet, well known in the camp, and perhaps by some who may read these pages, by the name of Pinkie. Pinkie was then helping a brother officer to clear his hut, but on the following day a Guardsman brought the noble fellow down. He lived in clover for a few days, but he had an English cat-like attachment for his old house, and despite the abundance of game, Pinkie soon stole away to his old master's quarters, three miles off. More than once the men brought him back

to me, but the attractions of Spring Hill were never strong enough to detain him long with me.

From the human thieves that surrounded Spring Hill I had to stand as sharp a siege as the Russians had in that poor city against which we heard the guns thundering daily; while the most cunning and desperate sorties were often made upon the most exposed parts of my defences, and sometimes with success. Scores of the keenest eyes and hundreds of the sharpest fingers in the world were always ready to take advantage of the least oversight. I had to keep two boys, whose chief occupation was to watch the officers' horses, tied up to the doorposts of the British Hotel. Before I adopted this safeguard, more than one officer would leave his horse for a few minutes, and on his return find it gone to the neighbourhood of the Naval Brigade, or the horse-fair at Kamiesch. My old friends, the Zouaves, soon found me out at Spring Hill, and the wiry, light-fingered, fighting-loving gentry spent much of their leisure there. Those confounded trowsers of theirs offered conveniences of stowage room which they made rare use of. Nothing was too small, and few things too unwieldy, to ride in them; like the pockets of clown in a pantomime, they could accommodate a well-grown baby or a pound of sausages equally well. I have a firm conviction that they stuffed turkeys, geese, and fowls into them, and I positively know that my only respectable tea-pot travelled off in the same conveyance, while I detected one little fellow, who had tied them down tight at his ankles, stowing away some pounds of tea and coffee mixed. Some officers, who were present, cut the cords, and, holding up the little

scamp by the neck, shook his trowsers empty amid shouts of laughter.

Our live stock, from the horses and mules down to the geese and fowls, suffered terribly. Although we kept a sharp look-out by day, and paid a man five shillings a night as watchman, our losses were very great. During the time we were in the Crimea we lost over a score of horses, four mules, eighty goats, many sheep, pigs, and poultry, by thieving alone. We missed in a single night forty goats and seven sheep, and on Mr Day's going to head-quarters with intelligence of the disaster, they told him that Lord Raglan had recently received forty sheep from Asia, all of which had disappeared in the same manner. The geese, turkeys, and fowls vanished by scores. We found out afterwards that the watchman paid to guard the sheep, used to kill a few occasionally. As he represented them to have died a natural death during the night, he got permission to bury them, instead of which he sold them. King Frost claimed his share of our stock too, and on one December night, of the winter of 1855, killed no less than forty sheep. It is all very well to smile at these things now, but at the time they were heartrending enough, and helped, if they did not cause, the ruin which eventually overtook the firm of Seacole and Day. The determination and zeal which besiegers and besieged showed with respect to a poor pig, which was quietly and unconsciously fattening in its sty, are worthy of record.

Fresh pork, in the spring of 1855, was certainly one of those luxuries not easily obtainable in that part of the Crimea to which the British army was confined, and when it became known that Mother Seacole had purchased a promising young porker from one of the ships in Balaclava, and that, brave woman! she had formed the courageous resolution of fattening it for her favourites, the excitement among the frequenters of Spring Hill was very great. I could laugh heartily now, when I think of the amount of persuasion and courting I stood out for before I bound myself how its four legs were to be disposed of. I learnt more at that time of the trials and privileges of authority than I am ever likely to experience again. Upon my word, I think if the poor thing had possessed as many legs as my editor tells me somebody called the Hydra⁷ (with whom my readers are perhaps more familiar than I am) had heads, I should have found candidates for them. As it was, the contest for those I had to bestow was very keen, and the lucky individuals who were favoured by me looked after their interests most carefully. One of them, to render mistake or misunderstanding impossible, entered my promise in my day-book. The reader will perhaps smile at the following important memorandum in the gallant officer's writing: –

‘Memorandum that Mrs Seacole did this day, in the presence of Major A— and Lieutenant W—, promise Captain H—, R.A., a leg of *the pig*.’

Now it was well known that many greedy eyes and fingers were directed towards the plump fellow, and considerable interest was

manifested in the result of the struggle, 'Mrs Seacole *versus* Thievery.' I think they had some confidence in me, and that I was the favourite; but there was a large field against me, which found its backers also; and many a bet was laughingly laid on the ultimate fate of the unconscious porker.

I baffled many a knavish trick to gain possession of the fine fellow; but, after all, I lost him in the middle of the day, when I thought the boldest rogues would not have run the risk. The shouts and laughter of some officers who were riding down from the front first informed me of my loss. Up they rode, calling out – 'Mother Seacole! old lady! quick! – *the* pig's gone!'

I rushed out, injured woman that I was, and saw it all at a glance. But that my straw wide-awake was in the way, I could have torn my hair in my vexation. I rushed to the sty, found the nest warm, and with prompt decision prepared for speedy pursuit. Back I came to the horsemen, calling out – 'Off with you, my sons! – they can't have got very far away yet. Do your best to save my bacon!'

Delighted with the fun, the horsemen dispersed, laughing and shouting – 'Stole away! hark away!' while I ran indoors, turned out all my available body-guard, and started in pursuit also. Not half a mile off we soon saw a horseman wave his cap; and starting off into a run, came to a little hollow, where the poor panting animal and two Greek thieves had been run down. The Provost-marshal took the latter in hand willingly, and Piggy was brought home in triumph. But those who had pork expectancies, hearing of the

adventure, grew so seriously alarmed at the narrow escape, that they petitioned me to run so desperate a hazard no longer; and the poor thing was killed on the following day, and distributed according to promise. A certain portion was reserved for sausages, which, fried with mashed potatoes, were quite the rage at the British Hotel for some days. Some pork was also sent to headquarters, with an account of the dangers we ran from thieves. It drew the following kind acknowledgment from General B—:

Head-Quarters

MY DEAR MRS SEACOLE, – I am very much obliged to you indeed for your pork. I have spoken to Colonel P— as to the police of your neighbourhood, and he will see what arrangement can be made for the general protection of that line of road. When the high-road is finished, you will be better off. Let me know at the time of any depredations that are committed, and we will try and protect you. – I am, faithfully yours, M. L. B—

For the truth was – although I can laugh at my fears now – I was often most horribly frightened at Spring Hill; and there was cause for it too. My washerwoman, who, with her family, lived not half a mile from us, was with me one day, and carried off some things for the wash. On the following morning I was horrified to learn that she, her father, husband, and children – in all, seven – had been most foully murdered during the night: only one of the whole family recovered from her wounds, and lived to tell the tale. It created a great sensation at the time, and caused me to pass many a sleepless night, for the murderers were never discovered.

Whilst I am upon the subject of Crimean thievery, I may as well exhaust it without paying any regard to the chronological order of my reminiscences. I have before mentioned what I suffered from the French. One day I caught one of our allies in my kitchen, robbing me in the most ungrateful manner. He had met with an accident near Spring Hill (I believe he belonged to a French regiment lent to assist the English in road-making), and had been doctored by me; and now I found him filling his pockets, before taking 'French' leave of us. My black man, Francis, pulled from his pockets a yet warm fowl, and other provisions. We kicked him off the premises, and he found refuge with some men of the Army Works Corps, who pitied him and gave him shelter. He woke them in the middle of the night, laying hands rather clumsily on everything that was removeable; and in the morning they brought him to me, to ask what they should do with him. Unluckily for him, a French officer of rank happened to be in the store, who, on hearing our tale, packed him off to his regiment. I gathered from the expression of the officer's face, and the dread legible upon the culprit's, that it might be some considerable time before his itch for breaking the eighth commandment⁸ could be again indulged in.

The trouble I underwent respecting a useful black mare, for which Mr Day had given thirty guineas, and which carried me beautifully, was immense. Before it had been many weeks in our store it was gone – whither, I failed to discover. Keeping my eyes wide open, however, I saw 'Angelina' – so I christened her – coming quietly down the hill, carrying an elderly naval officer. I was ready to

receive the unconscious couple, and soon made my claim good. Of course, the officer was not to blame. He had bought it of a sailor, who in his turn had purchased the animal of a messmate, who of course had obtained it from another, and so on; but eventually it returned to its old quarters, where it only remained about a fortnight. I grew tired of looking for Angelina, and had given her up, when one day she turned up, in capital condition, in the possession of a French officer of Chasseurs.⁹ But nothing I could say to the Frenchman would induce him to take the view of the matter I wished, but had no right to enforce. He had bought the horse at Kamiesch, and intended to keep it. We grew hot at last; and our dispute drew out so large an audience that the Frenchman took alarm, and tried to make off. I held on to Angelina for a little while; but at last the mare broke away from me, as Tam o' Shanter's Maggie did from the witches (I don't mean that she left me even her tail),¹⁰ and vanished in a cloud of dust. It was the last I ever saw of Angelina.

More than once the Crimean thievery reduced us to woeful straits. To a Greek, returning to Constantinople, we entrusted (after the murder of our washerwoman) two trunks, containing 'things for the wash,' which he was to bring back as soon as possible. But neither upon Greek, trunks, nor their contents did we ever set eyes again. It was a serious loss. The best part of our table-cloths and other domestic linen, all my clothes, except two suits, and all of Mr Day's linen vanished, and had to be replaced as best we could by fresh purchases from Kamiesch and Kadikoi.

Perhaps the most ridiculous shift I was ever put to by the Crimean thieves happened when we rose one morning and found the greater part of our stud missing. I had, in the course of the day, urgent occasion to ride over to the French camp on the Tchernaya;¹¹ the only animal available for my transport was an old grey mare, who had contracted some equine disease of which I do not know the name, but which gave her considerable resemblance to a dog suffering from the mange. Now, go to the French camp I must; to borrow a horse was impossible, and something must be done with the grey. Suddenly one of those happy thoughts, which sometimes help us over our greatest difficulties, entered into my scheming brains. Could I not conceal the poor mare's worst blemishes. Her colour was grey; would not a thick coating of flour from my dredger make all right? There was no time to be lost; the remedy was administered successfully, and off I started; but, alas! the wind was high and swept the skirts of my riding habit so determinedly against the side of the poor beast, that before long its false coat was transferred to the dark cloth, and my innocent *ruse* exposed. The French are proverbially and really a polite and considerate nation, but I never heard more hearty peals of laughter from any sides than those which conveyed to me the horrible assurance that my scheme had unhappily failed.

CHAPTER XIII

My Work in the Crimea

I hope the reader will give me credit for the assertion that I am about to make, viz., that I enter upon the particulars of this chapter with great reluctance; but I cannot omit them, for the simple reason that they strengthen my one and only claim to interest the public, viz., my services to the brave British army in the Crimea. But, fortunately, I can follow a course which will not only render it unnecessary for me to sound my own trumpet, but will be more satisfactory to the reader. I can put on record the written opinions of those who had ample means of judging and ascertaining how I fulfilled the great object which I had in view in leaving England for the Crimea; and before I do so, I must solicit my readers' attention to the position I held in the camp as doctress, nurse, and 'mother.'

I have never been long in any place before I have found my practical experience in the science of medicine useful. Even in

London I have found it of service to others. And in the Crimea, where the doctors were so overworked, and sickness was so prevalent, I could not be long idle; for I never forgot that my intention in seeking the army was to help the kind-hearted doctors, to be useful to whom I have ever looked upon and still regard as so high a privilege.

But before very long I found myself surrounded with patients of my own, and this for two simple reasons. In the first place, the men (I am speaking of the 'ranks' now) had a very serious objection to going into hospital for any but urgent reasons, and the regimental doctors were rather fond of sending them there; and, in the second place, they could and did get at my store sick-comforts and nourishing food, which the heads of the medical staff would sometimes find it difficult to procure. These reasons, with the additional one that I was very familiar with the diseases which they suffered most from, and successful in their treatment (I say this in no spirit of vanity), were quite sufficient to account for the numbers who came daily to the British Hotel for medical treatment.

That the officers were glad of me as a doctress and nurse may be easily understood. When a poor fellow lay sickening in his cheerless hut and sent down to me, he knew very well that I should not ride up in answer to his message empty-handed. And although I did not hesitate to charge him with the value of the necessaries I took him, still he was thankful enough to be able to *purchase* them. When we lie ill at home surrounded with comfort, we never think of feeling

any special gratitude for the sick-room delicacies which we accept as a consequence of our illness; but the poor officer lying ill and weary in his crazy hut, dependent for the merest necessities of existence upon a clumsy, ignorant soldier-cook, who would almost prefer eating his meat raw to having the trouble of cooking it (our English soldiers are bad campaigners), often finds his greatest troubles in the want of those little delicacies with which a weak stomach must be humoured into retaining nourishment. How often have I felt sad at the sight of poor lads who in England thought attending early parade a hardship, and felt harassed if their neckcloths set awry, or the natty little boots would not retain their polish, bearing, and bearing so nobly and bravely, trials and hardships to which the veteran campaigner frequently succumbed. Don't you think, reader, if you were lying, with parched lips and fading appetite, thousands of miles from mother, wife, or sister, loathing the rough food by your side, and thinking regretfully of that English home where nothing that could minister to your great need would be left untried – don't you think that you would welcome the familiar figure of the stout lady whose bony horse has just pulled up at the door of your hut, and whose panniers contain some cooling drink, a little broth, some homely cake, or a dish of jelly or blanc-mange – don't you think, under such circumstances, that you would heartily agree with my friend *Punch*'s remark: –

That berry-brown face, with a kind heart's trace
Impressed on each wrinkle sly,

Was a sight to behold, through the snow-clouds rolled
Across that iron sky.

I tell you, reader, I have seen many a bold fellow's eyes moisten at such a season, when a woman's voice and a woman's care have brought to their minds recollections of those happy English homes which some of them never saw again; but many did, who will remember their woman-comrade upon the bleak and barren heights before Sebastopol.

Then their calling me 'mother' was not, I think, altogether unmeaning. I used to fancy that there was something homely in the word; and, reader, you cannot think how dear to them was the smallest thing that reminded them of home.

Some of my Crimean patients, who were glad of me as nurse and doctress, bore names familiar to all England, and perhaps, did I ask them, they would allow me to publish those names. I am proud to think that a gallant sailor, on whose brave breast the order of Victoria¹ rests – a more gallant man can never wear it – sent for the doctress whom he had known in Kingston, when his arm, wounded on the fatal 18th of June,² refused to heal, and I think that the application I recommended did it good; but I shall let some of my patients' letters, taken from a large bundle, speak for me. Of course I must suppress most of their names. Here are two from one of my best and kindest sons.

MY DEAR MAMMA, – Will you kindly give the bearer the bottle you promised me when you were here this morning, for my jaundice. Please let me know how much I

am to take of it. Yours
truly, F. M., C. E.

You see the medicine does him good, for a few days later comes another from the same writer:—

MY DEAR MRS SEACOLE, – I have finished the bottle, which has done my jaundice
a deal of good. Will you kindly send another by bearer. Truly
yours,
F. M.

It was a capital prescription which had done his jaundice good. There was so great a demand for it, that I kept it mixed in a large pan, ready to ladle it out to the scores of applicants who came for it.

Sometimes they would send for other and no less important medicines. Here is such an application from a sick officer: –

Mrs Seacole would confer a favour on the writer, who is very ill, by giving his servant (the bearer) a boiled or roast fowl; if it be impossible to obtain them, some chicken broth would be very acceptable.

I am yours, truly obliged, J.K., 18th R. S.

Doesn't that read like a sick man's letter, glad enough to welcome any woman's face? Here are some gentlemen of the Commissariat anxious to speak for me: –

Arthur C—, Comm. Staff Officer, having been attacked one evening with a very bad diarrhœa at Mrs Seacole's, took some of her good medicine. It cured me before the next morning, and I have never been attacked since. – October 17th, 1855.

Archibald R. L—, Comm. Staff, Crimea, was suffering from diarrhœa for a week or more; after taking Mrs Seacole's good medicines for two days, he became quite well, and remained so to this day. – October 17th, 1855.

Here is Mr M—, paymaster of the Land Transport Corps, ready with a good account of my services: —

I certify that Madame Seacole twice cured me effectually of dysentery while in the Crimea, and also my clerk and the men of my corps, to my certain knowledge.

And some of the men shall speak for themselves: –

Stationary Engine, December 1, 1855

I certify that I was severely attacked by diarrhoea after landing in the Crimea. I took a great deal of medicine, but nothing served me until I called on Mrs Seacole. She gave me her medicine but once, and I was cured effectually.

W M. KNOLLYS, Sergt., L. T. C.

This is to certify that Wm. Row, L. T. C, had a severe attack of illness, and was in a short time restored to health by the prompt attention and medical skill of Mrs Seacole, British Hotel, Spring Hill, Crimea.

Many of my patients belonged to the Land Transport and Army Works Corps. The former indeed were in my close neighbourhood, and their hospital was nearly opposite to the British Hotel. I did all I could for them, and have many letters expressive of their gratitude. From them I select the following: –

Head-Quarters, Camp, Crimea, June 30, 1856

I have much pleasure in bearing testimony to Mrs Seacole's kindness and attention to the sick of the Railway Labourers' Army Works Corps and Land Transport Corps during the winters of 1854 and 1855.

She not only, from the knowledge she had acquired in the West Indies, was enabled to administer appropriate remedies for their ailments, but, what was of as much or more importance, she charitably furnished them with proper nourishment, which they had no means of obtaining except in the hospital, and most of that class had an objection to go into hospital, particularly the railway labourers and the men of the Army Works Corps.

JOHN HALL,

Inspector-General of Hospitals³

I hope that Mr P—, of the Army Works Corps, will pardon my laying the following letter before the public: –

DEAR MRS SEACOLE, – It is with feelings of great pleasure that I hear you are safely arrived in England, upon which I beg to congratulate you, and return you many thanks for your kindness whilst in the Crimea.

The bitter sherry you kindly made up for me was in truth a great blessing to both myself and my son, and as I expect to go to Bombay shortly, I would feel grateful to you if you would favour me with the receipt for making it, as it appears to be so very grateful a beverage for weakness and bowel complaints in a warm climate. With many kind regards, believe me, dear madam, your obliged servant,

SAMUEL P—,

Late Superintendent Army Works Corps.

Here is a certificate from one of the Army Works' men, to whose case I devoted no little time and trouble: –

I certify that I was labouring under a severe attack of diarrhoea last August, and that I was restored to health through the instrumentality and kindness of Mrs Seacole.

'I also certify that my fingers were severely jammed whilst at work at Frenchman's Hill, and Mrs Seacole cured me after three doctors had fruitlessly attempted to cure them.

And I cannot leave the Crimea without testifying to the kindness and skill of Mrs Seacole, and may God reward her for it.

JAMES WALLEN,

5th Division Army Works Corps.

Here are three more letters – and the last I shall print – from a sailor, a soldier, and a civilian: –

This is to certify that Wm. Adams, caulker, of H.M.S. *Wasp*,⁴ and belonging to the Royal Naval Brigade, had a severe attack of cholera, and was cured in a few hours by

Mrs Seacole.

I certify that I was troubled by a severe inflammation of the chest, caused by exposure in the trenches, for about four months, and that Mrs Seacole's medicine completely cured me in one month, and may God reward her.

CHARLES FLINN, Sergt. 3rd

Co. R. S. M.

Upper Clapton, Middlesex, March 2, 1856

DEAR MADAM, – Having been informed by my son, Mr Edward Gill, of St George's Store, Crimea, of his recent illness (jaundice), and of your kind attention and advice to him during that illness, and up to the time he was, by the blessing of God and your assistance, restored to health, permit me, on behalf of myself, my wife, and my family, to return you our most grateful thanks, trusting you may be spared for many years to come, in health of body and vigour of mind, to carry out your benevolent intention. Believe me, my dear madam, yours most gratefully,

EDWARD GILL

And now that I have made this a chapter of testimonials, I may as well finish them right off, and have done with them altogether. I shall trouble the patient reader with four more only, which I have not the heart to omit.

Sebastopol, July 1, 1856

Mrs Seacole was with the British army in the Crimea from February, 1855, to this time. This excellent woman has frequently exerted herself in the most praiseworthy manner in attending wounded men, even in positions of great danger, and in assisting sick soldiers by all means in her power. In addition, she kept a very good store, and supplied us with many comforts at a time we much required them.

WM. P—,

Adjutant-General of the British Army

in the Crimea⁵

July 1, 1856

I have much pleasure in stating that I am acquainted with Mrs Seacole, and from all that I have seen or heard of her, I believe her to be a useful and good person, kind and charitable.

C. A. W—,

Lt.-Gen. Comm. of Sebastopol

The third is from the pen of one who at that time was more looked to, and better known, than any other man in the Crimea.

In the 2nd vol. of Russell's *Letters from the Seat of War*,⁶ p. [187](#), is the following entry: –

In the hour of their illness these men (Army Works Corps), in common with many others, have found a kind and successful physician. Close to the railway, half-way between the Col de Balaclava and Kadikoi, Mrs Seacole, formerly of Kingston and of several other parts of the world, such as Panama and Chagres, has pitched her abode – an iron storehouse with wooden sheds and outlying tributaries – and here she doctors and cures all manner of men with extraordinary success. She is always in attendance near the battle-field to aid the wounded, and has earned many a poor fellow's blessings.

Yes! I cannot – referring to that time – conscientiously charge myself with doing less for the men who had only thanks to give me, than for the officers whose gratitude gave me the necessities of life. I think I was ever ready to turn from the latter to help the former, humble as they might be; and they were grateful in their way, and as far as they could be. They would buy me apples and other fruit at Balaclava, and leave them at my store. One made me promise, when I returned home, to send word to his Irish mother, who was to send me a cow in token of her gratitude for the help I had been to her

son. I have a book filled with hundreds of the names of those who came to me for medicines and other aids; and never a train of sick or wounded men from the front passed the British Hotel but its hostess was awaiting them to offer comforts to the poor fellows, for whose suffering her heart bled.

Punch, who allowed my poor name to appear in the pages which had welcomed Miss Nightingale home – *Punch*, that whimsical mouthpiece of some of the noblest hearts that ever beat beneath black coats – shall last of all raise its voice, that never yet pleaded an unworthy cause, for the Mother Seacole that takes shame to herself for speaking thus of the poor part she bore of the trials and hardships endured on that distant shore, where Britain's best and bravest wrung hardly Sebastopol from the grasp of Britain's foe: –

No store she set by the epaulette,
Be it worsted or gold lace;
For K. C. B. or plain private Smith,
She had still one pleasant face.

And not alone was her kindness shown
To the hale and hungry lot
Who drank her grog and ate her prog,
And paid their honest shot.

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.

Of such work, God knows, was as much as she chose
That dreary winter-tide,
When Death hung o'er the damp and pestilent camp,
And his scythe swung far and wide.

She gave her aid to all who prayed,
To hungry and sick and cold;
Open hand and heart, alike ready to part
Kind words and acts, and gold.

And – be the right man in the right place who can –
The right woman was Dame Seacole.

Reader, now that we have come to the end of this chapter, I can say what I have been all anxiety to tell you from its beginning. Please look back to [Chapter VIII](#), and see how hard the right woman had to struggle to convey herself to the right place.

CHAPTER XIV

My Customers at the British Hotel

I shall proceed in this chapter to make the reader acquainted with some of the customers of the British Hotel, who came there for its creature comforts as well as its hostess's medicines when need was; and if he or she should be inclined to doubt or should hesitate at accepting my experience of Crimean life as entirely credible, I beg that individual to refer to the accounts which were given in the newspapers of the spring of 1855 and I feel sure they will acquit me of any intention to exaggerate. If I were to speak of all the nameless horrors of that spring¹ as plainly as I could, I should really disgust you; but those I shall bring before your notice have all something of the humorous in them – and so it ever is. Time is a great restorer, and changes surely the greatest sorrow into a pleasing memory. The sun shines this spring-time upon green grass that covers the graves of the poor fellows we left behind sadly a few short months ago:

bright flowers grow up upon ruins of batteries and crumbling trenches, and cover the sod that presses on many a mouldering token of the old time of battle and death. I dare say that, if I went to the Crimea now, I should see a smiling landscape, instead of the blood-stained scene which I shall ever associate with distress and death; and as it is with nature so it is with human kind. Whenever I meet those who have survived that dreary spring of 1855, we seldom talk about its horrors; but remembering its transient gleams of sunshine, smile at the fun and good nature that varied its long and weary monotony. And now that I am anxious to remember all I can that will interest my readers, my memory prefers to dwell upon what was pleasing and amusing, although the time will never come when it will cease to retain most vividly the pathos and woe of those dreadful months.

I have said that the winter had not ended when we began operations at the British Hotel; and very often, after we considered we were fairly under spring's influence, our old enemy would come back with an angry roar of wind and rain, levelling tents, unroofing huts, destroying roads, and handing over May to the command of General Fevrier; But the sun fought bravely for us, and in time always dispersed the leaden clouds and gilded the iron sky, and made us cheerful again. During the end of March, the whole of April, and a considerable portion of May, however, the army was but a little better off for the advent of spring. The military road to the camp was only in progress – the railway only carried ammunition. A few hours' rain rendered the old road all but

impassable, and scarcity often existed in the front before Sebastopol, although the frightened and anxious Commissariat toiled hard to avert such a mishap; so that very often to the British Hotel came officers starved out on the heights above us. The dandies of Rotten Row² would come down riding on sorry nags, ready to carry back – their servants were on duty in the trenches – anything that would be available for dinner. A single glance at their personal appearance would suffice to show the hardships of the life they were called upon to lead. Before I left London for the seat of war I had been more than once to the United Service Club, seeking to gain the interest of officers whom I had known in Jamaica; and I often thought afterwards of the difference between those I saw there trimly shaven, handsomely dressed, with spotless linen and dandy air, and these their companions, who in England would resemble them. Roughly, warmly dressed, with great fur caps, which met their beards and left nothing exposed but lips and nose, and not much of those; you would easily believe that soap and water were luxuries not readily obtainable, that shirts and socks were often comforts to dream about rather than possess, and that they were familiar with horrors you would shudder to hear named. Tell me, reader, can you fancy what the want of so simple a thing as a pocket handkerchief is? To put a case – have you ever gone out for the day without one; sat in a draught and caught a sneezing cold in the head? You say the question is an unnecessarily unpleasant one, and yet what I am about to tell you is true, and the sufferer is, I believe, still alive.

An officer had ridden down one day to obtain refreshments (this was very early in the spring); some nice fowls had just been taken from the spit, and I offered one to him. Paper was one of the most hardly obtainable luxuries of the Crimea, and I rarely had any to waste upon my customers; so I called out, 'Give me your pocket-handkerchief, my son, that I may wrap it up.' You see we could not be very particular out there; but he smiled very bitterly as he answered, 'Pocket-handkerchief, mother – by Jove! I wish I had one. I tore my last shirt into shreds a fortnight ago, and there's not a bit of it left now.'

Shortly after, a hundred-dozen of these useful articles came to my store, and I sold them all to officers and men very speedily.

For some time, and until I found the task beyond my strength, I kept up a capital table at the British Hotel; but at last I gave up doing so professedly, and my hungry customers had to make shift with whatever was on the premises. Fortunately they were not over-dainty, and had few antipathies. My duties increased so rapidly, that sometimes it was with difficulty that I found time to eat and sleep. Could I have obtained good servants, my daily labours would have been lightened greatly; but my staff never consisted of more than a few boys, two black cooks, some Turks – one of whom, Osman, had enough to do to kill and pluck the poultry, while the others looked after the stock and killed our goats and sheep – and as many runaway sailors or good-for-nothings in search of employment as we could from time to time lay our hands upon; but they never found

my larder entirely empty. I often used to roast a score or so of fowls daily, besides boiling hams and tongues. Either these or a slice from a joint of beef or mutton you would be pretty sure of finding at your service in the larder of the British Hotel.

Would you like, gentle reader, to know what other things suggestive of home and its comforts your relatives and friends in the Crimea could obtain from the hostess of Spring Hill? I do not tell you that the following articles were all obtainable at the commencement, but many were. The time was indeed when, had you asked me for mock turtle and venison, you should have had them, preserved in tins, but that was when the Crimea was flooded with plenty – too late, alas! to save many whom want had killed; but had you been doing your best to batter Sebastopol about the ears of the Russians in the spring and summer of the year before last, the firm of Seacole and Day would have been happy to have served you with (I omit ordinary things) linen and hosiery, saddlery, caps, boots and shoes, for the outer man; and for the inner man, meat and soups of every variety in tins (you can scarcely conceive how disgusted we all became at last with preserved provisions); salmon, lobsters, and oysters, also in tins, which last beaten up into fritters, with onions, butter, eggs, pepper, and salt, were very good; game, wild fowl, vegetables, also preserved, eggs, sardines, curry powder, cigars, tobacco, snuff, cigarette papers, tea, coffee, tooth powder, and currant jelly. When cargoes came in from Constantinople, we bought great supplies of potatoes, carrots, turnips, and greens. Ah! what a rush there used to be for the greens.

You might sometimes get hot rolls; but, generally speaking, I bought the Turkish bread (*ekmek*), baked at Balaclava.

Or had you felt too ill to partake of your rough camp fare, coarsely cooked by a soldier cook, who, unlike the French, could turn his hand to few things but fighting, and had ridden down that muddy road to the Col, to see what Mother Seacole could give you for dinner, the chances were you would have found a good joint of mutton, not of the fattest, forsooth; for in such miserable condition were the poor beasts landed, that once, when there came an urgent order from head-quarters for twenty-five pounds of mutton, we had to cut up one sheep and a half to provide the quantity; or you would have stumbled upon something curried, or upon a good Irish stew, nice and hot, with plenty of onions and potatoes, or upon some capital meat-pies. I found the preserved meats were better relished cooked in this fashion, and well doctored with stimulants. Before long I grew as familiar with the mysteries of seasoning as any London piaman, and could accommodate myself to the requirements of the seasons as readily. Or had there been nothing better, you might have gone further and fared on worse fare than one of my Welch rabbits, for the manufacture of which I became so famous. And had you been fortunate enough to have visited the British Hotel upon rice-pudding day, I warrant you would have ridden back to your hut with kind thoughts of Mother Seacole's endeavours to give you a taste of home. If I had nothing else to be proud of, I think my rice-puddings, made without milk, upon the high road to Sebastopol, would have gained me a reputation. What a shout there

used to be when I came out of my little caboose, hot and flurried, and called out, 'Rice-pudding day, my sons.' Some of them were baked in large shallow pans, for the men and the sick, who always said that it reminded them of home. You would scarcely expect to finish up your dinner with pastry, but very often you would have found a good stock of it in my larder. Whenever I had a few leisure moments, I used to wash my hands, roll up my sleeves and roll out pastry. Very often I was interrupted to dispense medicines; but if the tarts had a flavour of senna, or the puddings tasted of rhubarb,³ it never interfered with their consumption. I declare I never heard or read of an army so partial to pastry as that British army before Sebastopol; while I had a reputation for my sponge-cakes that any pastry-cook in London, even Gunter, might have been proud of.⁴ The officers, full of fun and high spirits, used to crowd into the little kitchen, and, despite all my remonstrances, which were not always confined to words, for they made me frantic sometimes, and an iron spoon is a tempting weapon, would carry off the tarts hot from the oven, while the good-for-nothing black cooks, instead of lending me their aid, would stand by and laugh with all their teeth. And when the hot season commenced, the crowds that came to the British Hotel for my claret and cider cups, and other cooling summer drinks, were very complimentary in their expressions of appreciation of my skill.

Now, supposing that you had made a hearty dinner and were thinking of starting homeward – if I can use so pleasant a term in reference to your cheerless quarters – it was very natural that you

should be anxious to carry back something to your hut. Perhaps you expected to be sent into the trenches (many a supper cooked by me has been consumed in those fearful trenches by brave men, who could eat it with keen appetites while the messengers of death were speeding around them); or perhaps you had planned a little dinner-party, and wanted to give your friends something better than their ordinary fare. Anyhow, you would in all probability have some good reason for returning laden with comforts and necessities from Spring Hill. You would not be very particular about carrying them. You might have been a great swell at home, where you would have shuddered if Bond Street had seen you carrying a parcel no larger than your card-case; but those considerations rarely troubled you here. Very likely, your servant was lying crouched in a rifle pit, having 'pots' at the Russians, or keeping watch and ward in the long lines of trenches, or, stripped to his shirt, shovelling powder and shot into the great guns, whose steady roar broke the evening's calm. So if you did not wait upon yourself, you would stand a very fair chance of being starved. But you would open your knapsack, if you had brought one, for me to fill it with potatoes, and halloo out, 'Never mind, mother!' although the gravy from the fowls on your saddle before you was soaking through the little modicum of paper which was all I could afford you. So laden, you would cheerfully start up the hill of mud hutward; and well for you if you did not come to grief on that treacherous sea of mud that lay swelling between the Col and your destination. Many a mishap, ludicrous but for their consequences, happened on it. I remember a young officer

coming down one day just in time to carry off my last fowl and meat pie. Before he had gone far, the horse so floundered in the mud that the saddle-girths broke, and while the pies rolled into the clayey soil in one direction, the fowl flew in another. To make matters worse, the horse, in his efforts to extricate himself, did for them entirely; and in terrible distress, the poor fellow came back for me to set him up again. I shook my head for a long time, but at last, after he had over and over again urged upon me pathetically that he had two fellows coming to dine with him at six, and nothing in the world in his hut but salt pork, I resigned a plump fowl which I had kept back for my own dinner. Off he started again, but soon came back with, 'Oh, mother, I forgot all about the potatoes; they've all rolled out upon that—road; you must fill my bag again.' We all laughed heartily at him, but this state of things *had* been rather tragical.

Before I bring this chapter to a close, I should like, with the reader's permission, to describe one day of my life in the Crimea. They were all pretty much alike, except when there was fighting upon a large scale going on, and duty called me to the field. I was generally up and busy by daybreak, sometimes earlier, for in the summer my bed had no attractions strong enough to bind me to it after four. There was plenty to do before the work of the day began. There was the poultry to pluck and prepare for cooking, which had been killed on the previous night; the joints to be cut up and got ready for the same purpose; the medicines to be mixed; the store to be swept and cleaned. Of very great importance, with all these

things to see after, were the few hours of quiet before the road became alive with travellers. By seven o'clock the morning coffee would be ready, hot and refreshing, and eagerly sought for by the officers of the Army Works Corps engaged upon making the great high-road to the front, and the Commissariat and Land Transport men carrying stores from Balaclava to the heights. There was always a great demand for coffee by those who knew its refreshing and strengthening qualities, milk I could not give them (I kept it in tins for special use); but they had it hot and strong, with plenty of sugar and a slice of butter, which I recommend as a capital substitute for milk. From that time until nine, officers on duty in the neighbourhood, or passing by, would look in for breakfast, and about half past nine my sick patients began to show themselves. In the following hour they came thickly, and sometimes it was past twelve before I had got through this duty. They came with every variety of suffering and disease; the cases I most disliked were the frostbitten fingers and feet in the winter. That over, there was the hospital to visit across the way, which was sometimes overcrowded with patients. I was a good deal there, and as often as possible would take over books and papers, which I used to borrow for that purpose from my friends and the officers I knew. Once, a great packet of tracts was sent to me from Plymouth⁵ anonymously, and these I distributed in the same manner. By this time the day's news had come from the front, and perhaps among the casualties over night there would be some one wounded or sick, who would be glad to see me ride up with the comforts he stood most in need of; and

during the day, if any accident occurred in the neighbourhood or on the road near the British Hotel, the men generally brought the sufferer there, whence, if the hurt was serious, he would be transferred to the hospital of the Land Transport opposite. I used not always to stand upon too much ceremony when I heard of sick or wounded officers in the front. Sometimes their friends would ask me to go to them, though very often I waited for no hint, but took the chance of meeting with a kind reception. I used to think of their relatives at home, who would have given so much to possess my privilege; and more than one officer have I startled by appearing before him, and telling him abruptly that he must have a mother, wife, or sister at home whom he missed, and that he must therefore be glad of some woman to take their place.

Until evening the store would be filled with customers wanting stores, dinners, and luncheons; loungers and idlers seeking conversation and amusement; and at eight o'clock the curtain descended on that day's labour, and I could sit down and eat at leisure. It was no easy thing to clear the store, canteen, and yards; but we determined upon adhering to the rule that nothing should be sold after that hour, and succeeded. Any one who came after that time, came simply as a friend. There could be no necessity for any one, except on extraordinary occasions, when the rule could be relaxed, to purchase things after eight o'clock. And drunkenness or excess were discouraged at Spring Hill in every way; indeed, my few unpleasant scenes arose chiefly from my refusing to sell liquor where I saw it was wanted to be abused. I could appeal with a clear

conscience to all who knew me there, to back my assertion that I neither permitted drunkenness among the men nor gambling among the officers. Whatever happened elsewhere, intoxication, cards, and dice were never to be seen within the precincts of the British Hotel.⁶ My regulations were well known, and a kind-hearted officer of the Royals, who was much there, and who permitted me to use a familiarity towards him which I trust I never abused, undertook to be my Provost-marshal, but his duties were very light.

At first we kept our store open on Sunday from sheer necessity, but after a little while, when stores in abundance were established at Kadikoi and elsewhere, and the absolute necessity no longer existed, Sunday became a day of most grateful rest at Spring Hill. This step also met with opposition from the men; but again we were determined, and again we triumphed. I am sure we needed rest. I have often wondered since how it was that I never fell ill or came home 'on urgent private affairs.' I am afraid that I was not sufficiently thankful to the Providence which gave me strength to carry out the work I loved so well, and felt so happy in being engaged upon; but although I never had a week's illness during my campaign, the labour, anxiety, and perhaps the few trials that followed it, have told upon me. I have never felt since that time the strong and hearty woman that I was when I braved with impunity the pestilence of Navy Bay and Cruces. It would kill me easily now.

CHAPTER XV

My First Glimpse of War – Advance of my Turkish
Friends on Kamara – Visitors to the Camp – Miss
Nightingale – Mons. Soyer and the Cholera – Summer in
the Crimea – ‘Thirsty Souls’ – Death busy in the Trenches

In the last three chapters, I have attempted, without any consideration of dates, to give my readers some idea of my life in the Crimea. I am fully aware that I have jumbled up events strangely, talking in the same page, and even sentence, of events which occurred at different times; but I have three excuses to offer for my unhistorical inexactness. In the first place, my memory is far from trustworthy, and I kept no written diary; in the second place, the reader must have had more than enough of journals and chronicles of Crimean life, and I am only the historian of Spring Hill; and in the third place, unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all.

I shall now endeavour to describe my out-of-door life as much as possible, and write of those great events in the field of which I was a humble witness. But I shall continue to speak from my own experience simply; and if the reader should be surprised at my leaving any memorable action of the army unnoticed, he may be sure that it is because I was mixing medicines or making good things in the kitchen of the British Hotel, and first heard the particulars of it, perhaps, from the newspapers which came from home. My readers must know, too, that they were much more familiar with the history of the camp at their own firesides, than we who lived in it. Just as a spectator seeing one of the battles from a hill, as I did the Tchernaya, knows more about it than the combatant in the valley below, who only thinks of the enemy whom it is his immediate duty to repel; so you, through the valuable aid of the cleverest man in the whole camp,¹ read in the *Times*' columns the details of that great campaign, while we, the actors in it, had enough to do to discharge our own duties well, and rarely concerned ourselves in what seemed of such importance to you. And so very often a desperate skirmish or hard-fought action, the news of which created so much sensation in England, was but little regarded at Spring Hill.

My first experience of battle was pleasant enough. Before we had been long at Spring Hill, Omar Pasha got something for his Turks to do,² and one fine morning they were marched away towards the Russian outposts on the road to Baidar. I accompanied them on horseback, and enjoyed the sight amazingly. English and French

cavalry preceded the Turkish infantry over the plain yet full of memorials of the terrible Light Cavalry charge a few months before; and while one detachment of the Turks made a reconnaissance to the right of the Tchernaya, another pushed their way up the hill, towards Kamara, driving in the Russian outposts, after what seemed but a slight resistance. It was very pretty to see them advance, and to watch how every now and then little clouds of white smoke puffed up from behind bushes and the crests of hills, and were answered by similar puffs from the long line of busy skirmishers that preceded the main body. This was my first experience of actual battle, and I felt that strange excitement which I do not remember on future occasions, coupled with an earnest longing to see more of warfare, and to share in its hazards. It was not long before my wish was gratified.

I do not know much of the second bombardment of Sebastopol in the month of April, although I was as assiduous as I could be in my attendance at Cathcart's Hill.³ I could judge of its severity by the long trains of wounded which passed the British Hotel. I had a stretcher laid near the door, and very often a poor fellow was laid upon it, outwearied by the terrible conveyance from the front.

After this unsuccessful bombardment, it seemed to us that there was a sudden lull in the progress of the siege; and other things began to interest us. There were several arrivals to talk over. Miss Nightingale came to supervise the Balaclava hospitals, and, before long, she had practical experience of Crimean fever.⁴ After her,

came the Duke of Newcastle, and the great high priest of the mysteries of cookery, Mons. Alexis Soyer.⁵ He was often at Spring Hill, with the most smiling of faces and in the most gorgeous of irregular uniforms, and never failed to praise my soups and dainties. I always flattered myself that I was his match, and with our West Indian dishes could of course beat him hollow, and more than once I challenged him to a trial of skill; but the gallant Frenchman only shrugged his shoulders, and disclaimed my challenge with many flourishes of his jewelled hands, declaring that Madame proposed a contest where victory would cost him his reputation for gallantry, and be more disastrous than defeat. And all because I was a woman, forsooth. What nonsense to talk like that, when I was doing the work of half a dozen men. Then he would laugh and declare that, when our campaigns were over, we would render rivalry impossible, by combining to open the first restaurant in Europe. There was always fun in the store when the good-natured Frenchman was there.

One dark, tempestuous night, I was knocked up by the arrival of other visitors. These were the first regiment of Sardinian Grenadiers, who, benighted on their way to the position assigned them, remained at Spring Hill until the morning.⁶ We soon turned out our staff, and lighted up the store, and entertained the officers as well as we could inside, while the soldiers bivouacked in the yards around. Not a single thing was stolen or disturbed that night, although they had many opportunities. We all admired and liked the Sardinians;

they were honest, well-disciplined fellows, and I wish there had been no worse men or soldiers in the Crimea.

As the season advanced many visitors came to the Crimea from all parts of the world, and many of them were glad to make Spring Hill their head-quarters. We should have been better off if some of them had spared us this compliment. A Captain St Clair, for instance – who could doubt any one with such a name? – stayed some time with us, had the best of everything, and paid us most honourably with one bill upon his agents, while we cashed another to provide him with money for his homeward route. He was an accomplished fellow, and I really liked him; but, unfortunately for us, he was a swindler.

I saw much of another visitor to the camp in the Crimea – an old acquaintance of mine with whom I had had many a hard bout in past times – the cholera. There were many cases in the hospital of the Land Transport Corps opposite, and I prescribed for many others personally. The raki sold in too many of the stores in Balaclava and Kadikoi was most pernicious; and although the authorities forbade the sutlers to sell, it under heavy penalties, it found its way into the camp in large quantities.

During May, and while preparations were being made for the third great bombardment of the ill-fated city,⁷ summer broke beautifully, and the weather, chequered occasionally by fitful intervals of cold and rain, made us all cheerful. You would scarcely have believed that the happy, good-humoured, and jocular visitors to the British

Hotel were the same men who had a few weeks before ridden gloomily through the muddy road to its door. It was a period of relaxation, and they all enjoyed it. Amusement was the order of the day. Races, dog-hunts, cricket-matches, and dinner-parties were eagerly indulged in, and in all I could be of use to provide the good cheer which was so essential a part of these entertainments; and when the warm weather came in all its intensity, and I took to manufacturing cooling beverages for my friends and customers, my store was always full. To please all was somewhat difficult, and occasionally some of them were scarcely so polite as they should have been to a perplexed hostess, who could scarcely be expected to remember that Lieutenant A. had bespoke his sangaree an instant before Captain B. and his friends had ordered their claret cup.

In anticipation of the hot weather, I had laid in a large stock of raspberry vinegar, which, properly managed, helps to make a pleasant drink; and there was a great demand for sangaree, claret, and cider cups, the cups being battered pewter pots. Would you like, reader, to know my recipe for the favourite claret cup? It is simple enough. Claret, water, lemon-peel, sugar, nutmeg, and – ice – yes, ice, but not often and not for long, for the eager officers soon made an end of it. Sometimes there were dinner-parties at Spring Hill, but of these more hereafter. At one of the earliest, when the *Times* correspondent was to be present, I rode down to Kadikoi, bought some calico and cut it up into table napkins. They all laughed very heartily, and thought perhaps of a few weeks previously, when

every available piece of linen in the camp would have been snapped up for pocket-handkerchiefs.

But the reader must not forget that all this time, although there might be only a few short and sullen roars of the great guns by day, few nights passed without some fighting in the trenches; and very often the news of the morning would be that one or other of those I knew had fallen. These tidings often saddened me, and when I awoke in the night and heard the thunder of the guns fiercer than usual, I have quite dreaded the dawn which might usher in bad news.

The deaths in the trenches touched me deeply, perhaps for this reason. It was very usual, when a young officer was ordered into the trenches, for him to ride down to Spring Hill to dine, or obtain something more than his ordinary fare to brighten his weary hours in those fearful ditches. They seldom failed on these occasions to shake me by the hand at parting, and sometimes would say, 'You see, Mrs Seacole, I can't say good-bye to the dear ones at home, so I'll bid you good-bye for them. Perhaps you'll see them some day, and if the Russians should knock me over, mother, just tell them I thought of them all – will you?' And although all this might be said in a light-hearted manner, it was rather solemn. I felt it to be so, for I never failed (although who was I, that I should preach?) to say something about God's providence and relying upon it; and they were very good. No army of parsons could be much better than my sons. They would listen very gravely, and shake me by the hand

again, while I felt that there was nothing in the world I would not do for them. Then very often the men would say, 'I'm going in with my master to-night, Mrs Seacole; come and look after him, if he's hit;' and so often as this happened I would pass the night restlessly, awaiting with anxiety the morning, and yet dreading to hear the news it held in store for me. I used to think it was like having a large family of children ill with fever, and dreading to hear which one had passed away in the night.

And as often as the bad news came, I thought it my duty to ride up to the hut of the sufferer and do my woman's work. But I felt it deeply. How could it be otherwise? There was one poor boy in the Artillery, with blue eyes and light golden hair, whom I nursed through a long and weary sickness, borne with all a man's spirit, and whom I grew to love like a fond old-fashioned mother. I thought if ever angels watched over any life, they would shelter his; but one day, but a short time after he had left his sick-bed, he was struck down on his battery, working like a young hero. It was a long time before I could banish from my mind the thought of him as I saw him last, the yellow hair, stiff and stained with his life-blood, and the blue eyes closed in the sleep of death. Of course, I saw him buried, as I did poor H—V—, my old Jamaica friend, whose kind face was so familiar to me of old. Another good friend I mourned bitterly – Captain B—, of the Coldstreams – a great cricketer. He had been with me on the previous evening, had seemed dull, but had supped at my store, and on the following morning a brother officer told me he was shot dead while setting his pickets, which

made me ill and unfit for work for the whole day. Mind you, a day was a long time to give to sorrow in the Crimea.

I could give many other similar instances, but why should I sadden myself or my readers? Others have described the horrors of those fatal trenches;⁸ but their real history has never been written, and perhaps it is as well that so harrowing a tale should be left in oblivion. Such anecdotes as the following were very current in the Camp, but I have no means of answering for its truth. Two sergeants met in the trenches, who had been schoolmates in their youth; years had passed since they set out for the battle of life by different roads, and now they met again under the fire of a common enemy. With one impulse they started forward to exchange the hearty hand-shake and the mutual greetings, and while their hands were still clasped, a chance shot killed both.

CHAPTER XVI

Under Fire on the fatal 18th of June – Before the Redan –
At the Cemetery – The Armistice – Deaths at
Head-quarters – Depression in the Camp – Plenty in the
Crimea – The Plague of Flies – Under Fire at the Battle of
the Tchernaya – Work on the Field – My Patients

Before I left the Crimea to return to England, the Adjutant-General of the British Army gave me a testimonial, which the reader has already read in [Chapter XIV](#),¹ in which he stated that I had ‘frequently exerted myself in the most praiseworthy manner in attending wounded men, even in positions of great danger.’ The simple meaning of this sentence is that, in the discharge of what I conceived to be my duty, I was frequently ‘under fire.’ Now I am far from wishing to speak of this fact with any vanity or pride, because, after all, one soon gets accustomed to it, and it fails at last to create more than temporary uneasiness. Indeed, after Sebastopol was ours,² you might often see officers and men strolling coolly, even leisurely, across and along those streets, exposed to the enemy’s fire,

when a little haste would have carried them beyond the reach of danger. The truth was, I believe, they had grown so habituated to being in peril from shot or shell, that they rather liked the sensation, and found it difficult to get on without a little gratuitous excitement and danger.

But putting aside the great engagements, where I underwent considerable peril, one could scarcely move about the various camps without some risk. The Russians had, it seemed, sunk great ships' guns into the earth, from which they fired shot and shell at a very long range, which came tumbling and plunging between, and sometimes into the huts and tents, in a very unwieldy and generally harmless fashion. Once when I was riding through the camp of the Rifles, a round shot came plunging towards 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 distance in front of us.

In the first week of June, the third bombardment of Sebastopol opened, and the Spring Hill visitors had plenty to talk about. Many were the surmises as to when the assault would take place, of the success of which nobody entertained a doubt. Somehow or other, important secrets oozed out in various parts of the camp, which the Russians would have given much to know, and one of these places was the British Hotel. Some such whispers were afloat on the evening of Sunday the 17th of June, and excited me strangely. Any stranger not in my secret would have considered that my conduct fully justified my partner, Mr Day, in sending me home, as better

fitted for a cell in Bedlam³ than the charge of an hotel in the Crimea. I never remember feeling more excited or more restless than upon that day, and no sooner had night fairly closed in upon us than, instead of making preparations for bed, this same stranger would have seen me wrap up – the nights were still cold – and start off for a long walk to Cathcart's Hill, three miles and a half away. I stayed there until past midnight, but when I returned home, there was no rest for me; for I had found out that, in the stillness of the night, many regiments were marching down to the trenches, and that the dawn of day would be the signal that should let them loose upon the Russians. The few hours still left before daybreak, were made the most of at Spring Hill. We were all busily occupied in cutting bread and cheese and sandwiches, packing up fowls, tongues, and ham, wine and spirits, while I carefully filled the large bag, which I always carried into the field slung across my shoulder, with lint, bandages, needles, thread, and medicines; and soon after daybreak everything was ready packed upon two mules, in charge of my steadiest lad, and, I leading the way on horseback, the little cavalcade left the British Hotel before the sun of the fatal 18th of June had been many hours old.

It was not long before our progress was arrested by the cavalry pickets closely stationed to stop all stragglers and spectators from reaching the scene of action. But after a slight parley and when they found out who I was, and how I was prepared for the day's work, the men raised a shout for me, and, with their officer's sanction, allowed me to pass. So I reached Cathcart's Hill crowded with non-

combatants, and, leaving there the mules, loaded myself with what provisions I could carry, and – it was a work of no little difficulty and danger – succeeded in reaching the reserves of Sir Henry Barnard's division,⁴ which was to have stormed something, I forget what; but when they found the attack upon the Redan was a failure, very wisely abstained. Here I found plenty of officers who soon relieved me of my refreshments, and some wounded men who found the contents of my bag very useful. At length I made my way to the Woronzoff Road,⁵ where the temporary hospital had been erected, and there I found the doctors hard enough at work, and hastened to help them as best I could. I bound up the wounds and ministered to the wants of a good many, and stayed there some considerable time.

Upon the way, and even here, I was 'under fire.' More frequently than was agreeable, a shot would come ploughing up the ground and raising clouds of dust, or a shell whizz above us. Upon these occasions those around would cry out, 'Lie down, mother, lie down!' and with very undignified and unladylike haste I had to embrace the earth, and remain there until the same voices would laughingly assure me that the danger was over, or one, more thoughtful than the rest, would come to give me a helping hand, and hope that the old lady was neither hit nor frightened. Several times in my wanderings on that eventful day, of which I confess to have a most confused remembrance, only knowing that I looked after many wounded men, I was ordered back, but each time my bag of bandages and comforts for the wounded proved my passport. While at the hospital I was chiefly of use looking after those, who, either

from lack of hands or because their hurts were less serious, had to wait, pained and weary, until the kind-hearted doctors – who, however, *looked* more like murderers – could attend to them. And the grateful words and smile which rewarded me for binding up a wound or giving cooling drink was a pleasure worth risking life for at any time. It was here that I received my only wound during the campaign. I threw myself too hastily on the ground, in obedience to the command of those around me, to escape a threatening shell, and fell heavily on the thumb of my right hand, dislocating it. It was bound up on the spot and did not inconvenience me much, but it has never returned to its proper shape.

After this, first washing my hands in some sherry from lack of water, I went back to Cathcart's Hill, where I found my horse, and heard that the good-for-nothing lad, either frightened or tired of waiting, had gone away with the mules. I had to ride three miles after him, and then the only satisfaction I had arose from laying my horsewhip about his shoulders. After that, working my way round, how I can scarcely tell, I got to the extreme left attack, where General Eyre's division had been hotly engaged all day, and had suffered severely.⁶ I left my horse in charge of some men, and with no little difficulty, and at no little risk, crept down to where some wounded men lay, with whom I left refreshments. And then – it was growing late – I started for Spring Hill, where I heard all about the events of the luckless day from those who had seen them from posts of safety, while I, who had been in the midst of it all day, knew so little.

On the following day some Irishmen of the 8th Royals brought me, in token of my having been among them, a Russian woman's dress and a poor pigeon, which they had brought away from one of the houses in the suburb where their regiment suffered so severely.

But that evening of the 18th of June was a sad one, and the news that came in of those that had fallen were most heartrending. Both the leaders, who fell so gloriously before the Redan, had been very good to the mistress of Spring Hill. But a few days before the 18th, Col. Y— had merrily declared that I should have a silver salver to hand about things upon, instead of the poor shabby one I had been reduced to; while Sir John C—⁷ had been my kind patron for some years. It was in my house in Jamaica that Lady C—⁸ had once lodged when her husband was stationed in that island. And when the recall home came, Lady C—, who, had she been like most women, would have shrunk from any exertion, declared that she was a soldier's wife and would accompany him. Fortunately the *Blenheim* was detained in the roads a few days after the time expected for her departure, and I put into its father's arms a little Scotchman,⁹ born within sight of the blue hills of Jamaica. And yet with these at home, the brave general – as I read in the *Times* a few weeks later – displayed a courage amounting to rashness, and, sending away his aides-de-camp, rushed on to a certain death.¹⁰

On the following day, directly I heard of the armistice, I hastened to the scene of action, anxious to see once more the faces of those who had been so kind to me in life. That battle-field was a fearful

sight for a woman to witness, and if I do not pray God that I may never see its like again, it is because I wish to be useful all my life, and it is in scenes of horror and distress that a woman can do so much. It was late in the afternoon, not, I think, until half-past four, that the Russians brought over the bodies of the two leaders of yesterday's assault. They had stripped Sir John of epaulettes, sword, and boots. Ah! how my heart felt for those at home who would so soon hear of this day's fatal work. It was on the following day, I think, that I saw them bury him near Cathcart's Hill, where his tent had been pitched. If I had been in the least humour for what was ludicrous, the looks and curiosity of the Russians who saw me during the armistice would have afforded me considerable amusement. I wonder what rank they assigned me.

How true it is, as somebody has said, that misfortunes never come singly.¹¹ N. B. Pleasures often do. For while we were dull enough at this great trouble, we had cholera raging around us, carrying off its victims of all ranks. There was great distress in the Sardinian camp on this account, and I soon lost another good customer, General E—, carried off by the same terrible plague.¹² Before Mrs E— left the Crimea, she sent several useful things, kept back from the sale of the general's effects. At this sale I wanted to buy a useful waggon, but did not like to bid against Lord W—,¹³ who purchased it; but (I tell this anecdote to show how kind they all were to me) when his lordship heard of this he sent it over to Spring Hill, with a message that it was mine for a far lower price than he had given for it. And

since my return home I have had to thank the same nobleman for still greater favours. But who, indeed, has not been kind to me?

Within a week after General E—'s death, a still greater calamity happened. Lord Raglan died – that great soldier who had such iron courage, with the gentle smile and kind word that always show the good man. I was familiar enough with his person; for, although people did not know it in England, he was continually in the saddle looking after his suffering men, and scheming plans for their benefit. And the humblest soldier will remember that, let who might look stern and distant, the first man in the British army ever had a kind word to give him.

During the time he was ill I was at head-quarters several times, and once his servants allowed me to peep into the room where their master lay. I do not think they knew that he was dying, but they seemed very sad and low – far more so than he for whom they feared. And on the day of his funeral I was there again. I never saw such heartfelt gloom as that which brooded on the faces of his attendants; but it was good to hear how they all, even the humblest, had some kind memory of the great general whom Providence had called from his post at such a season of danger and distress. And once again they let me into the room in which the coffin lay, and I timidly stretched out my hand and touched a corner of the union-jack which lay upon it; and then I watched it wind its way through the long lines of soldiery towards Kamiesch, while, ever and anon, the guns thundered forth in sorrow, not in anger.¹⁴ And for days

after I could not help thinking of the *Caradoc*, which was ploughing its way through the sunny sea with its sad burden.¹⁵

It was not in the nature of the British army to remain long dull, and before very long we went on gaily as ever, forgetting the terrible 18th of June, or only remembering it to look forward to the next assault compensating for all. And once more the British Hotel was filled with a busy throng, and laughter and fun re-echoed through its iron rafters. Nothing of consequence was done in the front for weeks, possibly because Mr Russell was taking holiday, and would not return until August.¹⁶

About this time the stores of the British Hotel were well filled, not only with every conceivable necessary of life, but with many of its most expensive luxuries. It was at this period that you could have asked for few things that I could not have supplied you with on the spot, or obtained for you, if you had a little patience and did not mind a few weeks' delay. Not only Spring Hill and Kadikoi, which – a poor place enough when we came – had grown into a town of stores, and had its market regulations and police, but the whole camp shared in this unusual plenty. Even the men could afford to despise salt meat and pork, and fed as well, if not better, than if they had been in quarters at home. And there were coffee-houses and places of amusement opened at Balaclava, and balls given in some of them, which raised my temper to an unwonted pitch, because I foresaw the dangers which they had for the young and impulsive; and sure enough they cost several officers their

commissions. Right glad was I one day when the great purifier, Fire, burnt down the worst of these places and ruined its owner, a bad Frenchwoman. And the railway was in full work, and the great road nearly finished, and the old one passable, and the mules and horses looked in such fair condition, that you would scarcely have believed Farrier C—, of the Land Transport Corps, who would have told you then, and will tell you now, that he superintended, on one bleak morning of February, not six months ago, the task of throwing the corpses of one hundred and eight mules over the cliffs at Karanyi into the Black Sea beneath.¹⁷

Of course the summer introduced its own plagues, and among the worst of these were the flies. I shall never forget those Crimean flies, and most sincerely hope that, like the Patagonians, they are only to be found in one part of the world.¹⁸ Nature must surely have intended them for blackbeetles, and accidentally given them wings. There was no exterminating them – no thinning them – no escaping from them by night or by day. One of my boys confined himself almost entirely to laying baits and traps for their destruction, and used to boast that he destroyed them at the rate of a gallon a day; but I never noticed any perceptible decrease in their powers of mischief and annoyance. The officers in the front suffered terribly from them. One of my kindest customers, a lieutenant serving in the Royal Naval Brigade, who was a close relative of the Queen,¹⁹ whose uniform he wore, came to me in great perplexity. He evidently considered the fly nuisance the most trying portion of the

campaign, and of far more consequence than the Russian shot and shell. 'Mami,' he said (he had been in the West Indies, and so called me by the familiar term used by the Creole children), 'Mami, these flies respect nothing. Not content with eating my prog, they set to at night and make a supper of me,' and his face showed traces of their attacks. 'Confound them, they'll kill me, mami; they're everywhere, even in the trenches, and you'd suppose they wouldn't care to go there from choice. What can you do for me, mami?'

Not much; but I rode down to Mr B—'s store, at Kadikoi, where I was lucky in being able to procure a piece of muslin, which I pinned up (time was too precious to allow me to use needle and thread) into a mosquito net, with which the prince was delighted. He fell ill later in the summer, when I went up to his quarters and did all I could for him.

As the summer wore on, busily passed by all of us at the British Hotel, rumours stronger than ever were heard of a great battle soon to be fought by the reinforcements which were known to have joined the Russian army.²⁰ And I think that no one was much surprised when one pleasant August morning, at early dawn, heavy firing was heard towards the French position on the right, by the Tchernaya, and the stream of troops and on-lookers poured from all quarters in that direction. Prepared and loaded as usual, I was soon riding in the same direction, and saw the chief part of the morning's battle. I saw the Russians cross and recross the river. I saw their officers cheer and wave them on in the coolest, bravest manner,

until they were shot down by scores. I was near enough to hear at times, in the lull of artillery, and above the rattle of the musketry, the excited cheers which told of a daring attack or a successful repulse; and beneath where I stood I could see – what the Russians could not – steadily drawn up, quiet and expectant, the squadrons of English and French cavalry, calmly yet impatiently waiting until the Russians' partial success should bring their sabres into play. But the contingency never happened, and we saw the Russians fall slowly back in good order, while the dark-plumed Sardinians²¹ and red-pantalooned French spread out in pursuit, and formed a picture so excitingly beautiful that we forgot the suffering and death they left behind. And then I descended with the rest into the field of battle.

It was a fearful scene; but why repeat this remark. All death is trying to witness – even that of the good man who lays down his life hopefully and peacefully; but on the battle-field, when the poor body is torn and rent in hideous ways, and the scared spirit struggles to loose itself from the still strong frame that holds it tightly to the last, death is fearful indeed. It had come peacefully enough to some. They lay with half-opened eyes, and a quiet smile about the lips that showed their end to have been painless; others it had arrested in the heat of passion, and frozen on their pallid faces a glare of hatred and defiance that made your warm blood run cold. But little time had we to think of the dead, whose business it was to see after the dying, who might yet be saved. The ground was thickly cumbered with the wounded, some of them calm and resigned, others impatient 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. You might see officers and strangers, visitors to the camp, riding about the field on this errand of mercy. And this, although – surely it could not have been intentional – Russian guns still played upon the scene of action. There were many others there, bent on a more selfish task. The plunderers were busy everywhere. It was marvellous to see how eagerly the French stripped the dead of what was valuable, not always, in their brutal work, paying much regard to the presence of a lady. Some of the officers, when I complained rather angrily, laughed, and said it was spoiling the Egyptians; but I *do* think the Israelites spared their enemies those garments, which, perhaps, were not so unmentionable in those days as they have since become.²²

I attended to the wounds of many French and Sardinians, and helped to lift them into the ambulances, which came tearing up to the scene of action. I derived no little gratification from being able to dress the wounds of several Russians; indeed, they were as kindly treated as the others. One of them was badly shot in the lower jaw, and was beyond my or any human skill. Incautiously I inserted my finger into his mouth to feel where the ball had lodged, and his teeth closed upon it, in the agonies of death, so tightly that I had to call to those around to release it, which was not done until it had been bitten so deeply that I shall carry the scar with me to my grave. Poor fellow, he meant me no harm, for, as the near approach of death softened his features, a smile spread over his rough inexpressive face, and so he died.

I attended another Russian, a handsome fellow, and an officer, shot in the side, who bore his cruel suffering with a firmness that was very noble. In return for the little use I was to him, he took a ring off his finger and gave it to me, and after I had helped to lift him into the ambulance he kissed my hand and smiled far more thanks than I had earned. I do not know whether he survived his wounds, but I fear not. Many others, on that day, gave me thanks in words the meaning of which was lost upon me, and all of them in that one common language of the whole world – smiles.

I carried two patients off the field; one a French officer wounded on the hip, who chose to go back to Spring Hill and be attended by me there, and who, on leaving, told us that he was a relative of the Marshal (Pelissier);²³ the other, a poor Cossack colt I found running round its dam, which lay beside its Cossack master dead, with its tongue hanging from its mouth. The colt was already wounded in the ears and fore-foot, and I was only just in time to prevent a French corporal who, perhaps for pity's sake, was preparing to give it its *coup de grace*. I saved the poor thing by promising to give the Frenchman ten shillings if he would bring it down to the British Hotel, which he did that same evening. I attended to its hurts, and succeeded in rearing it, and it became a great pet at Spring Hill, and accompanied me to England.

I picked up some trophies from the battle-field, but not many, and those of little value. I cannot bear the idea of plundering either the living or the dead; but I picked up a Russian metal cross, and took

from the bodies of some of the poor fellows nothing of more value than a few buttons, which I severed from their coarse grey coats.

So end my reminiscences of the battle of the Tchernaya, fought, as all the world knows, on the 16th of August, 1855.

CHAPTER XVII

Inside Sebastopol – The Last Bombardment of Sebastopol
– On Cathcart's Hill – Rumours in the Camp – The
Attack on the Malakhoff – The Old Work again – A
Sunday Excursion – Inside 'Our' City – I am taken for a
Spy, and thereat lose my Temper – I Visit the Redan, etc.
– My Share of the Plunder

The three weeks following the battle of the Tchernaya were, I should think, some of the busiest and most eventful the world has ever seen.¹ There was little doing at Spring Hill. Every one was either at his post, or too anxiously awaiting the issue of the last great bombardment to spend much time at the British Hotel. I think that I lost more of my patients and customers during those few weeks than during the whole previous progress of the siege. Scarce a night passed that I was not lulled to sleep with the heavy continuous roar of the artillery; scarce a morning dawned that the same sound did not usher in my day's work. The ear grew so accustomed during those weeks to the terrible roar, that when Sebastopol fell the sudden quiet seemed unnatural, and made us dull. And during the

whole of this time the most perplexing rumours flew about, some having reference to the day of assault, the majority relative to the last great effort which it was supposed the Russians would make to drive us into the sea.² I confess these latter rumours now and then caused me temporary uneasiness, Spring Hill being on the direct line of route which the actors in such a tragedy must take.

I spent much of my time on Cathcart's Hill, watching, with a curiosity and excitement which became intense, the progress of the terrible bombardment. Now and then a shell would fall among the crowd of on-lookers which covered the hill; but it never disturbed us, so keen and feverish and so deadened to danger had the excitement and expectation made us.

In the midst of the bombardment took place the important ceremony of distributing the Order of the Bath to those selected for that honour. I contrived to witness this ceremony very pleasantly; and although it cost me a day, I considered that I had fairly earned the pleasure. I was anxious to have some personal share in the affair, so I made, and forwarded to headquarters, a cake which Gunter might have been at some loss to manufacture with the materials at my command, and which I adorned gaily with banners, flags, etc. I received great kindness from the officials at the ceremony, and from the officers – some of rank – who recognized me; indeed, I held quite a little *levée* around my chair.

Well, a few days after this ceremony, I thought the end of the world, instead of the war, was at hand, when every battery opened

and poured a perfect hail of shot and shell upon the beautiful city which I had left the night before sleeping so calm and peaceful beneath the stars. The firing began at early dawn, and was fearful. Sleep was impossible; so I arose, and set out for my old station on Cathcart's Hill. And here, with refreshments for the anxious lookers-on, I spent most of my time, right glad of any excuse to witness the last scene of the siege. It was from this spot that I saw fire after fire break out in Sebastopol, and watched all night the beautiful yet terrible effect of a great ship blazing in the harbour, and lighting up the adjoining country for miles.

The weather changed, as it often did in the Crimea, most capriciously; and the morning of the memorable 8th of September broke cold and wintry. The same little bird which had let me into so many secrets, also gave me a hint of what this day was pregnant with;³ and very early in the morning I was on horseback, with my bandages and refreshments, ready to repeat the work of the 18th of June last. A line of sentries forbade all strangers passing through without orders, even to Cathcart's Hill; but once more I found that my reputation served as a permit, and the officers relaxed the rule in my favour everywhere. So, early in the day, I was in my old spot, with my old appliances for the wounded and fatigued; little expecting, however, that this day would so closely resemble the day of the last attack in its disastrous results.

It was noon before the cannonading suddenly ceased; and we saw, with a strange feeling of excitement, the French tumble out of their

advanced trenches, and roll into the Malakhoff like a human flood.⁴ Onward they seemed to go into the dust and smoke, swallowed up by hundreds; but they never returned, and before long we saw workmen levelling parapets and filling up ditches, over which they drove, with headlong speed and impetuosity, artillery and ammunition-waggons, until there could be no doubt that the Malakhoff was taken, although the tide of battle still surged around it with violence, and wounded men were borne from it in large numbers. And before this, our men had made their attack, and the fearful assault of the Redan was going on, and failing.⁵ But I was soon too busy to see much, for the wounded were borne in even in greater numbers than at the last assault; whilst stragglers, slightly hurt, limped in, in fast-increasing numbers, and engrossed our attention. I now and then found time to ask them rapid questions; but they did not appear to know anything more than that everything had gone wrong. The sailors, as before, showed their gallantry, and even recklessness, conspicuously. The wounded of the ladder and sandbag parties came up even with a laugh, and joked about their hurts in the happiest conceivable manner.

I saw many officers of the 97th wounded; and, as far as possible, I reserved my attentions for my old regiment, known so well in my native island. 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. In the midst of this we were often interrupted by those unwelcome and impartial Russian visitors – the

shells. One fell so near that I thought my last hour was come; and, although I had sufficient firmness to throw myself upon the ground, I was so seriously frightened that I never thought of rising from my recumbent position until the hearty laugh of those around convinced me that the danger had passed by. Afterwards I picked up a piece of this huge shell, and brought it home with me.

It was on this, as on every similar occasion, that I saw the *Times* correspondent eagerly taking down notes and sketches of the scene, under fire – listening apparently with attention to all the busy little crowd that surrounded him, but without laying down his pencil; and yet finding time, even in his busiest moment, to lend a helping hand to the wounded. It may have been on this occasion that his keen eye noticed me, and his mind, albeit engrossed with far more important memories, found room to remember me. I may well be proud of his testimony, borne so generously only the other day,⁶ and may well be excused for transcribing it from the columns of the *Times*: – ‘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, laden, not with plunder, good old soul! but with wine, bandages, and food for the wounded or the prisoners.’

I remained on Cathcart’s Hill far into the night, and watched the city blazing beneath us, awe-struck at the terrible sight, until the bitter wind found its way through my thin clothing, and chilled me

to the bone; and not till then did I leave for Spring Hill. I had little sleep that night. The night was made a ruddy lurid day with the glare of the blazing town; while every now and then came reports which shook the earth to its centre. And yet I believe very many of the soldiers, wearied with their day's labour, slept soundly throughout that terrible night, and awoke to find their work completed: for in the night, covered by the burning city, Sebastopol was left, a heap of ruins, to its victors;⁷ and before noon on the following day, none but dead and dying Russians were in the south side of the once famous and beautiful mistress-city of the Euxine.⁸

The good news soon spread through the camp. It gave great pleasure; but I almost think the soldiers would have been better pleased had the Russians delayed their parting twelve hours longer, and given the Highlanders⁹ and their comrades a chance of retrieving the disasters of the previous day. Nothing else could wipe away the soreness of defeat, or compensate for the better fortune which had befallen our allies the French.

The news of the evacuation of Sebastopol soon carried away all traces of yesterday's fatigue. For weeks past I had been offering bets to every one that I would not only be the first woman to enter Sebastopol from the English lines, but that I would be the first to carry refreshments into the fallen city. And now the time I had longed for had come. I borrowed some mules from the Land Transport Corps – mine were knocked up by yesterday's work – and loading them with good things, started off with my partner and

some other friends early on that memorable Sunday morning for Cathcart's Hill.

When I found that strict orders had been given to admit no one inside Sebastopol, I became quite excited; and making my way to General Garrett's quarters,¹⁰ I made such an earnest representation of what I considered my right that I soon obtained a pass, of which the following is a copy: –

Pass Mrs Seacole and her attendants, with refreshments for
officers and soldiers in the Redan and in Sebastopol.

GARRETT, M. G.

Cathcart's Hill, Sept. 9, 1855

So many attached themselves to my staff, becoming for the nonce my attendants, that I had some difficulty at starting; but at last I passed all the sentries safely, much to the annoyance of many officers, who were trying every conceivable scheme to evade them, and entered the city. I can give you no very clear description of its condition on that Sunday morning, a year and a half ago. Many parts of it were still blazing furiously – explosions were taking place in all directions – every step had a score of dangers; and yet curiosity and excitement carried us on and on. I was often stopped to give refreshments to officers and men, who had been fasting for hours. Some, on the other hand, had found their way to Russian cellars; and one body of men were most ingloriously drunk, and playing the wildest pranks. They were dancing, yelling, and singing

– some of them with Russian women's dresses fastened round their waists, and old bonnets stuck upon their heads.

I was offered many trophies. All plunder was stopped by the sentries, and confiscated, so that the soldiers could afford to be liberal. By one I was offered a great velvet sofa; another pressed a huge arm-chair, which had graced some Sebastopol study, upon me; while a third begged my acceptance of a portion of a grand piano. What I did carry away was very unimportant: a gaily-decorated altar-candle, studded with gold and silver stars, which the present Commander-in-Chief condescended to accept as a Sebastopol memorial; an old cracked China teapot, which in happier times had very likely dispensed pleasure to many a small tea-party; a cracked bell, which had rung many to prayers during the siege, and which I bore away on my saddle; and a parasol, given me by a drunken soldier. He had a silk skirt on, and torn lace upon his wrists, and he came mincingly up, holding the parasol above his head, and imitating the walk of an affected lady, to the vociferous delight of his comrades. And all this, and much more, in that fearful charnel city, with death and suffering on every side.

It was very hazardous to pass along some of the streets exposed to the fire of the Russians on the north side of the harbour. We had to wait and watch our opportunity, and then gallop for it. Some of us had close shaves of being hit. More than this, fires still kept breaking out around; while mines and fougasses not unfrequently exploded from unknown causes. We saw two officers emerge from a

heap of ruins, covered and almost blinded with smoke and dust, from some such unlooked-for explosion. With considerable difficulty we succeeded in getting into the quarter of the town held by the French,¹¹ where I was nearly getting into serious trouble.

I had loitered somewhat behind my party, watching, with pardonable curiosity, the adroitness with which a party of French were plundering a house; and by the time my curiosity had been satisfied, I found myself quite alone, my retinue having preceded me by some few hundred yards. This would have been of little consequence, had not an American sailor lad, actuated either by mischief or folly, whispered to the Frenchmen that I was a Russian spy; and had they not, instead of laughing at him, credited his assertion, and proceeded to arrest me. Now, such a charge was enough to make a lion of a lamb; so I refused positively to dismount, and made matters worse by knocking in the cap of the first soldier who laid hands upon me, with the bell that hung at my saddle. Upon this, six or seven tried to force me to the guard-house in rather a rough manner, while I resisted with all my force, screaming out for Mr Day, and using the bell for a weapon. How I longed for a better one I need not tell the reader. In the midst of this scene came up a French officer, whom I recognized as the patient I had taken to Spring Hill after the battle of the Tchernaya, and who took my part at once, and ordered them to release me. Although I rather weakened my cause, it was most natural that, directly I was released, I should fly at the varlet who had caused me this trouble;

and I did so, using my bell most effectually, and aided, when my party returned, by their riding whips.

This little adventure took up altogether so much time that, when the French soldiers had made their apologies to me, and I had returned the compliment to the one whose head had been dented by my bell, it was growing late, and we made our way back to Cathcart's Hill. On the way, a little French soldier begged hard of me to buy a picture, which had been cut from above the altar of some church in Sebastopol. It was too dark to see much of his prize, but I ultimately became its possessor, and brought it home with me. It is some eight or ten feet in length, and represents, I should think, the Madonna. I am no judge of such things, but I think, although the painting is rather coarse, that the face of the Virgin, and the heads of Cherubim that fill the cloud from which she is descending, are soft and beautiful. There is a look of divine calmness and heavenly love in the Madonna's face which is very striking; and, perhaps, during the long and awful siege many a knee was bent in worship before it, and many a heart found comfort in its soft loving gaze.

On the following day I again entered Sebastopol, and saw still more of its horrors. But I have refrained from describing so many scenes of woe, that I am loth to dwell much on these. The very recollection of that woeful hospital, where thousands of dead and dying had been left by the retreating Russians, is enough to unnerve the strongest and sicken the most experienced. I would give much if I had never seen that harrowing sight. I believe some Englishmen

were found in it alive; but it was as well that they did not live to tell their fearful experience.

I made my way into the Redan also, although every step was dangerous, and took from it some brown bread, which seemed to have been left in the oven by the baker when he fled.

Before many days were passed, some Frenchwomen opened houses¹² in Sebastopol; but in that quarter of the town held by the English the prospect was not sufficiently tempting for me to follow their example, and so I saw out the remainder of the campaign from my old quarters at Spring Hill.

CHAPTER XVIII

Holiday in the Camp – A New Enemy, Time –
Amusements in the Crimea – My share in them – Dinner
at Spring Hill – At the Races – Christmas Day in the
British Hotel – New Year's Day in the Hospital

Well, the great work was accomplished – Sebastopol was taken. The Russians had retired sullenly to their stronghold on the north side of the harbour, from which, every now and then, they sent a few vain shot and shell, which sent the amateurs in the streets of Sebastopol scampering, but gave the experienced no concern. In a few days the camp could find plenty to talk about in their novel position – and what then? What was to be done? More fighting? Another equally terrible and lengthy siege of the north? That was the business of a few at head-quarters and in council at home, between whom the electric wires flashed many a message.¹ In the meanwhile, the real workers applied themselves to plan amusements, and the same energy and activity which had made Sebastopol a heap of ruins and

a well-filled cemetery – which had dug the miles of trenches, and held them when made against a desperate foe – which had manned the many guns, and worked them so well, set to work as eager to kill their present enemy, Time, as they had lately been to destroy their fled enemies, the Russians.

All who were before Sebastopol will long remember the beautiful autumn which succeeded to so eventful a summer, and ushered in so pleasantly the second winter of the campaign. It was appreciated as only those who earn the right to enjoyment can enjoy relaxation. The camp was full of visitors of every rank. They thronged the streets of Sebastopol, sketching its ruins and setting up photographic apparatus, in contemptuous indifference of the shot with which the Russians generally favoured every conspicuous group.

Pleasure was hunted keenly. Cricket matches, pic-nics, dinner parties, races, theatricals, all found their admirers. My restaurant was always full, and once more merry laughter was heard, and many a dinner party was held, beneath the iron roof of the British Hotel. Several were given in compliment to our allies, and many distinguished Frenchmen have tested my powers of cooking. You might have seen at one party some of their most famous officers. At once were present a Prince of the Imperial family of France, the Duc de Rouchefoucault, and a certain corporal in the French service, who was perhaps the best known man in the whole army, the Viscount Talon.² They expressed themselves highly gratified at the *carte*, and perhaps were not a little surprised as course after course

made its appearance, and to soup and fish succeeded turkeys, saddle of mutton, fowls, ham, tongue, curry, pastry of many sorts, custards, jelly, blanc-mange, and olives. I took a peculiar pride in doing my best when they were present, for I knew a little of the secrets of the French commissariat.³ I wonder if the world will ever know more. I wonder if the system of secrecy which has so long kept veiled the sufferings of the French army before Sebastopol will ever yield to truth. I used to guess something of those sufferings when I saw, even after the fall of Sebastopol, half-starved French soldiers prowling about my store, taking eagerly even what the Turks rejected as unfit for human food; and no one could accuse *them* of squeamishness. I cannot but believe that in some desks or bureaux lie notes or diaries which shall one day be given to the world; and when this happens, the terrible distresses of the English army will pall before the unheard-of sufferings of the French.⁴ It is true that they carried from Sebastopol the lion's share of glory. My belief is that they deserved it, having borne by far a larger proportion of suffering.

There were few dinners at Spring Hill at which the guests did not show their appreciation of their hostess's labour by drinking her health; and at the dinner I have above alluded to, the toast was responded to with such enthusiasm that I felt compelled to put my acknowledgments into the form of a little speech, which Talon interpreted to his countrymen. The French Prince was, after this occasion, several times at the British Hotel. He was there once when some Americans were received by me with scarcely that cordiality which I have been told distinguished my reception of guests; and

upon their leaving I told him – quite forgetting his own connection with America – of my prejudice against the Yankees. He heard me for a little while, and then he interrupted me.

‘Tenez! Madame Seacole, I too am American a little.’

What a pity I was not born a countess! I am sure I should have made a capital courtier. Witness my impromptu answer: –

‘I should never have guessed it, Prince.’ – And he seemed amused.

With the theatricals directly I had nothing to do. Had I been a little younger the companies would very likely have been glad of me, for no one liked to sacrifice their beards to become Miss Julia or plain Mary Ann; and even the beardless subalterns had voices which no coaxing could soften down. But I lent them plenty of dresses; indeed, it was the only airing which a great many gay-coloured muslins had in the Crimea. How was I to know when I brought them what camp-life was? And in addition to this, I found it necessary to convert my kitchen into a temporary green-room, where, to the wonderment, and perhaps scandal, of the black cook, the ladies of the company of the 1st Royals were taught to manage their petticoats with becoming grace, and neither to show their awkward booted ankles, nor trip themselves up over their trains. It was a difficult task in many respects. Although I laced them in until they grew blue in the face, their waists were a disgrace to the sex; while – crinoline being unknown then – my struggles to give them becoming *embonpoint* may be imagined. It was not until a year later that *Punch* thought of using a clothes-basket;⁵ and I would have

given much for such a hint when I was dresser to the theatrical company of the 1st Royals. The hair was another difficulty. To be sure, there was plenty in the camp, only it was in the wrong place, and many an application was made to me for a set of curls. However, I am happy to say, I am not become a customer of the wigmakers yet.

My recollections of hunting in the Crimea are confined to seeing troops of horsemen sweep by with shouts and yells after some wretched dog. Once I was very nearly frightened out of my wits – my first impression being that the Russians had carried into effect their old threat of driving us into the sea – by the startling appearance of a large body of horsemen tearing down the hill after, apparently, nothing. However I discovered in good time that, in default of vermin, they were chasing a brother officer with a paper bag.

My experience of Crimean races are perfect, for I was present, in the character of cantiniere, at all the more important meetings.⁶ Some of them took place before Christmas, and some after; but I shall exhaust the subject at once. I had no little difficulty to get the things on to the course; and in particular, after I had sat up the whole night making preparations for the December races, at the Monastery of St George,⁷ I could not get my poor mules over the rough country, and found myself, in the middle of the day, some miles from the course. At last I gave it up as hopeless, and, dismounting, sat down by the roadside to consider how I could

possibly dispose of the piles of sandwiches, bread, cheese, pies, and tarts, which had been prepared for the hungry spectators. At last, some officers, who expected me long before, came to look after me, and by their aid we reached the course.

I was better off at the next meeting, for a kind-hearted Major of Artillery provided me with a small bell-tent that was very useful, and enabled me to keep my stores out of reach of the light-fingered gentry, who were as busy in the Crimea as at Epsom or Hampton Court.⁸ Over this tent waved the flag of the British Hotel, but, during the day, it was struck, for an accident happening to one Captain D –, he was brought to my tent insensible, where I quickly improvised a couch of some straw, covered with the Union Jack, and brought him round. I mention this trifle to show how ready of contrivance a little campaigning causes one to become. I had several patients in consequence of accidents at the races. Nor was I altogether free from accidents myself. On the occasion of the races by the Tchernaya, after the armistice, my cart, on turning a sudden bend in the steep track, upset, and the crates, containing plates and dishes, rolled over and over until their contents were completely broken up; so that I was reduced to hand about sandwiches, etc., on broken pieces of earthenware and scraps of paper. I saved some glasses, but not many, and some of the officers were obliged to drink out of stiff paper twisted into funnel-shaped glasses.

It was astonishing how well the managers of these Crimean races had contrived to imitate the old familiar scenes at home. You might

well wonder where the racing saddles and boots, and silk caps and jackets had come from; but our connection with England was very different to what it had been when I first came to the Crimea, and many a wife and sister's fingers had been busy making the racing gear for the Crimea meetings. And in order that the course should still more closely resemble Ascot⁹ or Epsom, some soldiers blackened their faces and came out as Ethiopian serenaders admirably,¹⁰ although it would puzzle the most ingenious to guess where they got their wigs and banjoes from. I caught one of them behind my tent in the act of knocking off the neck of a bottle of champagne, and, paralysed by the wine's hasty exit, the only excuse he offered was, that he wanted to know if the officers' luxury was better than rum.

A few weeks before Christmas, happened that fearful explosion, in the French ammunition park, which destroyed so many lives.¹¹ We had experienced nothing at all like it before. The earth beneath us, even at the distance of three miles, reeled and trembled with the shock; and so great was the force of the explosion, that a piece of stone was hurled with some violence against the door of the British Hotel. We all felt for the French very much, although I do not think that the armies agreed quite so well after the taking of the Malakhoff, and the unsuccessful assault upon the Redan, as they had done previously. I saw several instances of unpleasantness and collision, arising from allusions to sore points. One, in particular occurred in my store.

The French, when they wanted – it was very seldom – to wound the pride of the English soldiery, used to say significantly, in that jargon by which the various nations in the Crimea endeavoured to obviate the consequences of what occurred at the Tower of Babel, some time ago,¹² ‘Malakhoff bono – Redan no bono.’¹³ And this, of course, usually led to recriminatory statements, and history was ransacked to find something consolatory to English pride. Once I noticed a brawny man, of the Army Works Corps, bringing a small French Zouave to my canteen, evidently with the view of standing treat. The Frenchman seemed mischievously inclined, and, probably relying upon the good humour on the countenance of his gigantic companion, began a little playful badinage, ending with the taunt of ‘Redan, no bono – Redan, no bono.’ I never saw any man look so helplessly angry as the Englishman did. For a few minutes he seemed absolutely rooted to the ground. Of course he could have crushed his mocking friend with ease, but how could he answer his taunt. All at once, however, a happy thought struck him, and rushing up to the Zouave, he caught him round the waist and threw him down, roaring out, ‘Waterloo was bono – Waterloo was bono.’ It was as much as the people on the premises could do to part them, so convulsed were we all with laughter.

And before Christmas, occurred my first and last attack of illness in the Crimea. It was not of much consequence, nor should I mention it but to show the kindness of my soldier-friends. I think it arose from the sudden commencement of winter, for which I was but poorly provided. However, I soon received much sympathy and

many presents of warm clothing, etc.; but the most delicate piece of attention was shown me by one of the Sappers and Miners, who, hearing the report that I was dead, positively came down to Spring Hill to take my measure for a coffin. This may seem a questionable compliment, but I really felt flattered and touched with such a mark of thoughtful attention. Very few in the Crimea had the luxury of any better coffin than a blanket-shroud, and it was very good of the grateful fellow to determine that his old friend, the mistress of Spring Hill, should have an honour conceded to so very few of the illustrious dead before Sebastopol.

So Christmas came, and with it pleasant memories of home and of home comforts. With it came also news of home – some not of the most pleasant description – and kind wishes from absent friends. ‘A merry Christmas to you,’ writes one, ‘and many of them. Although you will not write to us, we see your name frequently in the newspapers,¹⁴ from which we judge that you are strong and hearty. All your old Jamaica friends are delighted to hear of you, and say that you are an honour to the Isle of Springs.’

I wonder if the people of other countries are as fond of carrying with them everywhere their home habits as the English. I think not. I think there was something purely and essentially English in the determination of the camp to spend the Christmas-day of 1855 after the good old ‘home’ fashion. It showed itself weeks before the eventful day. In the dinner parties which were got up – in the orders sent to England – in the supplies which came out, and in the many

applications made to the hostess of the British Hotel for plum-puddings and mince-pies. The demand for them, and the material necessary to manufacture them, was marvellous. I can fancy that if returns could be got at of the flour, plums, currants, and eggs consumed on Christmas-day in the out-of-the-way Crimean peninsula, they would astonish us. One determination appeared to have taken possession of every mind – to spend the festive day with the mirth and jollity which the changed prospect of affairs warranted; and the recollection of a year ago, when death and misery were the camp's chief guests, only served to heighten this resolve.

For three weeks previous to Christmas-day, my time was fully occupied in making preparations for it. Pages of my books are filled with orders for plum-puddings and mince-pies, besides which I sold an immense quantity of raw material to those who were too far off to send down for the manufactured article on Christmas-day, and to such purchasers I gave a plain recipe for their guidance. Will the reader take any interest in my Crimean Christmas-pudding? It was plain, but decidedly good. However, you shall judge for yourself: – ‘One pound of flour, three-quarters of a pound of raisins, three-quarters of a pound of fat pork, chopped fine, two tablespoonfuls of sugar, a little cinnamon or chopped lemon, half-pint of milk or water; mix these well together, and boil four hours.’

From an early hour in the morning until long after the night had set in, were I and my cooks busy endeavouring to supply the great

demand for Christmas fare. We had considerable difficulty in keeping our engagements, but by substituting mince-pies for plum-puddings, in a few cases, we succeeded. The scene in the crowded store, and even in the little over-heated kitchen, with the officers' servants, who came in for their masters' dinners, cannot well be described. Some were impatient themselves, others dreaded their masters' impatience as the appointed dinner hour passed by – all combined by entreaties, threats, cajolery, and fun to drive me distracted. Angry cries for the major's plum-pudding, which was to have been ready an hour ago, alternated with an entreaty that I should cook the captain's mince-pies to a turn – 'Sure, he likes them well done, ma'am. Bake 'em as brown as your own purty face, darlint.'

I did not get my dinner until eight o'clock, and then I dined in peace off a fine wild turkey or bustard, shot for me on the marshes by the Tchernaya. It weighed twenty-two pounds, and, although somewhat coarse in colour, had a capital flavour.

Upon New Year's-day I had another large cooking of plum-puddings and mince-pies; this time upon my own account. I took them to the hospital of the Land Transport Corps, to remind the patients of the home comforts they longed so much for. It was a sad sight to see the once fine fellows, in their blue gowns, lying quiet and still, and reduced to such a level of weakness and helplessness. They all seemed glad for the little home tokens I took them.

There was one patient who had been a most industrious and honest fellow, and who did not go into the hospital until long and wearing illness compelled him. I was particularly anxious to look after him, but I found him very weak and ill. I stayed with him until evening, and before I left him, kind fancy had brought to his bedside his wife and children from his village-home in England, and I could hear him talking to them in a low and joyful tone. Poor, poor fellow! the New Year so full of hope and happiness had dawned upon him, but he did not live to see the wild flowers spring up peacefully through the war-trodden sod before Sebastopol.

CHAPTER XIX

New Year in the Crimea – Good News – The Armistice
– Barter with the Russians – War and Peace – Tidings
of Peace – Excursions into the Interior of the Crimea –
To Simpheropol, Baktchiserai, etc. – The Troops
begin to leave the Crimea – Friends' Farewells – The
Cemeteries – We remove from Spring Hill to Balaclava –
Alarming Sacrifice of our Stock – A Last Glimpse of Sebastopol –
Home!

Before the New Year was far advanced we all began to think of going home, making sure that peace would soon be concluded. And never did more welcome message come anywhere than that which brought us intelligence of the armistice,¹ and the firing, which had grown more and more slack lately, ceased altogether. Of course the army did not desire peace because they had any distaste for fighting; so far from it, I believe the only more welcome intelligence would have been news of a campaign in the field, but they were most heartily weary of sieges, and the prospect of another year before the gloomy north of Sebastopol damped the ardour of the

most sanguine. Before the armistice was signed, the Russians and their old foes made advances of friendship, and the banks of the Tchernaya used to be thronged with strangers, and many strange acquaintances were thus began. I was one of the first to ride down to the Tchernaya, and very much delighted seemed the Russians to see an English woman. I wonder if they thought they all had my complexion. I soon entered heartily into the then current amusement – that of exchanging coin, etc., with the Russians. I stole a march upon my companions by making the sign of the cross upon my bosom, upon which a Russian threw me, in exchange for some pence, a little metal figure of some ugly saint. Then we wrapped up halfpence in clay, and received coins of less value in exchange. Seeing a soldier eating some white bread, I made signs of wanting some, and threw over a piece of money. I had great difficulty in making the man understand me, but after considerable pantomime, with surprise in his round bullet eyes, he wrapped up his bread in some paper, then coated it with clay and sent it over to me. I thought it would look well beside my brown bread taken from the strange oven in the terrible Redan, and that the two would typify war and peace. There was a great traffic going on in such things, and a wag of an officer, who could talk Russian imperfectly, set himself to work to persuade an innocent Russian that I was his wife, and having succeeded in doing so promptly offered to dispose of me for the medal hanging at his breast.

The last firing of any consequence was the salutes with which the good tidings of peace were received by army and navy. After this

soon began the home-going with happy faces and light hearts, and some kind thoughts and warm tears for the comrades left behind.

I was very glad to hear of peace, also, although it must have been apparent to every one that it would cause our ruin. We had lately made extensive additions to our store and out-houses – our shelves were filled with articles laid in at a great cost, and which were now unsaleable, and which it would be equally impossible to carry home. Everything, from our stud of horses and mules down to our latest consignments from home, must be sold for any price; and, as it happened, for many things, worth a year ago their weight in gold, no purchaser could now be found. However, more of this hereafter.

Before leaving the Crimea, I made various excursions into the interior, visiting Simpheropol and Baktchiserai.² I travelled to Simpheropol with a pretty large party, and had a very amusing journey. My companions were young and full of fun, and tried hard to persuade the Russians that I was Queen Victoria, by paying me the most absurd reverence. When this failed they fell back a little, and declared that I was the Queen's first cousin. Anyhow, they attracted crowds about me, and I became quite a lioness in the streets of Simpheropol, until the arrival of some Highlanders in their uniform cut me out.

My excursion to Baktchiserai was still more amusing and pleasant. I found it necessary to go to beat up a Russian merchant,³ who, after the declaration of peace, had purchased stores of us, and some young officers made up a party for the purpose. We hired an araba,

filled it with straw, and some boxes to sit upon, and set out very early, with two old umbrellas to shield us from the midday sun and the night dews. We had with us a hamper carefully packed, before parting, with a cold duck, some cold meat, a tart, etc. The Tartar's⁴ two horses were soon knocked up, and the fellow obtained a third at a little village, and so we rolled on until mid-day, when, thoroughly exhausted, we left our clumsy vehicle and carried our hamper beneath the shade of a beautiful cherry-tree, and determined to lunch. Upon opening it the first thing that met our eyes was a fine rat, who made a speedy escape. Somewhat gravely, we proceeded to unpack its contents, without caring to express our fears to one another, and quite soon enough we found them realized. How or where the rat had gained access to our hamper it was impossible to say, but he had made no bad use of his time, and both wings of the cold duck had flown, while the tart was considerably mangled. Sad discovery this for people who, although hungry, were still squeamish. We made out as well as we could with the cold beef, and gave the rest to our Tartar driver, who had apparently no disinclination to eating after the rat, and would very likely have despised us heartily for such weakness. After dinner we went on more briskly, and succeeded in reaching Baktchiserai. My journey was perfectly unavailing. I could not find my debtor at home, and if I had I was told it would take three weeks before the Russian law would assist me to recover my claim. Determined, however, to have some compensation, I carried off a raven, who had been croaking angrily at my intrusion. Before we had been long on our homeward

journey, however, Lieut. C— sat upon it, of course accidentally, and we threw it to its relatives – the crows.

As the spring advanced, the troops began to move away at a brisk pace. As they passed the Iron House⁵ upon the Col – old for the Crimea, where so much of life's action had been compressed into so short a space of time – they would stop and give us a parting cheer, while very often the band struck up some familiar tune of that home they were so gladly seeking. And very often the kind-hearted officers would find time to run into the British Hotel to bid us good-bye, and give us a farewell shake of the hand; for you see war, like death, is a great leveller, and mutual suffering and endurance had made us all friends. 'My dear Mrs Seacole, and my dear Mr Day,' wrote one on a scrap of paper left on the counter, 'I have called here four times this day, to wish you good-bye. I am so sorry I was not fortunate enough to see you. I shall still hope to see you to-morrow morning. We march at seven a.m.'

And yet all this going home seemed strange and somewhat sad, and sometimes I felt that I could not sympathize with the glad faces and happy hearts of those who were looking forward to the delights of home, and the joy of seeing once more the old familiar faces remembered so fondly in the fearful trenches and the hard-fought battle-fields. Now and then we would see a loungee with a blank face, taking no interest in the bustle of departure, and with him I acknowledged to have more fellow-feeling than with the others, for he, as well as I, clearly had no home to go to. He was a soldier by

choice and necessity, as well as by profession. He had no home, no loved friends; the peace would bring no particular pleasure to him, whereas war and action were necessary to his existence, gave him excitement, occupation, the chance of promotion. Now and then, but seldom, however, you came across such a disappointed one. Was it not so with me? Had I not been happy through the months of toil and danger, never knowing what fear or depression was, finding every moment of the day mortgaged hours in advance, and earning sound sleep and contentment by sheer hard work? What better or happier lot could possibly befall me? And, alas! how likely was it that my present occupation gone, I might long in vain for another so stirring and so useful. Besides which, it was pretty sure that I should go to England poorer than I left it, and although I was not ashamed of poverty; beginning life again in the autumn –1 mean late in the summer of life – is hard up-hill work.

Peace concluded, the little jealousies which may have sprung up between the French and their allies seemed forgotten, and every one was anxious, ere the parting came, to make the most of the time yet left in improving old friendships and founding new. Among others, the 47th,⁶ encamped near the Woronzoff Road, gave a grand parting entertainment to a large company of their French neighbours, at which many officers of high rank were present. I was applied to by the committee of management to superintend the affair, and, for the last time in the Crimea, the health of Madame Seacole was proposed and duly honoured. I had grown so accustomed to the honour that I

had no difficulty in returning thanks in a speech which Colonel B— interpreted amid roars of laughter to the French guests.

As the various regiments moved off, I received many acknowledgments from those who thought they owed me gratitude. Little presents, warm farewell words, kind letters full of grateful acknowledgments for services so small that I had forgotten them long, long ago – how easy it is to reach warm hearts! – little thoughtful acts of kindness, even from the humblest. And these touched me the most. I value the letters received from the working men far more than the testimonials of their officers. I had nothing to gain from the former, and can point to their testimony fearlessly. I am strongly tempted to insert some of these acknowledgments, but I will confine myself to one: –

Camp, near Karani, June 16, 1856

MY DEAR MRS SEACOLE, – As you are about to leave the Crimea, I avail myself of the only opportunity which may occur for some time, to acknowledge my gratitude to you, and to thank you for the kindness which I, in common with many others, received at your hands, when attacked with cholera in the spring of 1855. But I have no language to do it suitably.

I am truly sensible that your kindness far exceeded my claims upon your sympathy. It is said by some of your friends, I hope truly, that you are going to England. There can be none from the Crimea more welcome there, for your kindness in the sick-tent, and your heroism in the battle-field, have endeared you to the whole army.

I am sure when her most gracious Majesty the Queen shall have become acquainted with the service you have gratuitously rendered to so many of her brave soldiers, her generous heart will thank you. For you have been an instrument in the hands of the Almighty to preserve many a gallant heart to the empire, to fight and win her battles, if ever again war may become a necessity. Please to accept this from your most grateful humble servant,

But I had other friends in the Crimea – friends who could never thank me. Some of them lay in their last sleep, beneath indistinguishable mounds of earth; some in the half-filled trenches, a few beneath the blue waters of the Euxine. I might in vain attempt to gather the wild flowers which sprung up above many of their graves, but I knew where some lay, and could visit their last homes on earth. And to all the cemeteries where friends rested so calmly, sleeping well after a life's work nobly done, I went many times, lingering long over many a mound that bore the names of those whom I had been familiar with in life, thinking of what they had been, and what I had known of them. Over some I planted shrubs and flowers, little lilac trees, obtained with no small trouble, and flowering evergreens, which looked quite gay and pretty ere I left, and may in time become great trees, and witness strange scenes, or be cut down as fuel for another besieging army – who can tell? And from many graves I picked up pebbles, and plucked simple wild-flowers, or tufts of grass, as memorials for relatives at home. How pretty the cemeteries used to look beneath the blue peaceful sky; neatly enclosed with stone walls, and full of the grave-stones reared by friends over friends. I met many here, thoughtfully taking their last look of the resting-places of those they knew and loved. I saw many a proud head bowed down above them. I knew that many a proud heart laid aside its pride here, and stood in the presence of death, humble and childlike. And by the clasped hand and

moistened eye, I knew that from many a heart sped upward a grateful prayer to the Providence which had thought fit in his judgment to take some, and in his mercy to spare the rest.

Some three weeks before the Crimea was finally evacuated,⁷ we moved from our old quarters to Balaclava, where we had obtained permission to fit up a store for the short time which would elapse before the last red coat left Russian soil. The poor old British Hotel! We could do nothing with it. The iron house was pulled down, and packed up for conveyance home, but the Russians got all of the out-houses and sheds which was not used as fuel. All the kitchen fittings and stoves, that had cost us so much, fell also into their hands. I only wish some cook worthy to possess them has them now. We could sell nothing. Our horses were almost given away, our large stores of provisions, etc., were at any one's service. It makes my heart sick to talk of the really alarming sacrifices we made. The Russians crowded down ostensibly to purchase, in reality to plunder. Prime cheeses, which had cost us tenpence a pound, were sold to them for less than a penny a pound; for wine, for which we had paid forty-eight shillings a dozen, they bid four shillings. I could not stand this, and in a fit of desperation, I snatched up a hammer and broke up case after case, while the bystanders held out their hands and caught the ruby stream. It may have been wrong, but I was too excited to think. There was no more of my own people to give it to, and I would rather not present it to our old foes.

We were among the last to leave the Crimea. Before going I borrowed a horse, easy enough now, and rode up the old well-known road – how unfamiliar in its loneliness and quiet – to Cathcart's Hill. I wished once more to impress the scene upon my mind. It was a beautifully clear evening, and we could see miles away across the darkening sea. I spent some time there with my companions, pointing out to each other the sites of scenes we all remembered so well. There were the trenches, already becoming indistinguishable, out of which, on the 8th of September, we had seen the storming parties tumble in confused and scattered bodies, before they ran up the broken height of the Redan. There the Malakhoff, into which we had also seen the luckier French pour in one unbroken stream; below lay the crumbling city and the quiet harbour, with scarce a ripple on its surface, while around stretched away the deserted huts for miles. It was with something like regret that we said to one another that the play was fairly over, that peace had rung the curtain down, and that we, humble actors in some of its most stirring scenes, must seek engagements elsewhere.

I lingered behind, and stooping down, once more gathered little tufts of grass, and some simple blossoms from above the graves of some who in life had been very kind to me, and I left behind, in exchange, a few tears which were sincere.

A few days later, and I stood on board a crowded steamer, taking my last look of the shores of the Crimea.

CONCLUSION

I did not return to England by the most direct route, but took the opportunity of seeing more of men and manners in yet other lands. Arrived in England at last, we set to work bravely at Aldershott to retrieve our fallen fortunes,¹ and stem off the ruin originated in the Crimea, but all in vain; and at last defeated by fortune, but not I think disgraced, we were obliged to capitulate on very honourable conditions.² In plain truth, the old Crimean firm of Seacole and Day was dissolved finally, and its partners had to recommence the world anew. And so ended *our* campaign. One of us started only the other day for the Antipodes, while the other is ready to take any journey to any place where a stout heart and two experienced hands may be of use.

Perhaps it would be right if I were to express more shame and annoyance than I really feel at the pecuniarily disastrous issue of my Crimean adventures, but I cannot – I really cannot. When I would try and feel ashamed of myself for being poor and helpless, I only experience a glow of pride at the other and more pleasing events of my career; when I think of the few whom I failed to pay in full (and so far from blaming me some of them are now my firmest friends), I

cannot help remembering also the many who profess themselves indebted to me.

Let me, in as few words as possible, state the results of my Crimean campaign. To be sure, I returned from it shaken in health. I came home wounded, as many others did. Few constitutions, indeed, were the better for those winters before Sebastopol, and I was too hard worked not to feel their effects; for a little labour fatigues me now – I cannot watch by sick-beds as I could – a week's want of rest quite knocks me up now. Then I returned bankrupt in fortune. Whereas others in my position may have come back to England rich and prosperous, I found myself poor – beggared. So few words can tell what I have lost.

But what have I gained? I should need a volume to describe that fairly; so much is it, and so cheaply purchased by suffering ten times worse than what I have experienced. I have more than once heard people say that they would gladly suffer illness to enjoy the delights of convalescence, and so, by enduring a few days' pain, gain the tender love of relatives and sympathy of friends. And on this principle I rejoice in the trials which have borne me such pleasures as those I now enjoy, for wherever I go I am sure to meet some smiling face; every step I take in the crowded London streets may bring me in contact with some friend, forgotten by me, perhaps, but who soon reminds me of our old life before Sebastopol; it seems very long ago now, when I was of use to him and he to me.

Where, indeed, do I not find friends. In omnibuses, in river steamboats, in places of public amusement, in quiet streets and courts, where taking short cuts I lose my way oft-times, spring up old familiar faces to remind me of the months spent on Spring Hill. The sentries at Whitehall relax from the discharge of their important duty of guarding nothing to give me a smile of recognition; the very newspaper offices look friendly as I pass them by; busy Printing-house Yard puts on a cheering smile, and the *Punch* office in Fleet Street³ sometimes laughs outright. Now, would all this have happened if I had returned to England a rich woman? Surely not.

A few words more ere I bring these egotistical remarks to a close. It is naturally with feelings of pride and pleasure that I allude to the committee recently organized to aid me,⁴ and if I indulge in the vanity of placing their names before my readers, it is simply because every one of the following noblemen and gentlemen knew me in the Crimea, and by consenting to assist me now record publicly their opinion of my services there. And yet I may reasonably on other grounds be proud of the fact, that it has been stated publicly that my present embarrassments originated in my charities and incessant labours among the army, by

Major-General Lord Rokeby, K. C. B.

H. S. H. Prince Edward of Saxe Weimar, C. B.⁵

His Grace the Duke of Wellington.⁶

His Grace the Duke of Newcastle.

The Right Hon. Lord Ward.

General Sir John Burgoyne, K. C. B.⁷

Major-General Sir Richard Airey, K. C. B.⁸

Rear-Admiral Sir Stephen Lushington, K. G. B.⁹

Colonel M'Murdo, C. B.¹⁰

Colonel Chapman, C. B.¹¹

Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley, C. B.¹²

Major the Hon. F. Keane.¹³

W. H. Russell, Esq. (*Times* Correspondent).

W. T. Doyne, Esq.¹⁴

THE END

Appendix

I: ENGLISH NEWSPAPER REPORTS ABOUT MARY SEACOLE

Seacole's work in the Crimea received extensive coverage, as did the bankruptcy proceedings she underwent after the war. The following section includes a sample of the numerous English newspaper reports about Seacole. Seacole's reply to Lord Rokeby (p. [175](#)) is the only other extant sample of her writing apart from *Wonderful Adventures*.

***Morning Advertiser*, 19 July 1855**

We have at present a lady of colour in Balaklava, and occasionally in camp, who is quite original in her way; and an amusing specimen of the adaptability to circumstances of the darker specimens of the genus *homo*. She is both a Miss Nightingale and a Soyer in her way. A native of Jamaica, she has travelled extensively on the American continent, and has acquired great experience in the treatment of cases of cholera and diarrhoea. Her powders for the latter epidemic are now so renowned, that she is constantly beset with applications, and it must be stated, to her honour, that she makes no charges for her powders. She is often seen riding out to the front with baskets of medicines of her own preparation, and this is particularly the case after an engagement with the enemy. Her culinary powers are so great, that even Soyer told her the other day that she knew as much about cooking as himself. Mrs

Seacole is, moreover, a highly intelligent woman, and a further proof that the race from which she sprang is one capable of high intellectual development. She may well exclaim with Othello –

‘Mistake me not for my complexion –

The burnish’d livery of the golden sun.’

The Times, 24 November 1856

MRS SEACOLE A BANKRUPT

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, – That good old soul whose generous hospitality has warmed up many a gallant spirit on the chilly heights of the Balaklava has now in her turn been caught in the worst storm of all – the gale of adversity.

Where are the Crimeans? Have a few months erased from their memories those many acts of comforting kindness which made the name of the old mother venerated throughout the camp? While the benevolent deeds of Florence Nightingale are being handed down to posterity with blessings and imperishable renown, are the humbler actions of Mrs Seacole to be entirely forgotten, and will none now substantially testify to the worth of those services of the late mistress of Spring Hill? I had hoped, Sir, ere this, some one would have endorsed, through your columns, those eulogies so feelingly and generously expressed by the graphic pen of your able correspondent (Mr Russell), and have called upon those to whom the old lady so gamely stuck during their trials to rally round her now in this her hour of adversity.

May I solicit a space in your valuable journal in order to submit to the public generally, and especially to all who served in the late campaign, whether this is not a favourable opportunity of showing an appreciation of those [exercises] and acts of benevolence which were characteristic of Mrs Seacole in her capacity of *vivandière* of the British army in the Crimea?

I beg to enclose my card, and, should this proposition meet with public approval, I shall be happy to forward a check for 20*l*.

Yours obediently,

D. A. MERITIS

Reform Club, Nov. 22.

The Times, 29 November 1856

MRS SEACOLE

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, – I beg leave to return you my thanks for your kindness in inserting in the columns of *The Times* my letter respecting Mrs Seacole. I take the liberty of enclosing a letter of thanks I have this morning received from her.

The good taste and feeling which characterize the document can scarcely fail to confirm the kind interest you appear to take in her welfare; and, as by making public my intention of seeking aid for her you have contributed more than I have as yet been able to do to my chance of success, you are fully entitled to share her gratitude, and receive this evidence that you are endeavouring to serve one worthy of consideration.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient humble servant,

Nov. 27

ROKEBY

No. 1, Tavistock-street, Nov. 25

Lord Rokeby, – Mr Lord, – With much gratitude I beg to offer you my sincere thanks for your letter, which I have just read in *The Times* of to-day, and would publicly acknowledge your present as well as past kindnesses to me, but I fancy you, my Lord, might object to my placing your name in the public papers; consequently I take this means of expressing to you my gratitude for the interest you take in my case.

I am fully aware of the kind feelings yourself and the army have towards me, and this knowledge tends to sustain me in my present difficulties; and, far from regretting my visit to the Crimea, I feel proud indeed, that I have had an opportunity to gain the esteem of your Lordship along with that of many others in the army; and indeed I would much rather suffer my present poverty, with the knowledge that the Almighty permitted me to be useful in my small sphere, than have returned wealthy without the esteem and respect of the brave defenders of our country.

Trusting your Lordship will excuse the liberty I have taken in thus writing to your Lordship,

I am your Lordship's

Very humble and grateful servant,

MARY SEACOLE

To the Right Hon. Lord Rokeby, M.G.,

Portman-square, London.

The Times, 11 April 1857

THE SEACOLE FUND

TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, – May I ask you to say a word for poor Mrs Seacole? There has been a subscription got up for her which is yet in its infancy, but I miss many names on the list which ought to have been *inter primos*. And for what does Mrs Seacole deserve a subscription? For courage, devotion, goodness of heart, public service, great losses undeservedly incurred. 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 a broken limb could not be found among our best surgeons. I saw her at the assaults on the Redan, at the Battle of the Tchernaya, at the fall of Sebastopol, laden, not with plunder, good old creature, but with wine, bandages, and food for the wounded or the prisoners. Her hands, too, performed the last offices for some of the noblest of our slain. Her hut was surrounded every morning by the rough navvies and Land Transport men, who had a faith in her proficiency in the healing art, which she justified by many cures and by removing obstinate cases of diarrhoea, dysentery, and similar camp maladies. These are facts for the world at large, not for any officer of the Crimean army, to whom they are known already. If this poor woman had been paid what she was owed – if she had but the amount of the 'little bills' cashed by her in the Crimea, and not paid at home, she would need no subscription; but she has been unfortunate not only in these respects, but she has been deceived and robbed by one in whom she placed trust and confidence.

I hope the public, as well as the army, will give enough to Mrs Seacole to set her up – late in life, poor soul! though it be, it is all she asks – for a fresh start in the world,

and that as she was liberal and kind, so may she receive a kind and liberal support.

Your obedient servant,

Tunbridge-wells

W.H.R.

The Times, 21 May 1881

The trustees of the fund established some time since in behalf of Mrs Mary Seacole wish it to be known that she died on the 14th inst. The deceased, it will be remembered, greatly distinguished herself as a nurse on the battlefield and in hospitals during the Crimean war. A Creole, she was born in Jamaica early in the present century, and from childhood was instructed by her mother in the art of nursing. In 1855, after it had been announced that no more nurses were required in the Crimea, she established a mess-table and comfortable quarters for sick and convalescent officers at Balaclava, landing there in the month of February. She was present at many battles, and at the risk of her life often carried the wounded off the field. Before Sebastopol she was a patient nurse among those stricken with cholera, and when she returned to England after the peace she was ruined in fortune and injured in health. The fund already referred to was then started, the Prince of Wales the Duke of Edinburgh, and the Duke of Cambridge being patrons. In 1857 she published an autobiography entitled 'Wonderful Adventures in Many Lands,' the preface being written by Dr W. H. Russell. 'I have witnessed,' he writes, 'her devotion and her courage; and I trust England will not forget one who nursed her sick, she sought out her wounded to aid and succour them, and who performed her last offices of the illustrious dead.' The sum raised for Mrs Seacole enabled her to end her days in comfortable ease. Strange to say, she has bequeathed all her property to persons of title.

II: JAMAICAN NEWSPAPER REPORTS ABOUT MARY SEACOLE

Jamaican newspapers followed Seacole's activities closely, and articles from English newspapers were sometimes published in the *Daily Advertiser* and the *Daily Gleaner*. Long

after Seacole's death, Jamaican readers, such as R. A. Walcott (who has not been identified), asserted the need to keep the memory of her life and work alive in Jamaica.

Daily Advertiser, 29 August 1857

Mrs Seacole

The Surrey Gardens are just now the scene of an interesting, as it is called. [*sic*]. Poor old Mrs Seacole, the Crimean sutler [*sic*] whose unrecompensed services to the sick, the wounded and the dead there earned her the title of 'Mother of the Soldiers', is being set up in life again by a series of four musical performances, the proceeds of which will be applied in her favour. It will be remembered that the kindly old creature lost her all in the Crimea upon the conclusion of Peace, which saved others but ruined her... If this be not doing Mrs Seacole honour, what is? Loud acclamations from the immense audience assembled [greet] the old lady every evening, and she rises amidst the lords and gentlemen by whom is surrounded, and bows and smiles, happy as a queen in the midst of grateful and loyal subjects. When Mrs Seacole has got, to use a common phrase, 'a new rig out', she intends embarking for India. The neighbourhood of Delhi will be the next scene of her operations, and as she is by birth a Creole, she will probably be enabled to stand the climate.

Daily Gleaner, 9 June 1881

The friends of Mrs Seacole in this city [i.e., Kingston] have received intimation of the death of that estimable lady in England. As many of our readers are aware, Mrs Seacole, a native of Jamaica, distinguished herself as a nurse in the Crimean War, devoting herself and her all to the sick and wounded. She received English, French, Russian, and Turkish decorations for her services, and highly flattering attentions from the English Royal family, nobility and army officers.

The Daily Gleaner, 27 July 1905

Remarkable Deeds OF A Jamaica Woman.

A NAME TO REMEMBER.

What she did During The Crimean War, AMUSING PANAMA TOAST.

THE EDITOR

Sir. – When I read, in your issue of the 22nd instant, the simple announcement of the death of Mrs Louisa M. Grant ‘sister of Mrs Seacole’, [I wondered] how many of your readers in this island – whose inhabitants are prone to take as little interest in the incidents and traditions of our own past history, as they do in solving the problems of to-day and their probable influences upon issues of to-morrow – know who is the person thus referred to in relation to the deceased.

Those who know and remember will forgive me for shortly reviving the memory of this remarkable daughter of Jamaica, and those who do not, will, I hope, find some interest and pleasure in learning something of her, and perusing ‘The Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands’... in which the thrilling incidents of her useful life, are modestly and amusingly told by herself. The work is dedicated by permission to Major General Lord Rokeby K.C.B....

WORK AT HOME

Mrs Seacole was a native of Kingston, Jamaica, which I suppose is a good reason for Jamaicans knowing little, and thinking less of her and her good works, although many of them were performed here during the great visitation of cholera in 1850 and 1851.

Besides her adventures in the Crimea, Mrs Seacole had some wonderful experiences, and battled with cholera and deadly fevers in the Isthmus of Panama when that place was a stage in the high road to California during what was known as ‘the California gold fever’ in 1849...

‘THE BRITISH HOTEL’

Mrs Seacole’s account of her struggles with the War Office and the army medical department; and other dull dens of red tape, in her efforts to get them to accept her voluntary services as a nurse are as interesting as they are aggravating even to read now. How at last she staked all she had in the world and went to the Crimea at her own expense: how she braved the rough manners and subsequently opened the kind heart and procured the help of that blustering brave old ‘sea warrior,’ Admiral Boxer, who died in the

Crimea... how she established on the big road between Balaklava and Sebastopol, 'The British Hotel', a place she called 'Spring Hill', how she there entertained heroes and princes; how she was under fire at the Battle Tchernaya, and the storming the Redan and the Malakhoff, attending to the sick and wounded while Russian shells were bursting around her; how she was the first woman to enter the ruins of Sebastopol after its fall; and how she was financially ruined for her pains, are all exceedingly interesting and worthy to be remembered by Jamaicans. But, I [feel] that while her countrymen can tell us about her fellow labourer in the work of mercy, Miss Florence Nightingale; I wonder who can tell of where to find any of the highly complementary [*sic*] letters that Mrs Seacole received from heroes, whose names are blazoned on the pages of history. Who can tell us where are the jewels that they gave her, where is the ring that the dying Russian officer gave her on the battle-field when she ministered to him with tender womanly hand, and kissed him for his mother, or where to find the Crimean War Medal and [clasp] that she received, or the bust of herself executed by a member of the Royal Family? Who can point out the resting place of the honoured bones of Mrs Seacole?

The English papers at the time of the great war often mentioned her name... In her own country, however, Mrs Seacole is 'only the sister of Mrs Louisa M. Grant.' We Jamaicans should cherish the memories of our past more than we do, for if we trample out the foot-prints on our own sands of time, we deprive forelorn and weary brothers of seeing those foot-prints and taking heart again, and blot out the memories that remind us, we can make our lives sublime.

I am. &c.,

R. A. WALCOTT

Kingston, 26 July 1905

III: LETTER FROM FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE TO SIR HARRY VERNEY (5 AUGUST 1870)

The following is an extract from a manuscript letter from Florence Nightingale to her brother-in-law, Sir Harry Verney. The letter, dated August 1870, is four folio pages long and the section included here comprises all Nightingale's comments on Seacole (she seems to have been responding to a request for information). Nightingale begins her remarks on a

separate page (p. 3 of the original) headed '*Burn*', indicating that they were intended only for Verney.

Burn

Mrs Seacole

I dare say you know more about her than I do.

She kept – I will not call it a 'bad house' but something not very unlike it – in the Crimean War.

She was very kind to the men &, what is more, to the Officers – & did some good – & made many drunk.

[A shameful or ignorant imposture was practised on the Queen who subscribed to the 'Seacole Testimonial']

I had the greatest difficulty in repelling Mrs Seacole's advances, & in preventing association between her and my nurses (absolutely out of the question) when we established 2 Hospitals nursed by us between Kadikoi & the 'Seacole Establishment' (in the Crimea).

But I was successful – without any open collision with Mrs Seacole – which I was anxious to avoid – [You will understand that any 'rivalry' between the 'Seacole' & the 'Nightingale' 'Establishment[s]' was very much to be averted –]

Any one who employs Mrs Seacole will introduce much kindness – also much drunkenness and improper conduct, wherever she is.

She had then, however, one or more 'persons' with her, whom (I conclude) she has not now. I conclude (& believe) that respectable Officers were entirely ignorant of what I... could not help knowing as a Matron & Chaperone & Mother of the Army.

[Square brackets and ellipses are Nightingale's.]

Notes

DEDICATION

- 1 *Major-General Lord Rokeby, K.C.B.:* Lieutenant-General Henry Montagu Lord Rokeby (1798–1883), Commander of the First Division in the Crimea, Knight Commander of the Order of Bath. His name appears in the list at the end of the text as a benefactor, and he wrote to *The Times* expressing his ‘interest in [Seacole’s] welfare’ (see [Appendix](#)). In her will, Seacole appointed him as one of her three trustees, and he is specified as holding ‘monies stocks funds and securities’ in trust for her.

TO THE READER

1. *Anna Comnena:* (1083–1148), Byzantine princess and historian, daughter of Emperor Alexius I Comnenus. After an unsuccessful attempt to gain her father’s crown for her husband she turned to literature, and on becoming a widow in 1137, retired to a convent. There she wrote the *Alexiad*, a fifteen-book account of Byzantine history and society.

2. 'sutler': A person who follows an army or lives in a garrison town and sells provisions to the soldiers. A report in *The Times* published after the war claims that 'Mrs Seacole... was the first to give a new character to the trade of sutler, and to rescue it from the imputation of worthlessness and plunder' (28 July 1857). Sutlers also appear to have been stock stage characters at this time: *Punch* asked: 'Who would give a guinea to see a mimic sutler-woman, and a foreigner, frisk and amble about the stage, when he might bestow the money on a genuine English one [i.e., Seacole], reduced to a two-pair back, and in imminent danger of being obliged to climb into an attic?' (30 May 1857).
3. *W. H. Russell*: William Howard Russell (1821–1907), special correspondent for *The Times*, widely regarded as one of the first, most important war reporters. He accompanied the first troops to the Crimea, remaining for two years. His uncompromising dispatches from the battlefield opened the British public's eyes to the sufferings of soldiers during the winter of 1854–5 while celebrating the heroism of the common soldier, and when Russell returned to England he was as well known as any of the war's military commanders. He was critical of British military disorganization before Sevastopol, and his reports provoked a wave of national hysteria and recrimination (Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War*, 1853–1856 (London: Arnold, 1999), p. [141](#)).

CHAPTER I

1. *I am a Creole, and have good Scotch blood coursing in my veins:*

The word ‘Creole’ appears to be derived from combining two Spanish words, ‘crier’ (to create, imagine, found, settle) and ‘colono’ (a colonist, founder, settler), into ‘criollo’, a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement and native though not ancestrally indigenous to it (Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. xiv–xv). *The Oxford English Dictionary* notes that although the word is now used more commonly for white descendants of European settlers, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ‘creole negro’ referred to black people born in the Caribbean or America ‘as distinguished from one freshly imported from Africa’. It was adopted by and applied to a variety of people in the New World who were descended from European colonists, African slaves or both (see Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Africana. The Encyclopaedia of the African and African American Experience* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), pp.528–9). Creole may also refer to their language. See Introduction, p.xvi. See also [Chapter VIII](#), note 16.

Seacole evidently counts herself among the ‘people of colour’ mentioned by Bryan Edwards ‘who, having some portion of Christian blood in their veins, pride themselves on that circumstance’ (*The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies*, 5 vols, 1793 (New York: AMS Press, 1966), vol. II, p. [30](#)). At the end of the eighteenth century, the notion of ‘blood quantum’ was important in determining a person’s legal status in

the Caribbean: Edwards points out that a person 'above three steps removed from the Negro venter' was entitled to the same rights and liberties as white people (vol. II, p. [20](#)).

[2.](#) *My father was a soldier, of an old Scotch family*: By the turn of the century, both white and black regiments were stationed in Jamaica, but it has not been possible to trace Seacole's father.

[3.](#) *'lazy Creole' applied to my country people*: The 'lazy Creole' was a character type in fictional and non-fictional writings of the Abolition era, and the stereotype refers to white or 'mixed' characters. Edward Long describes white Creoles in Jamaica as 'possessed with a degree of supineness and indolence in their affairs' (*The History of Jamaica. Or, General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island: with Reflections on its Situation, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government*, 3 vols (London, 1774), vol. II, p. 265). The idea that Creoles were lazy was connected to beliefs in the influence of the climate on one's physiological constitution. See Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race. Categories of Difference in Eighteenth Century British Culture* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 24.

[4.](#) *a female Ulysses*: The Latin name for Odysseus, the protagonist in Homer's *Odyssey*, where he is the son of Laertes, King of Ithaca, a hero of the Trojan War, and one of the Greeks' leading chieftains in Homer's *Iliad*. The idea of Ulysses as a perpetual wanderer started with Dante.

- [5.](#) *My mother kept a boarding-house in Kingston*: Seacole may be referring to Blundell Hall, the boarding house she and her sister seem to have inherited from their mother. Some sources claim that Blundell Hall was under Seacole's proprietorship and that it passed to Louisa Grant. Trollope mentions staying there in *The West Indies and the Spanish Main* (see Introduction, note 70). Blundell Hall was destroyed by an earthquake in 1907. The American traveller John Bigelow observes that '[t]here are no first-class hotels in Kingston, and the best accommodations for travellers are to be found at boarding houses, of which there are two or three claiming precedence... They are all kept and served by colored people...' (*Jamaica in 1850. Or, the Effects of Sixteen Years of Freedom on a Slave Colony* (1851, rep. Westport, CT: Negro Universities Press, 1970), p. [12](#)).
- [6.](#) *doctress*: In calling her mother a doctress, i.e., a female doctor, physician or medical practitioner, it may be significant that Seacole does not identify her mother or herself as a 'healer' but as a curer with no religious affiliation (Michel Laguerre, *Afro-Caribbean Folk Medicine* (Massachusetts: Bergin & Garvey Publishers Inc., 1987), pp. [51](#), 55).
- [7.](#) *the adjacent camp at Up-Park, or the military station at New castle*: Up-Park has been a military camp in Kingston since 1784 and it is the island's principal barracks. When Jamaica gained independence in 1962., it became the headquarters of the Jamaica Defence Force. The camp provided accommodation for

1,000 men and their dependants (see Roger Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats. The British West India Regiments, 1795–1815* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 78–9 and 329–30 for a detailed description). Frank Cundall claims that the history of the West India Regiment (in which both black and white soldiers served) is closely connected to the camp (*Historic Jamaica* (London: West India Committee, 1915, repr. 1971), p. 226).

Newcastle, in the southern parish of St Andrew, is a military camp situated on what was formerly a coffee plantation in the Blue Mountains, and is thought to be the first permanent mountain station in the British West Indies. It was probably named after Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Jamaica Defence Force is now stationed there. In 1840, General Sir William Gomm pushed for the establishment of a new camp when he discovered the unsanitary conditions at Up-Park Camp, and it was fully operational in 1845. At this point Seacole is referring to 1817 (she says she was twelve years old), so her memory would appear to be faulty.

8. *the blue hills of Jamaica... distance:* The Blue Mountains form a twenty-eight-mile range visible from Kingston. Blue Mountain Peak is the island's highest point at 2,292 m (7,520 ft).

9. *New Providence... Hayti:* New Providence is an island in the Bahamas, on the Great Bahama Bank. 'Hayti' is Haiti, a republic in the Caribbean east of Cuba, occupying the western third of the island of Hispaniola.

- [10.](#) *Creole medicinal art*: In *Afro-Caribbean Folk Medicine*, Michel Laguerre describes how medical remedies in the Caribbean circulated between Africans, Creoles, Indians and whites in a process of what he calls ‘medical syncretism’ (p. [15](#)). Laguerre identifies the household as one of the ‘niches’ via which folk medical knowledge was transmitted (p. 35). Edwards singles out ‘women of colour’ in the Caribbean for ‘[t]heir tenderness as nurses towards the sick’ (*History, Civil and Commercial*, vol. II, p. [29](#)).
- [11.](#) *Mr Seacole*: See Introduction, footnote 11. A pencilled note in a file of papers at the National Library of Jamaica claims that Mary Jane Grant married Edwin Horatio Hamilton Seacole on 10 November 1836, and that he was buried on 26 October 1844. (Another note dated 1959 claims that ‘John Seacole’ was an elderly man when Seacole married him.) In her will, Seacole identifies her husband as Edwin Horatio Seacole, late of Jamaica, Viscount (i.e., Horatio) Nelson’s godson. Nelson arrived in Jamaica in 1777 and remained through the 1780s, protecting the largest and most important of ‘Britain’s American possessions’ against a French invasion (Terry Coleman, *Nelson. The Man and the Legend* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), pp. [27–8](#)). Cundall notes that Nelson stood godfather to one Horatio Ross, son of a navy agent in Jamaica (*Historic Jamaica*, p.72, and see pp. 69–72).
- [12.](#) *Black River*: The largest town in the parish of St Elizabeth, which was named ‘Rio Caobana’ (Mahogany River) by the

Spanish. In the mid nineteenth century the town derived considerable wealth from its trade in logwood, which was used to produce black and dark-blue dyes for the textile industry.

CHAPTER II

1. *my editor*: The identity of Seacole's editor is elusive. The initials W.J.S., as given on the title-page, do not match any of the benefactors' names listed at the end of the text, nor are they mentioned in Seacole's will. It is unlikely that he is W.H. Russell, *The Times*' war correspondent, as Gillian Whitlock claims (*The Intimate Empire. Reading Women's Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 86). Although a number of Seacole's phrases and observations are identical to Russell's in his war dispatches and his *The British Expedition to the Crimea* (London: G. Routledge & Co., 1858), and Seacole cites Russell's *Letters from the Seat of War* (London: Periodical Publications, 1855) in [Chapter XIII](#), this would suggest Russell was a source rather than an editor. See also *To the Reader*, note 3 and [Chapter V](#), note 5.
2. *That gently... gentle mould*: Alfred Lord Tennyson, 'To J. S.' (1832), stanza 1 : 'The wind that beats the mountain, blows/
More softly round the open wold,/ And gently comes the world
to those/ That are cast in gentle mould' (*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (New York: W.W. Norton Inc., 1969), p. 463).

3. *the great fire of 1843... burnt down my poor home*: The fire started on 26 August 1843 and it destroyed many of Kingston's most valuable properties. A sum of £10, 149 was distributed among people who had lost homes, but Seacole does not mention receiving money from this fund. By 1850, Bigelow noted that 'only a portion of the houses [had] been rebuilt' (*Jamaica in 1850*, pp. 13–14).
4. *the battle-fields of the Crimea*: The Crimea is a peninsula in the south Ukraine in the Black Sea. The Turkish declaration of war against Russia was made on 4 October 1853, with assurances of support from France and Britain, who entered the conflict on 28 March 1854. The aim was to prevent Russia expanding westward, since this was seen as a threat to British and French Mediterranean overland routes to India. See Introduction, p. xxv.
5. *useful to my kind in many lands*: Seacole seems to mean 'humankind' rather than specifically Jamaican, Creole or British people.
6. *officers of the 97th... Sebastopol*: The Earl of Ulster's Regiment of Foot served abroad from 1841 (in Gibraltar, the Ionian Islands, Jamaica, and North America) to 1853, when it returned to England before being sent to the Crimea in 1854. Russell describes the role played by the 97th in the attacks on the Malakhof and the Redan in September 1855 (*British Expedition*, p. 435). The Crimean War has been described as an unusually long siege of Sebastopol (now Sevastopol), a town and a Russian

fortress, and it was the fall of this fortress on 8 September 1855 that led to the peace negotiations that were finally agreed in Paris, March 1856 (see [Chapter XIX](#), note 1).

[7.](#) *H— V—*: Unidentified (also mentioned in [Chapter XV](#)).

[8.](#) *in 1850, the cholera swept over the island of Jamaica with terrible force*: Cholera is an epidemic bacterial infection and diarrhoeal disease which became pandemic in the nineteenth century, and it was not until 1855 that the source of infection was identified as waterborne, transmitted by ingesting contaminated water or food. See also [Chapter IV](#), note 1.

[9.](#) *a steamer from New Orleans... introducing it into the island*: New Orleans, Louisiana, was a prosperous market for slaves and cotton through the mid nineteenth century. Seacole's belief that cholera may have been introduced to Jamaica by an American steamer demonstrates her knowledge of contagion theory. In [Chapter IV](#) she identifies this theory as specifically Creole (or perhaps Jamaican – 'my people') in origin. In fact, it is unlikely that the American steamer brought cholera to Jamaica, as the disease is communicated by polluted water (although this view may have been widely held (see <http://www.trainweb.org/panama>, where it is claimed that cholera arrived in Colón from a New Orleans' steamer). Perhaps Seacole's hypothesis is another manifestation of her anti-American sentiments; see Introduction, p. xx.

10. *Early in the same year my brother... hotel:* I.e., in 1850. The brother is Edward, presumably Grant (see [Chapter III](#)), who was among the first Jamaicans to emigrate to Panama on the initial wave of the gold-rush. Workers and caterers were needed to cater for California-bound gold-seekers crossing the isthmus from 1848, while Caribbean labourers were also recruited to work on the Panama Railroad (see note 12 below). In 1852, the *Falmouth Post* reported that many emigrants had returned to Jamaica disappointed and without fortunes, but this may have been part of what amounted to a press campaign in Jamaica to prevent people from emigrating to Panama. See Introduction, pp. xxii–xxiii and note 17 below.

11. *Chagres:* Small town on the Atlantic side of the Isthmus, where most of the immigrants landed before Colón was built. Alexander Dunlop describes Chagres as ‘unhealthy from the dampness and miasma’ because of its situation on the marshy bank of the Chagres River. ‘The left bank is covered with what is called the *American town*, composed of wooden buildings – with rude wharves, stores, and hotels (soi-disant) – and there the “free and enlightened” citizens from the great republic abound’ (*Notes on the Isthmus of Panama with Remarks on its Geography and its Prospects in Connections with the Gold Regions, Gold Mining and Washing* (London: Joseph Thomas, 1852), pp. 4–5).

12. *iron and steam, twin giants... Isthmus of Darien:* The construction of the Panama Railroad between 1850 and 1855 by the Panama

Railroad Company. In 1848, the government of New Granada and an American joint stock company agreed on an exclusive concession for the next forty-nine years, which allowed the company to construct a crossing by road, rail, river or a combination.

‘Isthmus of Darien’ refers loosely to the narrow neck of land separating North and South America, now known as Panama, on the Gulf of Darien.

[13.](#) *the New Grenada Republic... refuse of every nation*: The New Grenada Republic was part of a former Spanish colony in northern South America; it became independent in 1821. Panama became part of Colombia, and with the addition of Ecuador, the whole area was renamed the Republic of New Granada (becoming the Republic of Greater Colombia or Gran Colombia in 1886).

‘[T]he refuse of every nation’ may refer to labourers on the Panama Railroad, or to American gold-seekers, about which Alexander Dunlop wrote: ‘It is strange to see such hordes of ill-dressed and ill-conditioned *travellers*... chiefly emigrants and gold-seekers passing to and fro, and troops of “ritornados” from California, reckless-looking, keen-eyed men, dirty beyond belief... in my long journey through [the States] and the Far West, I never encountered such abominable savages’ (*Notes on the Isthmus of Panama*, pp. [4–5](#)).

[14.](#) *seven years ago, when I visited the Isthmus of Panama:* Seacole seems to have misremembered her dates. Although she implies that she visited Panama in 1850 (since she is writing in 1857), she says that she travelled by rail from Navy Bay to Gatun, but that strip of railway was not completed until October 1851 (see note 19 below). Similarly, she says that cholera struck Cruces shortly after her arrival (see [Chapter IV](#), note I), but the major outbreak on the Isthmus did not occur until 1852 (it is of course possible that she is referring to a different outbreak).

[15.](#) *Navy Bay... dreary spot:* For Navy Bay see [Chapter VI](#), note 5. Newton cites the *Jamaican Gazette's* description of Navy Bay as a 'charnel house' (Velma Newton, *The Silver Men. West Indian Labour Migration to Panama, 1850–1914* (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies), p. [51](#)).

[16.](#) *piles:* I.e., pillars. According to Newton, the Panama Railroad Company constructed villages of stilted shacks in which workmen – of the same nationality, wherever possible – were grouped (*Silver Men*, pp. [112](#), 119; see also Elizabeth McLean Petras, *Jamaican Labour Migration. White Capital and Black Labour, 1850–1930* (Boulder & London: Westview Press, 1988), p. 72.).

[17.](#) *Every mile of that fatal railway cost the world thousands of lives:* A common observation at the time, when it was also said that every railroad tie between Colón and Panama City represented a

dead man. The Panama Railroad Company did not keep official statistics on fatalities, except for its white workers, who represented only a small proportion of its workers, and the company undoubtedly tried to minimize the number in those published statistics. In April 1854, the *Daily Advertiser* published a sequence of articles warning Jamaicans about dire conditions on the Isthmus experienced by migrant workers: there were no doctors or medical supplies during the initial years of construction, and no hope of recovery once disease had struck. Petras notes that health conditions remained one of the most serious problems until about 1900, when successful campaigns got rid of malaria and yellow fever (Petras, *Jamaican Labour Migration*, p. 74).

18. *three times the survivors struck in a body*: Probably a reference to the strikes in 1853, when North Americans reacted to the harsh conditions in which they were expected to work. Encouraged by a local *alcade*, or union, the men stopped work and demanded that the contractor pay them \$1.20 a day. The strike was broken by an armed vigilante crew, and the contractor no longer employed large numbers of Americans in order to avoid both delays and the necessity of paying higher wages.

19. *The railway then ran no further than Gatun... to Gorgona*: The trackage across swampland to Gatun had been completed by October 1851: the eight miles of railroad had taken twenty months to build at a cost of over \$1,000,000. After this, it was

discovered that the Panama Railroad Company was on the verge of bankruptcy, and construction ceased temporarily (Joseph Schott, *Rails Across Panama. The Story of the Building of the Panama Railroad*, 1849–1855 (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 83–4). Like the directors of the Panama Railroad Company, Seacole travels the thirty miles from Chagres to Gorgona by water, and from there another four miles to Cruces. The whole journey would have taken approximately four days (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, p. 4).

Gorgona, a native village about twenty-four miles from Panama, was ‘well situated on rising ground’ with ‘long rows of Indian huts, some wooden houses, and numbers of sheds for housing merchandise in transit... There are hotels, lodging-houses &c., and agency-houses for letting mules. The town was so crammed full of Californian, American, Ritornados, that when I arrived, there was scarcely room for another man...’ (Dunlop, *Notes on the Isthmus of Panama*, p. 7).

[20.](#) *Pera*: On the western shore of the Bosphorus, on the Sea of Marmora, opposite Scutari.

[21.](#) *Spanish Indians*: The indigenous people of Panama. Estimates vary – from 500,000 to in excess of 750,000 – as to the size of the indigenous populations on the isthmus when Spanish explorers arrived at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The major tribes were the Cuna (or Kuna), the Guaymi and the Chocó. Having been robbed, enslaved and massacred by the

Spanish, thousands more succumbed to European illnesses and many fled to remote areas. However, in 1787, the Cuna entered into a trade treaty with Spain (Sandra W. Meditz and Dennis M. Hanratty, *Panama. A Country Study* (Washington: US Army Department, 1989), Pp. 6, 9, 77–94).

[22.](#) *The simple plan... who can*: William Wordsworth, ‘Memorials of a Tour in Scotland, 1803’, XI, ‘Rob Roy’s Grave’ (1807), lines 38–41.

[23.](#) *ten pounds... to Cruces*: Seacole is presumably referring to English money. Cruces, forty-five river miles from the town of Chagres, had been the Isthmus’s most important inland city for two centuries, but the town declined as Spanish power did (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, p. [53](#)). Seacole’s brother established his Independent Hotel there, and Schott also mentions an American Hotel (p. 54).

[24.](#) *Corporal Trim’s comrades in Flanders*: Corporal Trim, in Laurence Sterne’s *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759–67), served with his soldier-master, Uncle Toby, in Flanders when King William’s army captured Namur from the French. It is Uncle Toby who declares, during the delivery of a lengthy curse, ‘Our armies swore terribly in Flanders... but nothing to this’ (*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* ed. Melvyn and Joan New (London: Penguin, 1997), vol. III, ch. II, p. [143](#)).

CHAPTER III

1. *French lady writers*: An allusion to ‘lady writers’ who behave like men, but Seacole may also have been thinking of authors such as George Sand (Amandine-Aurore Lucille Dupin, 1804–76), who used male pseudonyms and led relatively free lifestyles.
2. *nigger cooks*: In her use of the word ‘nigger’ here, Seacole is clearly critiquing and ironizing the racist white Americans who abusively ‘halloo’ for their food. See Introduction, p. xxiv.

CHAPTER IV

1. *the cholera*: Cholera struck the Isthmus in June 1852, the worst epidemic in years. There were so many deaths that construction on the railroad ceased temporarily (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, pp. 113, 122).
2. *mustard emetics, warm fomentations, mustard plasters... and calomel*: Seacole’s treatment for cholera consisted of giving her patient mustard to make him vomit, applying warm cloths and a mustard paste (with a plaster – see also note 8 below) along with mercurous chloride (calomel) as a purgative. Schott notes that doctors ‘devised ferocious purges – calomel and enemas of hot salt water and tobacco juice – to exorcise the demon from the patient’s body’ (*Rails Across Panama*, p. 116).
3. *the yellow woman*: At this time, the epithet ‘yellow’ was used to describe Caribbean Creoles of ‘mixed-race’ origin: Long makes disparaging references to ‘this yellow [i.e., ‘mixed race’] brood’ (Long, *History of Jamaica*, vol. II, p. 329), whereas the American

John Bigelow refers to 'coloured' or 'brown' people in Jamaica (*Jamaica in 1850*, pp. 15, 20–29). See also Deirdre Coleman, 'Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36:2 (Spring 2003), pp. 169–93; pp. 180, 191, n. 67.

4. *Opium*: Some doctors prescribed opium, prepared from the opium poppy, for cholera (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, 116) as a sedative.
5. *water in which cinnamon had been boiled*: Edward Ayensu notes that boiling water was poured on to cinnamon twigs and leaves to make a drink that was taken with cornmeal porridge for the stomach, but he does not mention cinnamon as a treatment for cholera (*Medicinal Plants of the West Indies* (Michigan: Reference Publications Inc., 1981), p. 112).
6. *ten grains of sugar of lead*: Seacole may be referring to the 'lead tree', the Caribbean name for the tropical leguminous *Leucaena Glauca*. Ayensu lists this tree as a cure for 'wind on the stomach', to quiet nerves and to treat heart trouble (*Medicinal Plants*, p. 125). Seacole may have been using it as a sedative, in place of the opium of which she is wary. ('Lead sugar' is listed but not described in OED.)
7. *warm oil, camphor, and spirits of wine*: Seacole applies this remedy externally. Ayensu describes how the crushed leaves of the camphor tree are steeped in alcohol and used as a rub to relieve rheumatic pains. The leaves may be mashed with proof

rum to treat headache, nervous and eruptive fevers (*Medicinal Plants*, p. 112).

8. *mustard poultices*: A poultice is a soft mass of some substance (such as bread, meal, bran, linseed, etc.) spread upon muslin, linen, or other material, and applied to the skin to supply moisture or warmth, to soften a sore or inflamed part, or to relieve irritation. Mustard plasters or poultices were applied to offset the decline in the cholera patient's temperature during the cold or 'algid' stage (see note 9 below) of the disease (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, pp. 115, 116).

9. *giddiness, sickness, diarrhoea, or sunken eyes... indigo tint*: Seacole describes the distinctive clinical characteristics of cholera. At the onset, the patient feels anxious or depressed, and this is accompanied by internal disturbances, giddiness and nausea. These are followed by violent vomiting and diarrhoea, intense muscular cramps, a burning sensation in the stomach and a craving for water. Next is a 'sinking (or algid) stage' during which the pulse fades, body temperature drops and lethargy sets in. The patient, who is now close to death, shows the classic cholera symptoms Seacole describes here – a sunken and cadaverous face with a liverish colour around the eyes and blue (indigo) lips and fingernails.

CHAPTER V

1. *carpet my room, with the result... of his meditations*: Obscure: Seacole may mean that her visitor fills her room with his talk when he verbalizes his thoughts.
2. *Mrs Seacole very likely refers to Macbeth. But it was the witches he abused.* – Ed: In IV.1.48 Macbeth calls the witches ‘secret, black and midnight hags’, (line 48), but in III.5.105–6 he also addresses Banquo’s ghost as ‘horrible shadow! Unreal mockery’, so that Seacole’s reference may in fact be correct. This footnote is the only direct editorial interposition in the text.
3. *he stayed only to find a grave on the Isthmus of Panama*: No other details of her brother’s death are known.
4. *’cutest*: Acutest. See also [Chapter VI](#), where ‘too ’cute’ means ‘too clever’.
5. *coat-tale*: i.e., the tale told by the ‘Yankee friend’s’ chalked-up coat-tails.
6. *the Vigilance Committee... purification*: Any privately formed group of citizens who took it upon themselves to assist in the maintenance of law and order in the United States. Sometimes found in the southern states as a group that intimidated African Americans. During the American Civil War (1861–5) they strove to suppress the activities of loyalists to the Northern cause.
7. *Lola Montes... strange suite*: Lola Montes was the stage name of Marie Dolores Eliza Rosanna Gilbert (1818–61), a dancer and adventurer born in Limerick, Ireland. She assumed her stage name after studying dance for four months under a Spanish

teacher, and afterwards insisted that she was Spanish. Montes was married bigamously several times over, and was known to cross-dress. News of her 'evil fame' was evidently widespread, and Seacole would probably have heard of her before travelling to Panama, for example, in 1858, Jamaica's *Daily Advertiser* reported that Montez was performing in New York (16 July).

8. *Catherine Hayes, on her successful singing tour:* Catherine Hayes (1825–61), a singer born into poverty in Limerick, Ireland, studied and performed in Dublin, and subsequently in Paris and Milan. During the 1840s and 1850s she performed in operas throughout Europe, North and South America, Australia, India (where she performed for the British troops) and Java.
9. *filibusters... whop all creation abroad as they do their slaves at home:* Bands of adventurers who between 1850 and 1860 organized expeditions from the United States, in violation of international law, for the purpose of revolutionizing certain states in Central America and the Spanish West Indies. Seacole is referring to bullying and violent Americans who treated 'all creation' as slaves.
10. *Carthage*: Or Cartagena, a port in Columbia. Petras notes that a handful of workers was brought from Carthage to begin construction on the railroad in 1850, but it was thought that the native population was lazy, so workers were imported from elsewhere (*Jamaican Labour Migration*, p. 62).

11. *the ingenuity in cruelty of his Majesty the King of Naples*: Naples was the capital of the Sicilian kingdom from 1806 to 1860, but Seacole is possibly referring to Charles of Anjou, who put young Conradine to death in 1268 so that he could become King of Naples.
12. *‘Hombro – landro’*: The Spanish word for man is ‘hombre’, while a thief is ‘ladrón’. Seacole evidently means that her ‘little maid’ is shouting ‘Man – thief. It is not clear whether Seacole is making these mistakes or quoting her maid’s errors.

CHAPTER VI

1. *the anniversary of the declaration of American independence*: Independence Day is celebrated on 4 July.
2. *the Isle of Springs*: ‘Xaymaca’, the Tainos’ Arawak word for Jamaica. Isle of Springs is still used as a nickname for Jamaica.
3. *not wholly white... so many shades removed from being entirely black*: The American ‘spokesman’ who addresses Seacole expresses a view that was common at the time, namely, that white people degenerated as they ‘intermixed’ with black people. In the United States, ‘the one-drop rule’ meant that anyone with any black ancestry was designated a ‘negro’. See Appiah and Gates Jr., *Africana*, p. 1320.
4. *Cuban and Nicaraguan soil... schemes for annexation*: Both were republics of Cuba; at this time, Nicaragua was considered an alternative site to Panama for a trans-isthmus canal. ‘Schemes for

annexation' refers to American schemes; see, for example, [Chapter VII](#), note 6.

- [5.](#) *the American Railway Company took possession of Navy Bay, and christened it Aspinwall, after the name of their Chairman:*

Manzanillo Island in Navy Bay was chosen by the Panama Railroad Company for its Atlantic terminal and headquarters, and a settlement was established there in 1852. Having filled in the channel so that Manzanillo became part of the mainland, the railroad directors named the new town after their chairman William Aspinwall. However, the Columbian government and citizens of Panama insisted on calling the settlement Colón, after Christopher Columbus and, as Seacole goes on to observe, postal workers refused to deliver mail addressed to Aspinwall. The name Colón eventually prevailed (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, pp. [79](#), 107; see also Newton, *Silver Men*, pp.112–13).

- [6.](#) *the New Grenada constitution... of the English – that on a slave touching its soil his chains fall from him:* Seacole is drawing a parallel between Panamanian law and the English law, much-cited before Abolition, which meant that slaves were free in England even while slavery was practised in its colonies. The Mansfield judgment of 1772 found that slavery was illegal in England and could be introduced only by positive law. '[T]he moment [slaves] put their feet on English ground, that moment they become free. They are subject to the laws... of this country, and so are their masters, thank God!' (Peter Fryer, *Staying Power. The*

History of Black People in Britain (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. [122](#)); see also William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vols, 16th edn (London, 1825), vol. 1, p. [127](#)).

- [7.](#) *an American and her property*: Until the abolition of chattel slavery in the US in 1865, many people of African origin were legally defined as the property of white Americans (although there were free blacks in the North and South).
- [8.](#) *the sixth commandment*: ‘Thou shalt not kill’ (Exodus 20:13).
- [9.](#) *the true old adage, ‘God helps those who help themselves’*: Seacole is punning on the ‘honest folks’ helplessness and their reliance on saints, perhaps along with their failure to ‘help themselves’ to the householders’ goods.

CHAPTER VII

- [1.](#) *the yellow fever... that dreadful year*: Yellow fever is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes which results in fever, headaches, vomiting, muscle and joint pain, bleeding and jaundice; the kidneys and heart may also be affected, and the disease can be fatal. In 1853, the Jamaican newspapers were full of accounts of the ravages of yellow fever, and in one editorial, complaints were made that the Board of Health did not take adequate measures ‘to secure the public health’ (*The Colonial Standard*, 13 May). See also *Daily Advertiser*, 12, 13 May, 9 July, 28 August 1853.

- [2.](#) *the Valley of the Shadow of Death*: From Psalms 23:4: ‘Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.’
- [3.](#) *my sister*: Louisa Grant.
- [4.](#) ‘*senorita, buono, buono*’: Literally, ‘Miss, good, good’ (Spanish).
- [5.](#) *prospecting a mine*: Taking samples of ore for testing, and the resulting yield from this.
- [6.](#) *Recent news from America... annexing the isthmus of Panama*: Seacole seems to be referring to the American reaction to a violent incident that took place in Panama City, the so-called ‘Watermelon War’ of April 1856, when clashes between white Americans and black Panamanians left at least sixteen people dead and twenty-nine wounded. Rejecting Panamanian claims that American gold-seekers were the aggressors, US government officials made a series of demands, all of which were rejected. The USA eventually gave up its attempts to gain control of the railroad (Schott, *Rails Across Panama*, pp. 193–200). It is interesting that Seacole, writing in 1857, regards it as an attempt on the part of the USA to establish a protectorate in Panama.
- [7.](#) *the extreme class of its citizens... California*: i.e., American gold-seekers or ‘forty-niners’ on their way to California.

CHAPTER VIII

1. *the battle of Alma*: The Russians, French and British military divisions fought their first battle at the Alma River on 20 September 1854, when British and French lines advanced on the Russians, penetrating their ranks and forcing them to retreat. The battle caused a sensation among Allied supporters in Europe, but later the Allies were criticized for failing to pursue the shattered Russian army to total defeat.
2. *the 97th, 48th, and other regiments*: For the 97th Regiment, see [Chapter II](#), note 6. The 48th Regiment of Foot, eventually the 1st Battalion Northamptonshire Regiment, was stationed in Jamaica in 1820–22, 1844 and 1845–7. Seacole mentions the 47th Regiment in [Chapter XIX](#).
3. *Balaclava*: Harbour on the south-west tip of the Crimean peninsula, where the British established their supply base. Baumgart claims that this decision was to prove one of the costliest mistakes in the Crimean War, since Balaclava was too far from the front line, the harbour was too small, and supplies had to be transported 14 km uphill. The chaos there was reported by numerous contemporary observers, and it contrasted with French organization at Kamiesch (Winfried Baumgart, *The Crimean War, 1853–1856* (London: Arnold, 1999), p. [123](#); Trevor Royle, *Crimea. The Great Crimean War, 1854–1856* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1999), p. 299): see [Chapter XI](#), note 7.
4. *mismanagement want, and suffering in the Crimea*: Seacole may have read articles, including W. H. Russell's, published in *The*

Times in the winter of 1854, in which military disorganization and the misery of the ordinary soldier were represented in uncompromising detail. The first appeared in *The Times* on 12 October 1854, and drew attention to the deficiencies of the medical provisions at the battlefield. See also [note 7](#) below.

[5.](#) *battles of Balaclava and Inkermann... fearful storm of the 14th of November*: The Battle of Balaclava was fought on 25 October 1854, when the Russians attacked the south-easterly flank of the British line of observation, taking them by surprise; it was not successful, although the Allies sustained heavier losses. This was when the famous ‘Charge of the Light Brigade’ took place after a vague order given by Lord Raglan led to the death of 134 men. In the Battle of Inkermann (5 November 1854), the Russian army attacked the poorly fortified Inkermann ridge, and the British were on the verge of defeat when French troops arrived, eventually forcing the Russians to retreat. On 14 November 1854 a terrible storm swept over the southern part of the Crimea, causing loss and privation for all troops, especially the sick and wounded housed in makeshift hospitals, which often collapsed or were blown away. Baumgart notes that ‘[t]he hardship it produced for men and animals... has gone down in English historical consciousness as one of the great dramas of the Crimean War’ (*Crimean War*, p. [138](#)).

[6.](#) *eight times their number of picked Russians*: At the end of October 1854, Allied troops numbered some 70,000, while the Russian

force had approximately 65,000 men, but by November their numbers had increased to about 107,00. Sixty thousand British soldiers took part in the Battle of Inkermann, to which Seacole is referring here. Casualties were high: the Russians lost 10,729 men (killed, wounded or taken prisoner), while 597 British men were killed and 1,860 wounded (13 French soldiers were killed and 750 wounded).

[Z.](#) *the hospitals of Scutari... the Black Sea*: Scutari, or Üsküdar, a Turkish port on the Montenegrin coast on the opposite side of the Bosphorus from Constantinople, was a British rallying point and transit depot for reinforcements and supplies, and the British Military hospital was established there at the beginning of the conflict. In October 1854 a report by Thomas Chenery (not Russell, as is commonly thought) in *The Times* revealed the horrific conditions at the hospital in Scutari: ‘no sufficient medical preparations have been made for the proper care of the wounded’. *The Times* suggested establishing a fund for ‘creature comforts’, and the public response was instantaneous (see also note 15 below). A letter to *The Times* from ‘A Sufferer by the Present War’ asked why the British did not have ‘sisters of charity’ similar to those employed by the French, whose foresight with regard to medical arrangements had already been contrasted with British disorganization. This letter inspired Florence Nightingale to write to Mrs Sidney Herbert, wife of the Secretary at War, proposing the creation of a nursing service for ‘the wounded wretches’; meanwhile Sidney Herbert had already

written to Nightingale with just such a plan, and on 17 October the Cabinet approved her appointment as Superintendent of the Female Nursing Establishment of the English General Hospitals in Turkey. Nightingale arrived in Constantinople on 4 November 1854, and she went immediately to Scutari. There she improved the hospital by introducing hygiene, regulation and order (Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 246–52; Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 143–4).

8. *'I was sick, and ye visited me'*: Matthew 25:36.

9. *War Office*: Sidney Herbert, first Baron of Lea (1810–61), was Secretary at War from December 1852 until January 1855, when Lord Palmerston succeeded Lord Aberdeen as Prime Minister and the administration of all arms and of the Commissariat (see [Chapter X](#), note 2) was combined in the newly created War Office. The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Supplies of the British Army in the Crimea (1856) on the conditions of troops before Sevastopol found that Herbert was not responsible for the breakdown of military organization.

10. *dysentery*: Name given to two different intestinal infections (bacillary dysentery and amoebic dysentery), both of which are characterized by diarrhoea and the passage of blood and mucus in the stool. Amoebic is more serious, resulting in a severe and persistent diarrhoea. Dysentery is a waterborne disease, and occurs wherever people are crowded together without adequate sanitary conditions, especially armies in combat situations.

- [11.](#) *in a constitutional point of view*: Implying that Seacole is ‘constitutionally’, i.e., physically, suited to nursing.
- [12.](#) *the Quartermaster-General’s department*: The Quartermaster General was the head of the army department, in charge of controlling quarters, equipment, etc., and his responsibilities were large but ill-defined. Lord Raglan chose the inexperienced Lord de Ros as his Quartermaster General (Royle, *Crimea*, p. [132](#)), but in August 1854 he was repatriated and replaced by Richard Airey.
- [13.](#) *to offer myself to Mrs H—as a recruit*: Elizabeth Herbert stayed in London and recruited nurses for Nightingale.
- [14.](#) *Cox’s, the army agents*: Financial agents for army personnel. A notice in *The Times* of 11 April 1857, appealing for donations to the Seacole Fund, states that Messrs. Cox and Co., bankers, Craig’s Court, Charing Cross, would be receiving subscriptions to the fund; they were identified as Seacole’s financial agents in her will.
- [15.](#) *the managers of the Crimean fund*: On 12 October 1854, *The Times* called for the establishment of a fund: ‘We have now an opportunity, not of eating and drinking ourselves in honour of our noble but sufferings, but of sending them a few creature comforts,’ the reporter observed. ‘Four or five thousand pounds would do a great deal, even among as many men... So, as we let these poor fellows fight for us, let us send to them also the means for celebrating the victorious union of our armies.’ Sir Robert

Peel, son of the former Prime Minister, donated £200, and *The Times* itself gave £7,000 for Nightingale's personal use (Royle, *Crimea*, p. 247).

[16.](#) *an impulsive people*: Creoles, both white and black, were often represented as passionate and impulsive. Wylie Sypher characterizes the 'West-Indian' as represented in eighteenth-century fiction as displaying 'fitful spells of passion or energy, generosity bordering on improvidence, sentimentality combined with a streak of haughtiness' ('The West Indian as a "Character" in the 18th Century', *Studies in Philology* 36:3, p. 504). Long counts passion among the 'foibles' of *white* creoles in Jamaica (*History of Jamaica*, vol. II, p. 265).

[17.](#) *the well-known firm of Seacole and Day... Day and Martin*: 'Seacole and Day' was certainly well known by the time *Wonderful Adventures* was published, when the firm's bankruptcy was extensively reported in *The Times*. In the docket books at the Public Record Office the company was listed as 'late of Spring Hill and Balaklava both in the Crimea provision merchants trade &c.' (Public Record Office, B6/100 London District General Docket Book, January 1856-June 1859: A-Z, no. 2; B6.79 Town Declaration Book 1856-61). After the Crimean War, Seacole seems to have fallen out with her business partner (see Russell's letter to *The Times* on 11 April 1857 in the [Appendix](#)) but another letter from 'MRS SEACOLE'S LATE PARTNER IN THE CRIMEA' claimed that Seacole's bankruptcy was caused by 'the elements

and by robbery, and the depreciation of stock-in-trade' (*The Times*, 14 April 1857). Day and Martin was a firm of blacking manufacturers. Seacole expresses only a mild objection to the racist humour of 'the camp wits'.

18. *upon the now deserted high-road*: Seacole's hotel was en route from Balaklava to the battlefield, and was something of a landmark. Russell locates it 'Close to the railway, half-way between the Col de Balaklava and Kadikoi, Mrs Seacole, formerly of Kingston and of several other parts of the world, such as Panama and Chagres has pitched her abode – an iron storehouse, with wooden sheds and outlying tributaries, and here she doctors and cures all manner of men with extraordinary success. She is always in attendance near the battlefield to aid the wounded, and has earned many a poor fellow's blessings' (*The War*, 2 vols (London: George Routledge & Co., 1856), vol. II, p. 187). Later he refers to her 'hut' and her 'restaurant' as 'a noted landmark' that was also apparently recognized by military personnel (*The War*, vol. II, pp. 351, 367, 438). See also Russell, *British Expedition*, pp. 562, 591. Lady Alicia Blackwood evidently thought 'Mrs Seacole's hut' of enough significance for her to make a sketch of it. See *A Narrative of Personal Experiences and Impressions During a Residence on the Bosphorus Throughout the Crimean War* (London: Hatchard, 1881), p. 258.

CHAPTER IX

1. *Cape of St Vincent... Trafalgar's fight was won*: The Cape of St Vincent is off the south-west coast of Portugal. The Battle of Trafalgar was fought off Cape Trafalgar in Spain on 21 October 1805, and it resulted in Nelson's death at the moment of victory. It was the most famous naval engagement of the Napoleonic War, which destroyed Napoleon I's hopes of invading England.
2. *like Margery Daw*: Nursery rhyme; In *Ritson's Gammer Gurton's Garland* (1783) it appears as follows: 'See saw, Margery Daw/Sold her old bed to lay on straw.'
3. *two tower-crested promontories of rock... some pretty tale of love in days long gone by*: Two famous castles are situated at the narrowest point of the Dardanelle Straits: Andalou Hisar (1390) on the Asian side and Rumeli Hisar (1452) on the European side. The Greek story, the subject of poems by Christopher Marlowe and Thomas Hood, is of Hero, a priestess of Venus, and Leander. They fell in love, and Leander swam the Hellespont, the ancient name for the Dardanelles, every night to visit her. One night he was drowned, and a heartbroken Hero drowned herself in the same sea.
4. *Bosphorus*: A narrow strait separating European from Asiatic Turkey.
5. *'shy at the Rooshians'*: Try to hit the Russians. In *British Expedition* Russell describes a private soldier who wanted 'to have a go in at the Roosians' (p. 552).

- [6.](#) *the ‘scurvy’*: A deficiency of vitamin C resulting in bleeding gums, loss of teeth, haemorrhage, anaemia and depression. Common in the Royal Navy until the introduction of lime juice into seamen’s diets in 1759.
- [7.](#) *Mrs B—*: Very probably Selina Bracebridge, who accompanied Nightingale to Scutari, where she acted as her companion and amanuensis (Anne Summers, *Angels and Citizens. British Women as Military Nurses, 1854–1914* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1998), pp. [38](#), 40).
- [8.](#) *Subsequently I saw much of Miss Nightingale, at Balaclava*: Seacole does not describe any of these meetings, and it is possible that they did not take place. See Introduction, pp. xxx–xxxii, and [Appendix](#).

CHAPTER X

- [1.](#) *a young Greek Jew... ‘Johnny’*: As with her descriptions of other ethnic and ‘racial’ groups, Seacole’s attitude towards ‘Johnny’ is stereotyped and offhand; this is somewhat mitigated by her characterization of him as ‘the best and faithfulest servant I had in the Crimea’. According to Russell, the Allies called everyone ‘Johnny’, so that the Greeks and Turks eventually applied the name to themselves. ‘It became the established cry of the army... As you rode along the road friendly natives grinned at you, and thought, no matter what your rank, that they set themselves right with you and paid a graceful compliment by a shout of

“Bono, Johnny”.’ Market people shouted out ‘bono’ to signal the excellence of their wares, and ‘Bono Johnny’ became a catchphrase (*British Expedition*, p. 74).

2. *commissariat officers for Balaclava*: The Commissariat was the department of the military service that supervised the provision of food and other supplies for the army. In 1854, the Commissariat was a civilian organization under the direct control of the Treasury in London, but it proved incapable of tackling the problem of moving large amounts of supplies from Balaclava to the front lines, so it was dissolved in the spring of 1855 and replaced by a new military organization, the Land Transport Corps, later called the Military Train (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 77, 139; see [Chapter XI](#), note 2). The Commissariat was criticized in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Supplies of the British Army in the Crimea (1856).
3. *where the Prince, with her ill-fated companions, went down in that fearful November storm*: The *Prince* was laden with the major part of the equipment for the British army, along with hospital material and other stores, and it was the most substantial loss in the storm of 14 November 1854 (see [Chapter VIII](#), note 5) (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. 139).
4. *Captain Peel... the batteries of the Royal Naval Brigade*: Captain William Peel (1825–58), commander of the Naval Brigade, was wounded during the assault on the Redan in June 1855, when he was leading a party of soldiers into attack (Russell, *British*

Expedition, pp. 365, 280; *The Times*, 3 July 1855). Russell wrote: 'The Naval Brigade landed on 25th October 1854, and were at once set to the very onerous duty of dragging up the heavy siege guns to the batteries... They brought their own ammunition, provisioned themselves all through the winter, were their own commissariat, mounted their own guns, repaired their damaged embrasures, and were only twenty-four hours on and twenty-four hours off duty when the batteries were in play.' The brigade was disbanded in September 1855, after the fall of Sevastopol.

5. *my kind patron, Sir John Campbell, then commanding a division:* When Seacole met Sir John Campbell (1807–55) in Jamaica after 1840, he was commander of the 38th Regiment, and in 1854 he was posted to the command of the 2nd brigade of the 3rd division as brigadier-general, where he was present at the battles of the Alma and Inkermann; in December 1854 he was promoted to major-general. He was posted to the temporary command of the 4th division, and when he heard of the planned assault on the Great Redan in June 1855 he volunteered to lead the detachments of the 4th division (see [Chapter XVI](#), notes 6 and 9).
6. *H. Vicars:* Presumably 'the good and gallant Captain Vicars of the 97th', who died in March 1855 during a Russian attack (Russell, *British Expedition*, p. 298). He does not seem to be the 'H—V—' that Seacole has mentioned twice, as we are told that he died during the third bombardment of Sevastopol in June 1855.

- [7.](#) *the Nonpareil*: Russell calls the ship the *Sans Pareil* (Russell, *British Expedition*, p. 248). The French word means having no equal; peerless.
- [8.](#) *Admiral Boxer... the terrible Port-Admiral*: Rear Admiral Edward Boxer (1784–1855) arrived in the Crimea in January 1855 to assume the position of superintendent of Balaclava Harbour. His name is commonly associated with the terrible conditions there, although Russell calls him a ‘gallant and energetic old sailor [who], by his incessant personal exertions, succeeded in carrying out many improvements and introducing some order [at Balaclava]’ (*British Expedition*, p. 257). Royle’s description of Boxer as a pedantic observer of regulations chimes with Seacole’s experience, and Royle also notes that there was bad feeling between Boxer and Lord Raglan (Royle, *Crimea*, p. 143). All the same, when Boxer died of cholera on 4 June 1855, Raglan paid homage to the improvements he had instituted.
- [9.](#) *the Diamond*: A British frigate (Russell, *British Expedition*, p. 425).
- [10.](#) *Buyukdere*: Or Bujukdere, a Turkish port town on the western shore of the Bosphorus, near Scutari.
- [11.](#) *unfortunate in business*: The letter is dated September 1856, before Seacole and Day appeared in London’s bankruptcy courts, and prior to the establishment of the Seacole Fund.

CHAPTER XI

1. *the helpless waif... any such wind or waterfalls*: Here ‘waif’ refers to an ownerless piece of property. With ‘waterfall’, Seacole is humorously coining a term specific to her experiences at sea. A windfall is a piece of fruit blown down by the wind, or a piece of unexpected good fortune, such as a legacy. A ‘waterfall’ here alludes to the goods Seacole brought from England, unexpectedly acquired by the Greek and Maltese boatmen.
2. *the Land Transport and Army Works Corps*: These were both Lord Panmure’s innovations. The Land Transport Corps replaced the Commissariat (see [Chapter X](#), note 2), and it was led by officers from the Indian armies. Many of the men in the Transport Corps had little experience of working with horses, and initially they resisted military discipline. The civilian Army Works Corps consisted of navvies employed to build trenches in order to relieve soldiers of the task, which they did not perform well (Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 404–5). There were complaints that the navvies, who were paid at a higher rate than the infantrymen who protected them, were insubordinate and unwilling to work. After the war, a report in *The Times* claimed that ‘[Seacole’s] hut was daily besieged by the Army Works and Land Transport men, for whom she would prescribe in cases of diarrhoea, dysentery, and other camp maladies’ (28 July 1857).
3. *‘set a thief to catch a thief’*: Proverbial, from an epigram by Callimachus.

- [4.](#) *in flagrant defiance of the Prophet's injunction:* i.e., the Prophet Mohammed. Drinking is prohibited in the Qur'an. See Surah V:90.
- [5.](#) *the Zouaves particularly distinguished themselves:* The Zouaves were a light infantry elite force in the French army, originally Berbers from Algeria but many who fought in the Crimea were French soldiers. They retained their original, highly distinctive uniform (very baggy red trousers, short open-fronted jackets and tasselled caps or turbans). They were distinguished for their physique and verve, and they performed well at the battles of Alma and Inkermann. They were among the first soldiers to enter the Malakhoff on the final assault of 8 September 1855 (see Guy Arnold, *Historical Dictionary of the Crimean War* (Boston: Scarecrow Press, 2002), p. [152](#)).
- [6.](#) *the degenerate descendants of the fierce Arabs who... had wrested Constantinople from the Christians:* In 1453, the Byzantine capital of Constantinople became the capital of the Ottoman Empire, known as Istanbul. The empire lasted until 1922 (Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. [86](#), 214–15).
- [7.](#) *Kamiesch:* A port, south-west of Sevastopol, where the French established their supply base. They constructed a large hutted town with storehouses that kept their troops well equipped. French ships were more protected in Kamiesch Bay than British ones in Balaclava, so they were not as adversely affected by the

storm of November 1854 (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. 123; Royle, *Crimea*, p. 299).

8. *about two miles from Balaclava, in advance of Kadikoi... within a mile of head-quarters:* The village of Kadikoi was situated towards the northern end of the Allies' inner defence line, with a British field battery and an infantry battalion stationed there. Supplies were transported from Balaclava to Kadikoi, and from there to British lines. In February 1855, the British began to build a railway from Balaclava Harbour, and the first section ran to Kadikoi village (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 127, 139, 140). See also [Chapter VIII](#), note 18.

9. *Spring Hill... our new home:* There is a Spring Hill in Portland, Jamaica, so it may be that Seacole had some connection with that area.

10. *Captain Ali Baba:* Ali Baba is generally regarded as the hero of a story in *The Thousand and One Nights*, known as 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'; he discovers a magic cave full of treasure while out gathering wood. Seacole seems to be using the name generically to denote the Turkish officer who works as her carpenter.

11. *the sacred duties of eating and praying:* Ritual prayer five times a day is an obligation for Muslims, but eating does not constitute a 'sacred duty'.

12. *Lord Raglan's staff:* Lord Fitzroy James Henry Somerset, first Baron Raglan (1788–1855), Commanding General of the British

Expeditionary Forces in the Crimea. He was still a vigorous man in 1854, but historians describe him as a 'desk warrior' who had not been involved in a major European war (as opposed to a colonial war) since Napoleon. His name came to be associated with the blunders and mismanagement of the British army in the Crimea, but Royle claims that this is an unfair verdict, and he points out that the British government was happy to use Raglan as a scapegoat. Losses at the battles of Alma and Inkermann led to sharp criticisms of Raglan in the British press, and a motion for an inquiry into the army's conditions, which brought defeat to the government in January 1855, was followed by the formation of a new ministry under Palmerston. The failure of British troops on the Redan in June 1855 deeply afflicted Raglan. He suffered from periodic bouts of dysentery, and he died in the Crimea of somewhat mysterious causes (dysentery or cholera – some even speculated that he was broken-hearted after the devastating losses of the attack on Sevastopol only ten days before his death) on 28 June 1855.

- [13.](#) *three wives*: Polygamy is permitted in the Qur'an: see Surah IV:4; IV. 129.
- [14.](#) *the Sardinians*: Sardinia entered the conflict on the Allied side in January 1855 with a pledge of 15,000 men. When Sardinian troops landed at Balaclava on 8 May 1855 they were placed under joint Allied command and immediately lost 1,300 men to

cholera. See also [Chapter XV](#), note 6. They were involved in the battle of the Tchernaya on 16 August 1855.

[15.](#) *the Greeks hated them... in every way*: Tensions between Greek and Turkish soldiers were probably the result of the Greek desire to regain the territories that had belonged to Greece in the Byzantine era. Modern Greece came into being in 1830, with certain provinces remaining Turkish even though their population was predominantly Greek. Russia supported the Greek cause, but the Allies occupied Greek territories in order to force the Greek government to declare their neutrality – which it did (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. [50](#)–54).

[16.](#) *Kamara*: To the east of Kadikoi on the Black River gorge; a station for Russian infantry.

CHAPTER XII

[1.](#) *as my kind friend Punch said: Punch, or the London Charivari*, the illustrated weekly comic periodical founded in 1841, began as a radical paper, but gradually became less political (it ceased publication in 1992).

[2.](#) *The cold without... to the pannikin*: From the fourth verse of ‘A Stir for Seacole’, published in *Punch* (6 December 1856), p. [221](#). See also [Chapter XIII](#) for quotations – with some inaccuracies – from verses 3, 5–8, 10, 11.

[3.](#) *wool*: In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, black people were frequently described as having ‘woolly’ hair as a way of

distinguishing them from white people, and it is troubling that Seacole adopts the racist metaphor to describe her cook Francis's hair.

4. *the souls of the slain Russian soldiers had entered the bodies of the rats... late enemies*: It is possible that Francis is a Jamaican who believes in the existence of 'duppies', harmful, invisible supernatural presences believed to be raised from the dead. See Richard Allsop (ed.), *Dictionary of Caribbean Usage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 207–8; Elisa Janine Sobo, *One Blood. The Jamaican Body* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 266–75.

5. *the tale of Whittington was by no means an improbable one*: Seacole is referring to the scarcity and value of cats. In the popular legend and pantomime story, Dick Whittington, a poor boy in search of riches, made his way to London where his cat was purchased for a vast sum by the King of Barbary, who was plagued by rats and mice.

6. *the Guards' camp... the Coldstreams*: The First Battalion of the Coldstream Guards went to the Crimea in February 1854, taking part in the battles of Alma, Inkermann and the fall of Sevastopol.

7. *Hydra*: mythical many-headed water snake living by Lake Lerna in the Peloponnese marshes in Argolis, reputed to have one hundred heads, or fifty, or nine. It was Hercules' second out of twelve labours to kill it, but as soon as he struck off one of its heads, another appeared in its place.

- [8.](#) *the eighth commandment*: ‘Thou shalt not steal’, (Exodus 20:15).
- [9.](#) *Chasseurs*: The Chasseurs d’Afrique, a cavalry brigade from Algeria.
- [10.](#) *Tarn O’Shanter’s Maggie did from the witches... even her tail*: In ‘Tarn O’Shanter’ (1791) by Robert Burns, Tam, riding home from an alehouse on his mare Meg, sees warlocks and witches dancing to a tune played by the Devil. When Tam shouts out to Maggie, a ‘winsome wench’, he is pursued by the witches, but Maggie catches him and pulls off Meg’s tail.
- [11.](#) *the French camp on the Tchernaya*: I.e., the Tchernaya or Chernaia River. Russell gives the following description: ‘The Tchernaya, issuing at the Tower of Karlovka from the narrow gorge in which it runs after leaving the Valley of Baidar, flows between a succession of hillocks, which formed the basis of the position of the Allied armies.’ The Turks were stationed on two hillocks on the extreme right, the Sardinians were situated to the left of the Turks, and the French were to the left of the Sardinians (*British Expedition*, p. 403).

CHAPTER XIII

- [1.](#) *the order of Victoria*: The Victoria Cross, the premier British award for conspicuous bravery in the face of an enemy, was instituted by Queen Victoria at the end of the war in 1856, for ‘some signal act of valour or devotion to [the recipient’s] country’ (quoted in Royle, *Crimea*, p. [159](#)). At this time the

crosses were made from the metal of guns captured at Sevastopol.

2. *the fatal 18th of June:* On 17 June 1855, French forces attacked the Malakhof, after which British soldiers assaulted the Great Redan. The Allies hoped that possession of these Russian bastions outside Sevastopol would lead to the fall of the city. This fourth bombardment, engineered by General Aimable Pélissier, commanding General of the French Army, was timed to coincide with the date of the Battle of Waterloo, but it was beset by confusion and resulted in defeat. The heaviest Allied losses were incurred during this assault: the French lost at least 3,600 men, of whom 1,600 were killed, while 1,500 British soldiers were placed out of action. The Russians lost 1,500 men (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 153–5; Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 392–7).

3. *John Hall, Inspector-General of Hospitals:* Hall commanded the army's medical staff on the Crimean front. Royle cites him as an example of the callousness of military medical personnel: for example, he points out that Hall was opposed to the use of anaesthetic because he believed that 'the smart of the knife [was] a powerful stimulant' that prevented soldiers from sinking into death (*Crimea*, p. 254).

4. *H.M.S. Wasp:* A steamer belonging to the Royal Navy.

5. *Wm. P—, Adjutant-General of the British Army in the Crimea:* Colonel William Pakenham. The *Illustrated London News* review

of *Wonderful Adventures* quotes Pakenham's testimony of Seacole's courageous exertions on the battlefield (25 July 1857).

6. *2nd vol. of Russell's Letters from the Seat of War*: No copy has been located.

CHAPTER XIV

1. *accounts which were given in the newspapers of the spring of 1855... the nameless horrors of that spring*: Russell's dispatches from 'the Camp before Sebastopol' were indeed filled with reports of the dire weather conditions in February 1855. There were gales, accompanied by rain, wind, hail and snow, which obliterated the battle lines. Russell reported that 11 February was '[a] day quite worthy of "General Février's" gratitude – bleak, raw, and stormy, the wind raging furiously between intervals of profound calm, the sky invisible in a murky sheet from which fall incessant showers of rain, sleet, or snow alternately – or altogether – and the landscape shut out of sight at a few yard's distance by the grey walls of drizzling clouds and vapour' (*The Times*, 27 February 1855). 'Février' is the French word for 'February', and Seacole uses the same phrase (see below). 'The cold pierces one's bones as he faces the gale', Russell reported on 20 February, 'and now and then he plunges above the knees into snow drifts, which are rapidly forming at every hillock and furrow in the ground'. There were numerous

cases of frostbite, while the dry winds brought typhus with them (*The Times*, 8 March).

2. *Rotten Row*: A famous equestrian track in Hyde Park, London.

Describing the air of unreality before the Battle of the Alma, Royle observes that ‘Raglan [was] at ease in a blue frock-coat looking for all the world as if he were about to take a morning ride in Rotten Row’ (*Crimea*, p. 219).

3. *senna... rhubarb*: Senna, or cassia Italica, is the dried leaves of the Cassia plant, used in medicine as a cathartic and emetic. Rhubarb was also used medicinally at this time. Seacole is saying that her tarts and puddings tasted medicinal because she was cooking and dispensing remedies at the same time.

4. *even Gunter, might have been proud of*: Gunter’s Tea Shop in London’s Berkeley Square, founded in 1757 by an Italian pastry cook who took James Gunter into partnership in 1777. By 1799 the teashop had become a fashionable Mayfair rendezvous where various sweetmeats were served. Gunter’s was also known for its multi-tiered, decorated wedding cakes. Perhaps Seacole is alluding to these.

5. *a great packet of tracts was sent to me from Plymouth*: Among the supplies sent to the men at the front, often through the organization of *The Times*’ Crimean War Fund, were religious tracts (Royle, *Crimea*, p.340). Seacole seems to have received and distributed tracts, which may have come from the Plymouth Brethren.

6. *drunkenness and excess were discouraged... intoxication, cards and dice were never to be seen within the precincts of the British Hotel:* Seacole's assertions do not square with Nightingale's hints of 'drunkenness and improper conduct' at the British Hotel. See [Appendix](#) and Introduction, pp. xxx-xxxii. Russell observes that 'Every canteen-keeper or store-keeper on whose premises a drunken officer was seen, no matter what the excuse might be, was fined 5 l for each, and the Provost-Marshal had more money than he knew what to do with from this source alone' (*British Expedition*, p. 561).

CHAPTER XV

1. *the cleverest man in the whole camp: i.e., The Times* correspondent W. H. Russell.
2. *Omar Pasha got something for his Turks to do:* A Croatian by birth (his real name was Michael Lotis), Pasha (1806–71) had deserted from the Austrian army, after which he held various posts in the Turkish army and administration. As commander-in-chief of the Turkish army he issued an ultimatum in October 1853 giving the Russians two weeks to evacuate the principalities they had occupied, and his army then went on the offensive. He arrived with part of his army in the Crimea in January 1855, but he did not like cooperating with the Allied commanders (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 86–7). After the fall of Sevastopol in September 1855 he was finally allowed to take a

contingent of his army to the Caucasus to relieve the fortress of Kars (not Baidar, as Seacole has it). Seacole seems to have witnessed the Turkish troops' departure, although if this is the case, her chronology is somewhat skewed.

[3.](#) *the second bombardment of Sebastopol in the month of April... attendance at Cathcart's Hill*: The Allies launched an all-out bombardment on Sevastopol on 9 April, but they halted their operations nine days later having achieved nothing strategically. Their losses were substantial, although in the circumstances they were not as severe as Seacole implies (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. [148](#)). English officers were buried on Cathcart's Hill, which afforded the best view of Sevastopol. Russell gives the following description in *British Expedition*: ‘“Cathcart's Hill”, a small rectangular mound in front of the Fourth Division camp, enclosed by the ruins of a wall just peering a foot above the grass, was a favourite resort for the officers belonging to the regiments behind the left attack. It commanded a view of the extreme French left towards Kamiesch, and of their approaches to the Flagstaff Battery and the crenellated wall’ [*British Expedition*, p. 305; see also p. 486).

[4.](#) *Miss Nightingale came to supervise the Balaclava hospitals... practical experience of Crimean fever*: Improved conditions at Scutari allowed Nightingale to tour hospitals at and around Balaclava in May 1855 with Mr Bracebridge and Alexis Soyer (see note 5 below). She nearly collapsed during a visit to a

hospital and spent two weeks in a critical condition. The progress of her illness was anxiously followed at the Crimean battlefield and in England, by, among others, Queen Victoria herself. Ignoring advice to convalesce in England or Switzerland, Nightingale insisted on returning to her work in Scutari on 6 June (John Shepherd, *A History of the British Medical Services in the Crimean War*, 2 vols (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), vol. 2, pp. 500–501; Russell, *British Expedition*, p. 348). The exact nature of Nightingale's malady is unclear: Shepherd speculates that it was some form of typhus, and a report in *The Times* in February described 'the fever' that was raging among British army and medical personnel (27 February 1855).

5. *the Duke of Newcastle... Mons. Alexis Soyer*: Henry Pelham Fiennes Pelham Clinton (1811–64), fifth Duke of Newcastle, took up a position in the war office when war broke out with Russia in 1854, and although he was concerned at the dreadful conditions suffered by wounded soldiers and worked hard to organize his department, he was criticized both in and out of Parliament (Royle, *Crimea*, p. 256). In February 1855, he resigned and went to the Crimea to witness the state of the army for himself. Seacole lists Newcastle among her supporters at the end of the text.

Alexis Benoît Soyer (1809–58), renowned French chef. He left France for London in 1830 because of the July revolution, and although he served in the kitchens of royalty and a private club,

he went to Dublin during the famine of 1847 to organize economy kitchens. In February 1855, he wrote to *The Times* offering to advise the Allies on their cooking practices, and then travelled to the Crimea, where he revised the dietary practices at the hospitals in Scutari and Constantinople. During two visits to Balaclava he worked with Florence Nightingale to reorganize the provisioning of the hospitals there, and he also cooked for the army's fourth division. Soyer met Seacole several times while he was in the Crimea, and he includes humorous portrayals of her in his Crimean memoir, *Soyer's Culinary Campaign Being Historical Reminiscences of the Late War With the Plain Art of Cookery for Military and Civil Institutions, the Army, Navy, Public, etc. etc.* (London: G. Routledge and Co., 1857), pp. 269, 334, 434, 482.

- [6.](#) *the first regiment of Sardinian Grenadiers... until the morning:* In May 1855, 9,000 Sardinian troops were deployed on the Gasfort Hill to assist in taking the Fedukhin Heights from the Russians in the final stages of the Siege of Sevastopol (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. [150](#), 157). Presumably the soldiers to whom Seacole gives shelter were on their way to their positions.
- [7.](#) *the third great bombardment of the ill-fated city:* The third bombardment of Sevastopol took place on 6 June 1855.
- [8.](#) *Others have described the horrors of those fatal trenches:* Seacole is referring to the numerous personal accounts of the Crimean campaign that were published in the immediate aftermath of the war. For a list of these, see Ulrich Keller, *The Ultimate Spectacle*.

A Visual History of the Crimean War (Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 2001), 'Eyewitness Accounts and Official Reports' pp. 277–80; and Royle, *Crimea*, 'Personal Accounts', pp. 530–32.

CHAPTER XVI

1. *Chapter XIV*: Seacole is mistaken. The testimonial is in fact quoted in [Chapter XIII](#) (p. 116).
2. *after Sebastopol was ours*: The Allies officially took possession of Sevastopol on 12 September 1855.
3. *Bedlam*: Synonymous with 'a lunatic asylum' or 'madhouse', from the Bethlehem hospital in London; also used to signify a place of hubbub and confusion.
4. *Sir Henry Barnard's division*: Sir Henry William Barnard (1799–1857) served on the staff of Sir John Keane in Jamaica, where Seacole may have met him. When he landed in the Crimea in 1854, he was a newly-made general in command of a brigade of the 3rd (Sir Richard England's division of the army, to which Seacole is alluding here). Barnard became Simpson's chief of staff after Raglan's death, and after the fall of Sevastopol he commanded the 2nd Division in the Crimea. Rokeby mentions Barnard in his letter to *The Times* of 25 November 1856, where he says that he has approached Barnard for a testimonial for Seacole to assist her in her bankruptcy.

- [5.](#) *Woronzoff Road*: Named after the Russian Prince Woronzoff, this was a metalled road leading from Sevastopol through Inkermann. The Russians were in possession of the Woronzoff Road after the Battle of Balaclava in October 1854, making it more difficult for the Allies to get supplies to their camps (Paul Kerr et al., *The Crimean War* (London: Boxtree, 1997), pp. [69](#), 104; Russell, *British Expedition*, p. 175).
- [6.](#) *General Eyre's division... suffered severely*: Sir William Eyre (1805–59) commanded the second brigade of the 3rd division at the beginning of the Crimean invasion, was promoted major-general in December 1854, and given command of a force in June 1855.
- [7.](#) *both the leaders, who fell so gloriously before the Redan... Col. Y —... Sir John C—*: Colonel Lacy Yea of the Light Division, and General Sir John Campbell of the 4th Division. Campbell was among the first to be killed on 18 June (see [Chapter X](#), note 5; and note 9 below): he was gunned down as he left the trenches, in the act of cheering his men. *The Times* dispatch of 4 July 1855 describes the death of ‘poor Colonel Yea’: realizing that the bugler was missing, ‘the gallant old soldier, by voice and gesture, tried to form and compose his men... and as he rushed along the troubled mass of troops... and endeavoured to get them into order for a rush at the batteries... a charge of the deadly missile passed, and the noble soldier fell in advance of his men, struck at

once in head and stomach by grape shot' (4 July 1855). See also Russell, *British Expedition*, pp. 367–8.

8. *Lady C—*: Helen Margaret Campbell.

9. *a little Scotchman*: Presumably Sir John Campbell's eldest son, Archibald Ava, who became third baronet.

10. *as I read in the Times a few weeks later – displayed a courage amounting to rashness, and... rushed on to a certain death*: Seacole is quoting from *The Times* report published on 4 July 1855, where Campbell's death is described as follows: 'Poor Sir John Campbell seems to have displayed a courage amounting to rashness. He sent away Captain Hume and Captain Snodgrass, just before he rushed out of the trench, as if averse to bring them into the danger he meditated, and fell in the act of cheering on his men.'

11. *as somebody has said, that misfortunes never come singly*: Seacole may be thinking of Claudius' statement in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, 'When sorrows come they come not single spies,/ But in battalions' (IV. 5. 79–80).

12. *General E—... terrible plague*: Unidentified: Seacole is not referring to General Eyre.

13. *Lord W—*: Possibly Lord Ward, listed at the end of the text.

14. *in sorrow, not in anger*: Horatio describes the ghost of Hamlet's father as having '[a] countenance more in sorrow than in anger' [*Hamlet*, I.2.232).

- [15.](#) *the Caradoc... its sad burden*: The steam frigate which carried the Allied Commanders to the Crimea in September 1854. Raglan's embalmed body was taken with full military honours to the *Caradoc* on 3 July, and transported from the Crimea to his family home. See Royle, *Crimea*, pp. [143](#), 400.
- [16.](#) *Nothing of consequence was done in the front for weeks, possibly because Mr Russell was taking holiday, and would not return until August*: Russell spent July at Therapia with his wife, but he fell ill from Crimean fever and did not return to the front until the beginning of August (*British Expedition*, p. 382). The lull at the front probably had more to do with Raglan's unexpected death. He was succeeded in the command of the British army by Major-General Sir James Simpson, but by the middle of July, Simpson asked to be relieved. General Sir William Codrington replaced him in October 1855, and Simpson was later made a scapegoat for the British army's failure on the Redan. Royle notes that 'the summer of 1855 was marked in the British camp by inactivity, growing doubts and a paralysis of thought' (pp. 401–4; Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. 16, 77, 193).
- [17.](#) *the cliffs at Karanyi... Black Sea beneath*: Or Karani, a town to the west of Balaclava, on the Black Sea.
- [18.](#) *the Patagonians... only to be found in one part of the world*: In the nineteenth century, Patagonia was the name for the southernmost area of South America. It now refers to a region in

southern Argentina. It is not clear why Seacole thinks that Patagonians do not travel out of Patagonia.

19. *a lieutenant serving in the Royal Naval Brigade, who was a close relative of the Queen:* Prince Victor Ferdinand Franz Eugen Gustaf Adolf Constantin Friedrich of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, later known as Count Gleichen (1833–91). His mother was Queen Victoria's half-sister, and it was through Victoria's interest that he entered the British navy as a midshipman in 1848. He was appointed to a warship off Sevastopol, and subsequently transferred to a naval brigade to do duty in the trenches. He was present at the Battle of the Tchernaya and distinguished for his bravery under fire. After his retirement from the navy, Count Gleichen pursued an artistic career. It is probable that Seacole met Gleichen for the first time in the Crimea, and he sculpted her in 1871 (see Introduction, p. xvii). Presumably, Seacole sat for Gleichen at St James' Palace, and it is here that she may have made her connections with the Royal family (see Introduction, p. xxxix). He was one of her three trustees.

20. *a great battle soon to be fought by the reinforcements which were known to have joined the Russian army:* The Russians were preparing for the Battle of the Tchernaya, which took place on 16 August 1855 when they attacked Allied lines on two fronts. It was a terrible defeat for them (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. 159; Royle, *Crimea*, pp. 407–9).

21. *dark-plumed Sardinians*: Russell describes the ‘melo-dramatic head-dress’ worn by Sardinian troops – ‘a bandit-looking hat, with a large plume of black cock’s feathers in the side’ (*British Expedition*, p. 330).

22. *spoiling the Egyptians... not so unmentionable in those days as they have since become*: ‘Every woman shall borrow of her neighbour, and of her that sojourneth in her house, jewels and silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and ye shall put them upon your sons, and upon your daughters; and ye shall spoil [plunder] the Egyptians’ (Exodus 3:22). ‘Raiment’ means clothing, but Seacole implies that, unlike the allied soldiers on the battlefields of the Crimea, the Israelites spared the Egyptians their underclothes.

23. *Marshal (Pelissier)*: General Aimable Pélissier (1794–1864) went to the Crimea as commander of the 1st Corps where he eventually became commander-in-chief of the French Army. He was created marshal and duke for his achievement in taking the Malakhof from the Russians on 8 September 1855.

CHAPTER XVII

1. *three weeks following the battle of the Tchernaya... the world has ever seen*: On 17 August 1855 the Allies launched a bombardment which continued unabated for ten days. It was decided to renew the bombardment on 5 September and to launch the final assault on the Malakhof and the Great Redan on 8 September.

2. *the last great effort which it was supposed the Russians would make to drive us into the sea: I.e., the Black Sea.* This does indeed seem to have been a rumour.
3. *The same little bird which had let me into so many secrets... what this day was pregnant with:* Seacole may have obtained her ‘insider’ information from the officers who frequented the British Hotel.
4. *the French tumble... like a human flood:* After a preliminary bombardment, the French Zouaves leaped out of their trenches towards the Malakhof, taking Russian soldiers by surprise. Within ten minutes, Malakhof tower had fallen to the French, but elsewhere French and Sardinian soldiers met with determined opposition as the Russians reorganized themselves.
5. *the fearful assault of the Redan was going on, and failing:* The British assault did indeed end in confusion and failure. A force of 11,000 men attacked the Great Redan, which was defended by 7,500 Russians, but the British were repulsed three times.
6. *his testimony, borne so generously only the other day:* Seacole quotes from Russell’s letter to *The Times* published on 11 April 1857. The date, and Seacole’s statement that Russell gave his ‘testimony... only the other day’, indicate that Seacole was writing *Wonderful Adventures* in the spring of 1857, probably in March.
7. *the burning city, Sebastopol... to its victors:* On 9 September 1855, Sevastopol was burning on all sides and the Allies could

not take it for fear of explosives. It was only on 12 September that they occupied its ruins.

8. *none but dead and dying Russians... the once famous and beautiful mistress-city of the Euxine:* The Russians retreated from the south side of Sevastopol on the evening of 8 September. Euxine, meaning ‘the hospitable sea’, is the euphemistic Greek name for the stormy Black Sea. Russell uses a similar phrase in *British Expedition*, where he describes Sevastopol as ‘that fine and stately mistress of the Euxine’ (*British Expedition*, p. 469).

9. *the Highlanders:* The Highland Division, commanded by Sir Colin Campbell. During the assault on the Great Redan, the Highlanders were held in reserve and did not participate in the attack.

10. *General Garrett’s quarters:* Possibly Sir Robert Garrett, who commanded a brigade of the 4th Division in the Crimea from November 1854 to November 1855, when he succeeded to the command of the 4th Division.

11. *the quarter of the town held by the French:* The French held the Korabelnaya suburb and the south side of Sevastopol.

12. *some Frenchwomen opened houses:* Seacole appears to mean hotels, rather than disreputable ‘houses’.

CHAPTER XVIII

1. *the electric wires flashed many a message:* A British firm opened a telegraph line from Balaclava to Varna in April 1855, which

allowed direct communication between the battlefield, London and Paris. As Royle points out, it prevented Allied leaders from hiding behind the fog and confusion of war (*Crimea*, pp. 256, 350; Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. 148).

2. *the Duc de Rouchefoucault... Viscount Talon*: Rouchefoucault is unidentified. Viscount Talon was one of the Chasseurs d'Afrique.

3. *the secrets of the French commissariat*: Seacole is implying that the French commissariat was unable to provide its men with sufficient food.

4. *the system of secrecy... the unheard-of sufferings of the French*: The French army was becoming immobilized by diseases such as scurvy and typhoid. French losses in the war amounted to 95,000 dead of which only 20,000 died in action or from wounds received in action; the rest died from sickness, mainly cholera and typhus. Seacole may have been attempting to dampen French triumphalism in the wake of the success on the Great Redan. French and British soldiers had the opportunity to fraternize while peace negotiations were taking place, but relations between them quickly deteriorated into their former national antagonisms (Royle, *Crimea*, p. 473).

5. *not until a year later that Punch thought of using a clothes-basket*: Although *Punch's* 'A Stir for Seacole' alludes to the post-war jollities Seacole describes, no clothes-baskets are mentioned in any of the articles concerning her.

6. *My experience of Crimean races are perfect, for I was present... at all the more important meetings:* Russell describes the races in his *Times* dispatch: 'the only representative of the fair sex was Mrs Seacole, who presided over a sorely invested tent full of creature comforts' (18 December 1855).
7. *the Monastery of St George:* Russell describes finding himself at the Monastery of St George, 'on the very edge of the tremendous precipices which overhang the sea near Cape Fiolente'. It was a French outpost, situated near Sevastopol (*British Expedition*, p.274).
8. *Epsom or Hampton Court:* Epsom, Surrey, has horse races in May or June. Hampton Court is a Royal Residence situated by the Thames River near London. Queen Victoria declared it open to the public in 1851.
9. *Ascot:* Royal Ascot is a race meeting held in June at Ascot Heath in Berkshire, usually attended by members of the Royal family.
10. *some soldiers blackened their faces, and came out as Ethiopian serenaders admirably:* Russell writes in *The Times*: 'the domestic character of the scene was preserved by a band of Ethiopian serenaders, furnished by amateurs from the Guards, who favoured us with abundance of the peculiar vocal and instrumental music in vogue among that interesting race' (18 December 1855). It would appear that Ethiopians were among the black entertainers popular in England at this time, although

Peter Fryer claims that the first Ethiopian was brought to Britain in 1879 (*Staying Power*, p. 593, note 30). Black and white minstrel shows first appeared on the English stage in the 1830s, shaping popular conceptions of 'the Negro' (see Douglas Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians. English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-nineteenth century* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1978), pp. 85–90).

11. *A few weeks before Christmas, happened that fearful explosion... which destroyed so many lives:* Seacole is probably referring to the explosion that took place in the French artillery 'Park of the Mill' outside Sevastopol, where, according to Marshal Pélissier, an explosion occurred on 19 November 1855, causing 30 deaths and considerable damage in the French camp (*The Times*, 20 November 1855). Ten days later General Codrington described the damage done to the neighbouring English ammunition park by the explosion of 100,000 pounds of gunpowder. He lists 21 dead, killed, 116 wounded, and 7 missing (*The Times*, 30 November 1855).

12. *that jargon... the consequences of what occurred at the Tower of Babel, some time ago:* Seacole is referring to a 'pidgin' or creole language with which the different nationalities in the Crimea communicated with each other. In Genesis, 'the whole earth was of one language' until the people decided to build a tower that would reach up to heaven. 'Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all

the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth' (Genesis II. I, 9).

13. *'Malakhoff bono – Redan no bono'*: 'Bono', meaning 'good', had become something of a catchword in the Crimea (see [Chapter X](#), note 1). Cf. 'Waterloo was bono' (below), where an English soldier reminds his French counterpart of the Battle of Waterloo, 18 June 1815, when Napoleon was defeated by the Duke of Wellington's mixed allied force.

14. *we see your name frequently in the newspapers*: It is not clear whether this refers to Jamaican or English newspapers.

CHAPTER XIX

1. *armistice*: Peace negotiations opened in Paris on 25 February 1856 and a formal armistice was concluded on the Tchernaya on 14 March. The Treaty of Paris, whereby all Russian-occupied territory was restored to Turkey, was signed on 30 March (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, p. [203](#); Erik Goldstein, *Wars and Peace Treaties, 1816–1991* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p.2.8).

2. *various excursions into the interior, visiting Simpheropol and Baktchiserai*: After the fall of Sevastopol, Napoleon III (1808–73) planned to attack Simpheropal, or Simferopal, a Russian supply base and hospital location in the centre of the Crimea, but Pélissier was not keen on the idea, and in the end there was no assault (Baumgart, *Crimean War*, pp. [194](#), 196; Royle, *Crimea*, p.

440). Baktchiserai, or Bakhchisaray, was located in the Crimean interior, also the site of a Russian hospital.

- [3.](#) *to beat up a Russian merchant*: Not a mean physical beating ('to beat up' was not used in this way until 1907); probably Seacole means that she is going to obtain money that was owed to her.
- [4.](#) *The Tartar's*: Tartars were native inhabitants of Central Asia, extending east from the Caspian Sea, formerly known as Independent and Chinese Tartary. The term was used in the West to apply to a group including Mongols, Tartars and Turks, which invaded much of Asia and Eastern Europe under the leadership of Jenghiz Khan (1202–27).
- [5.](#) *the Iron House*: I.e., the British Hotel.
- [6.](#) *the 47th*: The 47th Regiment of Foot, part of the 2nd Division under Sir De Lacy Evans. See [Chapter VIII](#), note 2. The regiment sustained huge losses at the Battle of Alma in September 1854 (Russell, *British Expedition*, pp. [111](#), 154).
- [7.](#) *Some three weeks before the Crimea was finally evacuated*: The Allies began leaving the Crimea at the end of April 1856, but it was not until July that all the troops left the area.

CONCLUSION

- [1.](#) *at Aldershott to retrieve our fallen fortunes*: Aldershot, Surrey. *The Times* of 5 July 1856 reported that 'Mrs Seacole, the celebrated proprietress of the provision store in the Crimea, intends setting up a similar establishment at Aldershott. Her

fame in this particular department of business is so well-known among all military men that success in her new speculation is almost certain.' *The Times's* optimism was misplaced: see [Chapter VIII](#), note 17.

- [2.](#) *obliged to capitulate on very honourable conditions*: Both Seacole and Day were granted first-class certificates of conformity. *The Times* reported the bankruptcy proceedings on 7 November 1856, and twice in January 1857 (when Seacole was granted her certificate). On each occasion, Seacole caused a stir: first by demanding a larger weekly allowance; then by asking for a ticket of leave (i.e., the certificate that would allow her to continue with her business); and finally by claiming that as a 'first class woman' she deserved a first-class certificate.
- [3.](#) *the very newspaper offices... Punch office in Fleet Street*: The newspaper offices Seacole refers to were presumably on Fleet Street; although many of the newspaper offices have now moved, it is still cited as the headquarters of London journalism and the newspaper world. With 'Printing-house Yard', Seacole is referring to Printing House Square, synonymous with *The Times* newspaper, which was produced there from its inception until 1974.
- [4.](#) *the committee recently organized to aid me*: The Seacole Fund, instituted by Major Keane in *The Times* (see note 13 below).
- [5.](#) *H.S.H. Prince Edward of Saxe Weimar, C.B.*: (1823–1902) Queen Victoria's cousin. Major of the 3rd Battalion, Grenadier Guards,

with which he served in the Crimean War. Presumably, this is where Seacole met him.

6. *the Duke of Wellington*: Arthur Richard Wellesley, second duke of Wellington (1807–84). It is likely that Seacole met him in the Crimea.
7. *General Sir John Burgoyne, K.C.B.*: (1782–1871) After the outbreak of the Crimean War, he joined the British Army at Varna as an official advisor. Influential in the planning of the siege of Sevastopol, he was widely blamed for the sufferings of Allied soldiers in the winter of 1854–5, and was recalled by the Cabinet in 1855 after numerous disagreements with the French. His popularity revived after the war ended.
8. *Major-General Sir Richard Airey, K.C.B.*: Airey (1803–81) was Quartermaster General in the Crimea. He wrote down Lord Raglan's famous order that the Light Cavalry should advance to the front in order to prevent Russian troops from carrying away guns, precipitating the 'Charge of the Light Brigade' on 25 October 1854. Once he returned to England he was made a scapegoat by the British public for the condition of the British troops before Sevastopol, and in 1856 he was singled out for criticism in the Report of the Commission of Inquiry, but he exonerated himself in a military inquiry.
9. *Rear-Admiral Sir Stephen Lushington, K.C.B.*: At the beginning of the siege of Sevastopol, Lushington (1803–77) was landed in command of the naval brigade and his name was associated with

its success. Seacole may have met him when he was serving in the Caribbean (before 1840).

- [10.](#) *Colonel M'Murdo, C.B.*: Sir William Montagu Scott M'Murdo (1819–94). In 1855 he was appointed director-general of the new Land Transport Corps, and he was sent to the Crimea to reorganize the transport service, which he did successfully.
- [11.](#) *Colonel Chapman, C.B.*: Probably Sir Frederick Edward Chapman (1815–93). He was instrumental at the siege of Sevastopol and subsequently became executive engineer for the whole siege operation. He distinguished himself in the attack on the Redan in June 1855.
- [12.](#) *Lieutenant-Colonel Ridley, C.B.*: Unidentified.
- [13.](#) *Major the Hon. F. Keane*: Wrote to *The Times* to ask that Seacole be supported financially after her bankruptcy: see [Appendix](#). He was one of the three trustees of her will, along with Rokeby and Gleichen.
- [14.](#) *W. T. Doyne, Esq.*: Superintendent-in-chief of the Army Works Corps. He arrived at Balaclava with 450 men in August 1855 and in October 1855 he supervised the preparations for another winter before Sevastopol (Russell, *British Expedition*, pp. [40](#), 50).

Glossary

ague Fever, with hot shivering phases. The word is often used synonymously for malaria, a parasitic disease carried by mosquitoes.

alcalde Magistrate of a town, a sheriff or justice, in Spain and Portugal.

araba Carriage used for conveying goods.

arrow-root Plant or herb with fleshy nutritious tuberous roots, native to some Caribbean islands, and cultivated in others.

bastinadoed Punished or tortured by caning on the soles of the feet; beaten with a stick.

to beard To defy openly.

bo'swain Ship's officer in charge of the sails, rigging, etc. It is his duty to summon the men to work with a whistle.

caboose Cook-room or kitchen on a small ship.

caciques Light rowing boats used on the Bosphorus.

Cantiniere Feminine form of the French word for canteen-keeper.

caulker Person who stops up the seams of a ship.

C.E. Civil Engineer.

‘Chips’ Nickname for a carpenter, especially on a ship.

cicerones Guides.

Col Depression in a mountain chain forming a pass between two peaks or ridges.

crazy hut Hut made of irregular pieces fitted together.

dam Mother, usually of cattle, horses, etc.

day-book Book in which commercial transactions, sales, purchases, etc., of the day are entered.

dropsy Disease in which an abnormal accumulation of fluid collects in the body’s cavities or tissues.

embonpoint Complimentary term meaning plumpness, a well-nourished physical appearance. From ‘en bon point’ (French).

Esquimaux Eskimo, i.e., Inuits.

faggots Bundles of sticks, twigs, or small branches of trees bound together.

fandangoes Lively dance in time, very popular in Spain and Spanish America; or a tune to which the fandango is danced.

firebrand Piece of wood kindled at a fire.

firkin Small cask.

fougasses Small explosive mines, placed underground and charged with powder or loaded shells. Often loaded with stones.

French leave Departure or action taken without prior permission or notice.

Giaours Term of reproach applied by the Turks to non-Muslims (infidels), especially Christians.

green-room Room in a theatre where performers wait when not on stage. Originally painted green to relieve the eyes from the glare of the stage.

grog Slang for spirits, originally rum diluted with water.

gunwales Upper edge of a ship's side.

horse-pistol Large pistol carried at the pommel of the saddle by a rider.

jaundice Yellow discoloration of the skin caused by the deposition of bile pigment in the deeper layers; a symptom of liver and biliary disorders.

K.C.B. Knight Commander of the Bath.

kraal Southern or Central African village of huts surrounded by a fence, or an enclosure for cattle or sheep.

levée Reception of visitors on rising from bed; a morning assembly held by a person of distinction.

long-shore craft Vessel with many rowers.

men-of-war's boats Vessels equipped for warfare, armed ships belonging to the recognized navy of a country.

mercury Mercurial compounds were formerly used as purgatives and antiparasitic agents.

milk-tree Generic term for any tree yielding a wholesome milky juice, especially the cow-tree.

mock turtle Dish consisting of calf's head dressed with sauces and condiments so as to resemble turtle.

muriatic acid Hydrochloric acid.

Order of the Bath Order of knighthood, so named because of the bath preceding the knight's installation.

Pacha Or Pasha, high-ranking Turkish officer such as a military commander or governor of a province.

packthread Stout thread or twine used for sewing or tying up packs or bundles.

padrone Patron or master (Italian), which may be used in many contexts. Used by Seacole to refer to the master of a trading-vessel in the Mediterranean.

pannikins Small metal drinking vessels.

pecary Also peccary, a gregarious quadruped related to the swine, of South and Central America.

prog Slang for food, originating from a sixteenth-century verb, to forage around for anything, especially food.

Provost marshal Head of military police in a camp or on active service, with a body of soldiers serving under him.

quid Piece of something (usually tobacco), held in the mouth and chewed.

raki Aromatic liquor made from grain-spirit, or from grape-juice, drunk in Greece and Turkey.

reach Continuous extent, especially the part of a river between two bends that can be perceived at one viewing, or part of a canal between two locks.

real Small silver coin formerly used in Spain and Spanish-speaking countries.

returns Official reports supplying information as to the numbers, amounts, statistics, etc.

R.S.M. Regimental Sergeant Major.

saloon Large cabin in a passenger-boat for the common use of passengers in general or for those paying first-class fares.

sangaree: Cold drink made of diluted, spiced wine.

Sappers and Miners The non-commissioned officers and privates of the Engineers were formerly called the (Royal) Sappers and Miners, but in 1859 they became the Royal Engineers (the privates are still unofficially called sappers). Sappers are soldiers employed in working at saps (i.e., trenches), the building and repairing of fortifications, the execution of fieldworks, and the like, while a miner's special duty is the laying of mines.

simples and essences Medicines or medicaments composed of a single ingredient, especially of a herb or plant. An 'essence' is a concentrated extract obtained by distillation or otherwise from a plant, to be eaten or inhaled.

Stamboul Istanbul.

supercargo Officer on board a merchant ship who superintends the cargo and the commercial transactions of the voyage.

swell Fashionably or stylishly dressed person; hence, a person of good social position, a highly distinguished person.

table d'hôte Meal at a fixed price and a fixed time for guests at a hotel or eating-house (French).

throwing his pocket-handkerchief at Madame Seacole, widow
i.e., courting her.

touters One who touts or canvasses for customers or clients; a thief's scout.

Turkish bread (ekmek) Also means food, livelihood or a profession.

waesome woesome, i.e., woeful (Scottish vernacular).

wide-awake Jocular term for a soft felt or straw hat with a broad brim and low crown.

* Mrs Seacole very likely refers to Macbeth. But it was the witches he abused. -ED.²

* Subsequently I saw much of Miss Nightingale, at Balaclava.⁸



Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.



z-library.sk

z-lib.gs

z-lib.fm

go-to-library.sk



[Official Telegram channel](#)



[Z-Access](#)



<https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library>