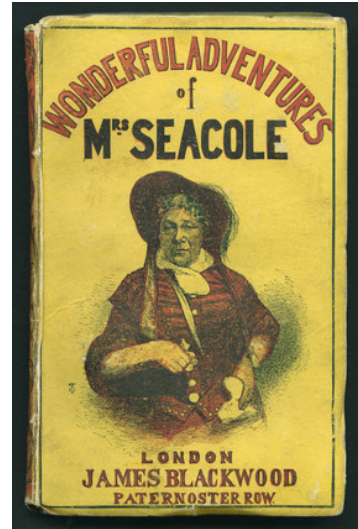


WONDERFUL
ADVENTURES OF MRS. SEACOLE
IN MANY LANDS.

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.



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, 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" 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. RUSSELL.

CHAPTER I.

My Birth and Parentage – Early Tastes and Travels – Marriage, and Widowhood 1

CHAPTER XIII.

My Work in the Crimea

134

ADVENTURES OF MRS. SEACOLE

IN MANY LANDS.

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. My father was a soldier, of an old Scotch family; 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; 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. 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 boardinghouse in Kingston, and was, like very many of the Creole women, an admirable doctress; 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 set 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.

3

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.

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. 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 dusker 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 Hayti 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, until I couldn't find courage to say "no" to a certain arrangement timidly proposed by Mr. Seacole, but married him, and took him down to Black River, 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 home 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 loss 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.

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 necessaries 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 Victoria 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, 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,

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 diarrhoea 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 diarrhoea 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 Madam 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.

"WM. 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 hem, 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 Hospitals."

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,' 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 Crimea."

"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," 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 necessaries 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,

