

Florence Nightingale

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Introduction

Florence Nightingale was a Victorian-era English woman who greatly improved the care of sick and dying soldiers during the Crimean war. She was the lady carrying a lamp as she made her way through the dark and damp halls of a make-shift hospital where hundreds of men lay inches apart in unspeakable conditions. She was the heroine of the Crimean war, returning to England and avoiding every attempt at fame as she quietly withdrew and secluded herself from mainstream society. Her efforts to remain anonymous were so well orchestrated that, when she died at the age of 90, many were surprised to know that she was still alive, thinking she had died decades earlier.

Florence Nightingale was memorialized and archived onto the pages of many children's books. Her absence from society blocked from public view the many accomplishments she achieved during her lifetime, and left in its place the child's story book nurse, whose life reads like a chapter from a book of saints.

There is an irony about the story of the reclusive Lady with the Lamp, one that surfaced after her death. Among her possessions were found thousands of letters she had written and some that had been written to her, as well as many notes and diary entries, all of which helped to remove much of the shadow that had been cast over the life of England's famous daughter. The breadth and detail of the documentation told the story of a woman whose

accomplishments were far greater than those achieved during the war with Russia. They constructed an in-depth look at a complex character who was driven by forces that she herself claimed originated from God. Nightingale claimed that God had spoken to her, first at the age of 17 and later on two occasions, making clearer with each communication how she was to spend her life in the service of others. Whether these divine communications were actual or invented, and intended as a way to build a case for living a life that contradicted every norm of upper class Victorian society, they provided the force for change that was nurtured and supported by key figures in Nightingale's life, a maiden aunt who provided spiritual guidance, close friends and confidants who understood her, and religious sisters who befriended her and encouraged her spiritual growth.

Nightingale Story - Commissioned and Non Commissioned

After her death, Sir Edward Cook was commissioned to write the biography of Florence Nightingale. It remains one of the most comprehensive works on the subject of Nightingale but it represents an unfolding of only part of the mystique of Florence Nightingale. Cook did not have carte blanche access to all the information about Nightingale and he was cautious to exercise discretion when retelling some parts of the story, especially those related to Florence's vitriolic commentary that sometimes surfaced in her letters and notes. Direction from the Nightingale family led Cook to convey a positive image of the Nightingale Training School, even though there were problems, especially in its early development.

The Cook biography was followed by much more storytelling and with each biography, there was uncovered something new from Nightingale's life, sometimes accurate and

sometimes exaggerated and even fabricated. And so, Florence Nightingale was the Lady with the Lamp whose life story can read like a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde novella, depending on the storyteller.

Florence Nightingale's public life began with articles in the daily Times Newspaper giving accounts of her merciful mission to care for the soldiers during the Crimean war, and continued to grow through the many volumes that, to this day, continue to be written more than 100 years after her death. The commentary on the life of Nightingale is broad and varied from the saintly-like mercenary to the tyrannical commander who bullied her way to the top with little regard for others. The first attacks on her character were recorded in 1913, in the book titled Eminent Victorians by Lytton Strachey, a member of the British Bloomsbury literary group. Strachey was among the first to introduce a form of biographical storytelling, with a caricature-like quality, that was a combination of fact and invention. From Strachey's pen, Nightingale's working relationships with powerful and influential men were represented for the great accomplishments that resulted, but the reader could also be left wondering, through innuendo, if something more occurred between Nightingale and these men. In spite of Strachey's speculations, and those of others, there exists no substantive proof that Nightingale had other than friendships or working relationships with men or women.

Early Years and Education

Florence Nightingale was born during her parents three year honeymoon in Italy. Named after the city of her birth, she was the second child of William and Frances Nightingale, a handsome couple who had money, more than anything else in common. Frances was

beautiful, gracious and well prepared for the life of an upper class, successful Victorian wife and mother. Her goal was to provide an elegant country home that met the highest standards for entertaining her large family and the upper classes in society, and to prepare her two daughters for marriages that would provide a life equal to that which they were accustomed, a life in which they did little and much was done for them.

William Edward Nightingale, more often referred to as W.E.N., was tall, handsome, highly educated and, according to Florence, unambitious. It was a combination of tradition and law that added to the wealth of William Nightingale as he acquired his great uncle's property by default. Peter Nightingale never married and therefore had no direct male heir.

In accordance with the traditions of the upper class family in Victorian England, Florence and her sister Parthenope received much of their care, nurturing and discipline from a governess. Miss Christie was one of many employees retained by the Nightingales to manage a large household, its inhabitants, the grounds and gardens. Miss Christie was among the first to understand Florence as being different, self-centered, and sometimes retreating into an imaginary world of her own making. Miss Christie married and died during childbirth shortly thereafter. O'Malley, one of the early Nightingale biographers, reported that Florence and her sister wore mourning clothes in the period following Miss Christie's death, which may have been unusual even for children in Victorian England.

Unable to find a teacher who met the standards of the Nightingale's, especially those of WEN, resulted in the girls being home-schooled by their father. There is widespread

agreement that the education they received was substantially of a better quality and greater depth than was common for children with parents of similar means. Their schooling was at least equal to that of the education given to upper class boys and that was unusual, since it was believed that girls did not require as extensive an education. The girls received instruction in modern and classic languages, history, geography, mathematics, literature, grammar, writing and music. Florence was the better student of the two sisters, while Parthenope, often called Parthe, was more drawn to the arts and to those activities which were more suitable to little girls in upper class society.

As a child, Florence was prone to unexplained medical problems. She wore metal plates in her shoes during part of her childhood and she has what appears to be a partial supportive glove on her right hand in a water color painted by W. White around 1836.

When Florence was six years old, a serious illness resulted in her being confined to her bed for an extended period of time. As an adult reflecting back on that confinement, she described that time as one of the happiest of her life. Was Nightingale's isolation and confinement in later life a burden, and; if not, to what extent was it self-imposed? This and many questions related to her isolation have been the subject of many of her biographers. Some have relegated the isolation to suffering in a way that merits sainthood, while others saw it as a form of control and manipulation, especially because it was effective to keep a safe distance between Florence and her mother and sister. And, there are those who regarded the isolation as the normal consequence of a chronic illness that she contracted while in the Crimea.

Florence Nightingale's education most likely contributed greatly to her ability to communicate and work with men as equals. The daily and ongoing interactions between Florence and her father, in addition to expanding her knowledge and understanding of the world, provided the know-how and confidence to move in circles that were unfamiliar to most Victorian women. She was exposed to politics by her father and later she further developed interests that continued, an example being her following the struggle of the Italians in their pursuit of liberty. Later in life, she actually had a visit from Garibaldi, one of many political officials, who requested to meet with her.

Florence admired her father's intelligence but also believed he was a man without a purpose, one who lacked incentive and ambition. In her long career of working towards the improvement of sanitary conditions in England and later India, Florence's ambition and drive would prove to be the antithesis of that of her father's sedentary existence.

Extended Family

In Victorian England, the extended family was a major focal point of entertainment. Visits from relatives were long, sometimes lasting months, which afforded Florence an opportunity to form close relationships with some of her cousins, one in particular named Hillary, as well as with her aunt Mai, who was WEN's sister, married to Florence's mother's brother Sam Smith. Florence had a great admiration for another of her cousins Marianne, who she believed was perfect in every way. Florence's refusal to marry Marianne's brother caused a rift between Florence and Marianne, who believed that Florence had misled her brother into thinking she was interested in marriage.

Florence was close to two of her aunts with one of the two becoming her confidant and spiritual advisor. Her aunt Mai would do much to support and assist Florence during her life as did other relatives but to a lesser degree.

Florence was often called upon to care for family members when they were ill. She did so willingly and seemed to derive enjoyment from being the care taker. When her grandmother became seriously ill, Florence remained with her until her death. During that time, Florence wrote to her cousin Hillary expressing her comfort in dealing with death.

Called by God

At age 17, Florence claimed to have heard the voice of God calling her, although it was not clear to what purpose. This began a period of self-questioning, and in particular, generated doubt about her lavish lifestyle and that of the rich in general, especially in contrast to the poor. The closer Florence came to understanding her purpose to fulfill God's wishes in the service of others, the more she rejected her life of luxury. Once her ideas of nursing the sick were clear and openly expressed, she met with great resistance from her family and suffered much internal conflict. This suffering was sometimes of crises proportions vacillating from periods of self-hatred to outbursts of rage that caused an escalation of tension between Florence and her family, especially her mother and sister. There were attempts to dissuade her with a long continental trip through Europe with her parents and sister, as well as one through Egypt, Greece and Rome, with the Bracebridges, who were close family friends. The continental trip did provide some level of distraction but the later trip with the Bracebridges was not as successful. At the time, her diary entries showed a definite movement away from

life as she knew it for one in the service of God. Florence's personal notes reflect the admonition of pretentiousness and pride, or of drawing attention to one's own good deeds or to oneself. The entries are filled with a desire to serve God, to be one with God. The emotion conveyed in these diary entries is very intense and reflects her extreme bewilderment with her life at the time.

Although WEN was initially opposed to his daughter's interests, he later came around to understand them but; he never openly sided with Florence because doing so would have created tensions between he and his wife and older daughter, and; it was not within his nature to do so. Instead, Nightingale's father eventually provided her with monetary support, 500 pounds a year, which to a great extent, removed the shackles of financial dependency characteristic of unmarried Victorian women.

There was no real support for a Victorian woman of the upper class to resist the desires and will of the family. The role of the woman, very much supported by society, was clearly and narrowly defined within the confines of marriage, children and the home. Florence's mother and sister were a great force of resistance to her ideas of nursing the sick. Nursing was relegated to women with little means who had loose reputations and a tendency for drink. The dreadful and ghastly characterization of the nurse began with Dicken's Sairey Gamp, a literary character who was depicted as an old, feeble woman, often drunk and with little empathy for those in her charge. The institutions where these women worked were filthy and those for whom they cared were from the lowest ranks of society. A woman of Florence Nightingale's means would not have even entertained the thought of entering such a place.

Religion and Spirituality

Nightingale was a member of the Church of England, but in fact, her beliefs were not defined denominationally nor through the strict interpretation of the Bible. She was very religiously tolerant, believing that the religions of the world were all variations and interpretations of a similar premise.

Nightingale's religion was more personally defined in a pragmatic way. God was about laws and it was the job of mankind to understand them and do good works in relation to them. These good works were at the center of her religion and her belief in them must have provided much of the drive that was apparent in a very strong work ethic.

To understand God's laws was to understand statistics. The analysis of numbers uncovered the nature and extent of need, therefore providing a guide for one's good works. When reading through her letters, notes and publications, it is difficult to doubt Nightingale's belief in her work as an expression of her desire to serve God by serving mankind. Hers was the kind of commitment that Catholic nuns made to work in God's service, but in her case without the trappings of vows.

Florence's knowledge of religion was vast and in-depth. She understood the mystics and saints and was particularly interested in the religious orders of women. She maintained communications with certain religious leaders and was spiritually mentored by Madre Santa Colomba, a superior general of a religious group who Nightingale met while travelling in Rome. Nightingale believed God spoke to her through Madre Colomba and during introspective periods, she would recount the lessons of her Madre.

Nightingale established a relationship with another superior of a Catholic religious order. Reverend Mother Mary Moore, and a group of Sisters of Mercy, accompanied her in the Crimea. Nightingale was particularly fond of Moore. When she returned to England, Nightingale went to Moore's convent where she remained for a brief period of time in prayer with the sisters.

Discovered among Florence Nightingale's possessions, after her death, were a collection of the rules of French religious orders. It would seem unusual if not strange that a Victorian woman of the Church of England would collect rules of nuns in Catholic religious orders but not in the case of Nightingale, at least in relation to what we know about her. Although Florence was not Catholic, nor would she convert to Catholicism, the religious sisterhood represented a kind of support and foundation that helped her move forward into the service of God because it provided a clear and precise framework for how women did the work of God.

Nightingale's family could argue and resist her ideas of how she should live her life but she had God on her side. She had formed a relationship with Him similar to that between a nun and God, and being "wedded" to God, engaged her in a commitment with Him that spiritually and morally compelled her to serve.

In addition to spending time with religious orders that provided nursing care, Florence went to Kaiserswerth, in Germany, an institution where deaconesses were trained as nurses during a three year period. Although similar to a Catholic sisterhood, the women were not bound by vows and could therefore leave at any time. Her first visit was for a few weeks and later for three months of training. She was very pleased with the order and discipline she

experienced there although, conditions for patients were less than satisfactory. She would later deny that she learned anything about nursing at Kaiserswerth.

Proposal of Marriage

Florence was courted by Richard Moncton Milnes, who was a poet of comparable standing in society to that of the Nightingale's. Although she seemed to have a great affection for Milnes, she refused him marriage based on her belief that marriage would provide the kind life that would prevent her from the work for which she believed she was called. She did remain in contact with Milnes, and in fact, he was later very active in soliciting money for the Nightingale Fund. He even named one of his daughters Florence after her.

Her First Position

In 1853, Florence Nightingale was appointed superintendent of an Establishment for Gentlewomen. The institution was intended to provide care to those ladies in society who had limited means but were not destitute to the point of qualifying for the free care given to the poor. Many of these women were former governesses who had been employed in large estates.

Florence was able to secure the position of superintendent, in part, because of the influence of Lady Elizabeth Herbert, the wife of Sidney Herbert. Nightingale's aptitude for management became evident during the initial stages of planning and later on a day-to-day basis. The committee of wealthy women, who controlled the institution, made demands related to restricting Catholic clergy from visiting the residents. Florence pushed-back, threatening to resign. With her promise to accompany the clergy at all times during their visits,

the committee relented. Nightingale was able to get major repairs approved by the committee, and once she assumed the position of superintendent, changes were made that resulted in a reduction in expenses. Although the post was considered much beneath Florence by family and acquaintances, it provided the kind of experience that would prove to be of use during the Crimean war.

In a note to her friend Clarkey, and again to her father, Nightingale boasted about her ability to bring about changes, leaving the committee members and others to believe the ideas for change were theirs. She was most certainly proud of her ability to influence and control situations and people.

War in the Crimea

The Crimean war began when Russia took aggressive actions towards the acquisition of religious territory in Jerusalem. The action provided a threat to Turkey, and England and France, believing the Russians would advance even further, joined forces with Turkey. The battles and losses of English soldiers were most likely no greater than those of previous wars, the difference being William Howard Russell, a newspaper reporter for the Times of London, who told the story of the inadequacies of the medical care the soldiers received and the abhorrent conditions under which care was provided, resulting in hundreds of deaths. Russell contrasted what he saw with the French soldiers who were being cared for by the Sisters of Charity, and so, the cry of 'Where are our sisters of Charity?' led to an outrage that escalated quickly within the general public.

Knowing of Florence Nightingale's interests in nursing, Sidney Herbert asked her if she would consider going to the Crimea, an adventure that Nightingale had contemplated. Within a short period of time, Nightingale was on a ship with 38 women headed for the Crimea. The group included women with little experience, some with hospital experience and Catholic and protestant religious sisters with varied experience. The Bracebridges, the couple who she accompanied on a trip through Egypt, Greece and Italy, were also with her, and her aunt Mai, to whom she was much attached, would join her later.

The conditions in the Crimea constituted more of an atrocity than had been imagined. It was not only care that was lacking but also food, clothing and basic services like laundering. The soldiers' wounds were unattended, adhering to their clothing and often gangrenous, resulting in many amputations. These surgeries were rudimentary and sometimes performed without anesthesia. Early during the war, the amputations were done in the presence of the other soldiers because of a lack of space for operating or curtains and partitions to wall-off an area.

The make-shift hospital at Scutari was rat infested and the floors were covered in excrement as there was little attention given to the physical facility. There was a sewer under the building which caused major problems with sanitation. In addition to the dreadful conditions, many of the soldiers contracted contagious diseases like cholera and typhoid which resulted in hundreds of deaths, many more than resulted from war injuries.

The image of the angelic nurse passing through the halls by lamp light rendering care was most likely an attempt to calm and convince the citizens of England that their

husbands, sons and brothers were being cared for properly. During the early period of the war, nothing was further from the truth. Improvement came slowly as the kind and level of care needed came after much struggle for action by Nightingale and others. A major issue that impeded progress was the conflicting reports the government was receiving about the conditions of the soldiers and the facilities, reports by medical personnel that indicated things were fine -in good order. It took a sanitary commission, sent to the Crimea in March of 1855, to assess and bring to light the reality of the situation. It was not until then that the desperately needed changes were implemented, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of deaths.

The first traces of the honor bestowed upon Florence Nightingale came very soon after her departure to the Crimea. There were newspaper articles paying homage to the daughter of a family from the upper classes of society who chose to extend acts of charity to those afflicted by the ravages of war rather than to be at home with family. There was also criticism of Florence for taking Catholic religious sisters to the Crimea, a kind of criticism that questioned her faith.

There were accounts of Nightingale from others who actually met her for the first time in the Crimea. Sydney Osbourne was a minister who unofficially went to the Crimea to assist the chaplains. He wrote favorably about Nightingale in his book Scutari and Its Hospitals. He commented about her insistence on strict adherence to the rules along with her attention to detail in her managerial role, the kind of attention that could be construed as overly restrictive. He was also quick to offer his opinion of the nurses' dress, which he deemed drab and unattractive. Upon his return to England, Osbourne was able to dispel any question of Nightingale not being a Christian.

Osbourne's account of Scutari also included commentary on the condition of the facilities and the treatment of soldiers. He was particularly critical of the lack of organization and administrative oversight in the Crimea, which he understood to be a major detriment to the operation of the hospitals.

Nursing the Soldiers

In addition to her leadership role, Nightingale did provide direct care to soldiers, and she did, as the story is told, make her nightly rounds with a lamp, more specifically a Turkish lantern. She also attended most all of the surgeries that resulted in amputations. The early hours of the morning were spent letter writing which included the families of soldiers. These letters provided information about the condition and care of soldiers and also served as death notices with reassurance that everything possible had been done, while 'death came peacefully'.

Nightingale and her nurses met with great resistance by the military medical staff in the Crimea. Dr. John Hall, who was the chief medical officer, did not believe women had a place in the care of soldiers and that Nightingale was a spy, reporting back to the officials in England, which was somewhat true as she wrote many letters to Sidney Herbert, informing him of the unbearable conditions, the incompetence of those in charge, and the lack of supplies and services. At first, Hall's resistance prohibited Florence and her nurses from entering the wards. Much time was lost as they awaited the opportunity to begin providing care.

Florence Nightingale's involvement at Scutari was sanctioned by the government, but she understood that resisting the medical staff would accomplish nothing, and

so; she and her nurses waited. It was also clear to her that they would function under the direction of the physicians if anything was to get done. It took a bloody battle and subsequent influx of hundreds of soldiers into the hospital to end the wait and provide the nurses with an opportunity to begin doing what they had come to do –nurse the soldiers!

Accounts of Nightingale during the war made much of her influence as a leader. It was said that she insisted upon rigid adherence to the rules, and that she was not tolerant of those nurses who did not yield. The nurse's uniform consisted of an unattractive dress that was purposely ill-fitted, with the intention to make the nurses unattractive to the men. The activities of nurses were highly regulated and no nurse was permitted in the wards during the night. The management of the nurses was wrought with many problems from too much drink to running off with soldiers so; Nightingale did not hesitate to send insubordinate nurses back to England.

Bureaucratic Inefficiency

The lack of supplies and services were major stumbling blocks. The muddled and incompetent bureaucracy led to much confusion, causing strife between Nightingale and the military purveyor of goods and supplies. The inability to get what was needed resulted in Nightingale using her own money, and money given to her by the Times (7,000 pounds), to make large scale purchases of supplies and food. Kitchens were inadequate or non-existent and any laundry facilities that did exist were of little use. The transportation of soldiers to the hospital was a long and arduous journey resulting in many men arriving dead. The conditions

were so deplorable that drunkenness, as a way of coping among the soldiers and orderlies, was pandemic.

The Crimea provided a backdrop of horror and chaos, against which Florence Nightingale would make a transformation that led to improvements in the care and treatment of soldiers. The addition of kitchens led to better nutrition and laundry facilities were established. Believing that the soldiers, given the opportunity, would send money home to their families, resulted in opening a post office, and there was a coffee house and areas where the men could read or play table games. The overall improvements went far beyond those documented in storybooks about the Lady with the Lamp. They represented a woman of means, who put herself in an unimaginable and extraordinary situation of desperate proportions. It was a combination of intelligence, influence, tenacity and an unconditional belief in good over evil that drove her to accomplish what would be considered nearly impossible for women even today.

While in the Crimea, Florence Nightingale did have the support of others. Charles and Selina Bracebridge, the couple with whom she traveled in Europe, accompanied her to the Crimea and remained almost one year. Selina Bracebridge managed to keep things going during the time when Florence was seriously ill from what was diagnosed as Crimean fever. Selina Bracebridge was also having health problems which necessitated that she and her husband return to England. A short time later, Florence's aunt Mai would join her in the Crimea, followed by Mai's husband Sam and others. It is safe to say that neither in the Crimea, nor at any other time in her life, was Florence Nightingale without the support and assistance of others. Although she gave-up much of what her life had been in upper class society, to some

extent, even in terrible conditions, her life style, supported by others, was aligned with the Victorian class from which she came. There were always servants and cooks in the post war years and she continued to receive financial support from her father. The difference between Florence Nightingale and other unmarried upper class women of the time was her ability to maintain control over her life and all the subsequent activities that led to her accomplishments.

A Different Side of Florence Nightingale

Florence Nightingale was not without biographers who sometimes raised the level of criticism to rancorous accusations. Lytton Strachey, mentioned earlier, was the first to tarnish the polished surface of the Nightingale icon. There were many others with F.B. Smith being the most acrimonious, providing a tyrannical sketch of Nightingale's character, while emphasizing her narcissism.

Added to the mix of questionable flaws in Nightingale were depictions of mood swings, obsessive compulsive behavior, depression and a death wish that surfaced at times when she experienced intense intra-psychic tension. Some of these characteristics were specifically related to situations and periods in her life when she met with great resistance, preventing her from doing the things she so desperately desired. Caution must be exercised when attempting to interpret Nightingale's behavior given that Victorian women often responded to mental anguish with drama and hysteria, and often by collapsing and fainting.

Nightingale was accused of pushing others aside when she perceived them as a threat. The more serious complaint against her places some blame for the deaths of two of her collaborators, Sidney Herbert and Arthur Clough, men who gave much of themselves to assist

her. Although these men suffered from chronic illnesses, she was said to be unrelenting in her drive to push them to do more, often denying the seriousness of their illnesses. This was especially true with Sidney Herbert and less so with Arthur Clough.

Florence Nightingale was not without fault –that is certain! She could be very forceful, dominant, condescending and flippant in her pursuit of what it was she believed and desired. Her early ambitions, triggered by the voice of God, helped her break away from tradition and its constricting hold on women in Victorian England, but one must wonder if the rigor with which she pursued change in sanitary laws, and the overall improvement in the treatment and care of soldiers, was not driven by the nightmares she most likely experienced while in the Crimea and subsequently for the rest of her life. The impact of the atrocities to which she was subjected cannot be minimized or downplayed. Added to this was the responsibility she must have felt as the leader of a group of women, of varying skill, who required constant and close supervision. Florence’s aunt Mai went to the Crimea to assist her niece, and upon her arrival, Mai was shocked by Florence’s poor physical condition. Her appearance certainly reflected the gravity of her situation.

Other descriptions of Nightingale, by both men and women who met her, were of a rather soft-spoken, slender and poised woman with a gentle demeanor, piercing gray eyes and of having an exceptional intelligence. She was said to be able to conduct herself with restraint and control, even under difficult circumstances.

It is possible that some of Nightingale’s aberrant behavior might have resulted from the Crimean fever she suffered, and from which she almost died. The lingering effects of

the disease, which has been re-diagnosed in modern times as brucellosis, resulted at least in part, in her confinement through most of her post war life. Today, we understand how chronic illness can wear down the ability of the ego to regulate the psyche between the internal and external environments. This kind of understanding is somewhat lacking in many of her biographies, but in fairness this concept would not have been completely understood during her lifetime, making such an interpretation impossible.

Did Florence Nightingale use illness as a way of manipulating others? There is ample evidence that shows her ability to use her illness to draw some closer and create a distance with others. She could suddenly become deathly ill requiring one of her associates to return quickly to her bedside and she could also use the same degree of illness to make a visit from her mother or sister impossible.

Daughter and Sister

Florence Nightingale's relationship with her mother and sister, most definitely strained at times, must be understood in the context of the Victorian era, as well as the Nightingale's prominence and place in society. The Florence Nightingale who returned from the Crimea was very different from the one who went to the Crimea two years earlier. Before the war, she came to understand what it was she wanted to do, but still there was no definite plan or path to follow. She was attempting to make her way through uncharted territory. Her experience in Scutari caused her purpose in life to come to fruition and her upper class status, expert knowledge of sanitation and contacts with powerful and influential men pointed her in the direction of her future, and there was no stopping her!

Florence's mother and sister represented the embodiment of romanticized upper class Victorian women. The major change in their lives was that Florence had become famous, even beyond the borders of England, and therefore, they could vicariously benefit from her notoriety and fame.

Unlike her mother and sister, Florence shunned attention, at least on the surface, and; she seemed to never identify with the persona that was created by the media, the government, reports from soldiers and her family, although she completely understood the power that the image of the Lady with the Lamp provided and was not reluctant to use it. A close relationship with her mother and sister would have resulted in an attempt to pull her back into a lifestyle that she had come to loathe, one that was completely incongruous with the work that lay before her.

Back Home in England

As England prepared for the return of its wartime heroine, Florence, under the disguise of a Miss Smith, passed unnoticed back to Lea Hurst, her parent's home in Derbyshire. The royal welcome and fanfare never took place, and all of her time and energy were focused on improving sanitary conditions in the military. She would carry with her the memories of the dead soldiers from the Crimea and transform them into a force that resulted in the kinds of change that would improve many aspects of the soldier's life, from the food he ate to the treatment he received under the knife of the surgeon. It was a sequel to the story of the Crimea that few know about because of Nightingale's withdrawal and isolation from

mainstream society. Her absence from everyday life was so complete that the announcement of her death, in August of 1910, was a surprise to many who thought she had already died.

By invitation only, a limited number of people were given access to Florence Nightingale and generally for a specific purpose related to her work. She had working relationships with powerful and influential doctors and politicians who collaborated with her to impact and change the policies and laws of sanitation, especially those affecting the soldier in England and later India. Her power and influence equaled theirs as she was undoubtedly one of the individuals with the most and best knowledge and experience in the area of sanitation. In addition to her experience in the Crimea, Florence had visited many hospitals in many countries and read all the bluebooks written about sanitation. Blue books were documents used by the government for keeping records and she was obsessed with the detailed information they provided.

Florence Nightingale's work would be driven by the need to keep the memory of the Crimean soldier alive in the minds of those who had the power and ability to improve conditions for soldiers. Her efforts, supported by prominent physicians and put forward by politicians, would serve as the foundation for many important changes in the way the military treated and cared for its soldiers. The first steps toward that goal would be to make contacts with those who could launch her project and then to use the story of the Crimea to justify the need for large scale change.

By royal invitation, Florence Nightingale was able to meet with Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and Lord Panmure, the war secretary. The meeting resulted in a royal commission

to investigate the lack of preparation and the mismanagement of the Medical Department of the army. Nightingale was pleased with the members of the commission in part because of her ability to exert her influence over them.

Upon Lord Panmure's request, Florence Nightingale did a great deal of work gathering information and assembling it into a document that would substantiate the need for major changes, but progress was slow! At one point, she threatened to go public with her information and actually had copies of the document printed for distribution. In the end, the final report of the Crimean commission, without placing blame, outlined major changes that met with Nightingale's approval.

Sanitation was greatly improved in the military in large part because of the tenacious drive and effort Nightingale was willing to extend towards her goals. Although limited by her physical malady, Nightingale's work toward policy and law to improve the soldier's lot was indefatigable. She pushed forward in a way that consumed her, leaving little time and energy for anything or anyone other than work. Visitors were controlled by those around her, by staff and certain family members, with hardly a chance for an impromptu visit. Nightingale would never have been accused of being spontaneous during the long arduous years of work that led to important reforms in sanitation.

Nurse Training

A rather large sum of money had been collected at the beginning and during the war to be administered by Nightingale for the purpose of training nurses. The coffers of the Nightingale Fund were filled by the contributions of citizens from all classes of society. There

were benefits held to solicit contributions, and gifts of money came from churches and even the soldiers themselves. Henry Moncton Milnes, Nightingale's former suitor, was a major proponent of the campaign. In 1856, the equivalent of two million dollars had been contributed, and although Nightingale was pleased, her immediate attention was required elsewhere, causing the fund to be put on hold.

In 1860, Notes on Nursing, Nightingale's treatise on the care of the patient, was published and the Nightingale Training School was established at St. Thomas Hospital. Nightingale wanted her friend Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to graduate from medical school in the United States, to be the superintendent but the offer was declined. With the exception of a few times when there were problems with the school, Florence's involvement was peripheral. She never took direct control of the school nor did she provide instruction. Her declining health kept her from taking a more active part in the day-to-day operations. Henry Bonham Carter, her attorney cousin, would be more directly involved in the affairs of the school, especially when problems surfaced.

Nightingale wrote a letter to each group of probationers completing the program and each letter was read to the probationers usually by her brother-in-law Sir Harry Verney. After her death and with much coaxing, her family was persuaded to publish the letters, which resulted in a book titled To Her Nurses. The content of these letters provides insight as to what Nightingale believed about the nurse and especially the nurse's character, which was always a primary focus in the selection of candidates for admission to and retention in the training program.

Nightingale did maintain relationships, both through visits and correspondence, with some of the probationers (students) after they completed the nursing program. Much of her contact had to do with giving support, encouragement and advice. She was generous in her gift-giving sending food, flowers, books and other novelties. She would encourage them to rest and sometimes arranged for her favorites among them to stay at her sister's residence or her parent's home for a sojourn.

Her Writing

Florence Nightingale was a writer of prolific proportions. In addition to the reports she generated, which were filled with explicit detail, she wrote extensively about a variety of topics. Much of her philosophy about religion, politics, family, society, nursing and sanitation in both England and India is documented in the thousands of letters she wrote. These letters, in fact, were painstakingly reviewed, categorized, and along with other works by Nightingale, assembled into several volumes under the direction of Lynn McDonald, a professor of sociology in Canada. The 16 volume *Collected Works of Florence Nightingale* was the outcome of having reviewed more than 200 Nightingale archives. McDonald's work, which took more than a decade to complete, is most certainly a tribute of the highest order to Florence Nightingale. Much of the rancor found in some of the previously written biographies is disputed and debunked in McDonald's work.

Nightingale and Her Collaborators

Florence Nightingale had a long and ongoing correspondence with Benjamin Jowett, a professor and protestant minister, who held an academic position at Oxford

University. Considered by colleagues as controversial, he wrote on the subject of Christianity and was also known for his translation of the works of Plato. Jowett reviewed Nightingale's Suggestions for Thought, a treatise on religion, science and the family, and recognized her keen ability to think substantively and deeply. Believing that her writing needed to be better organized and a little less emotional in tone, especially in relation to statements about the family, he advised Florence to rework what she had written into a more cohesive document. Although read by selected others, the book remained unedited and unpublished.

Florence Nightingale was first introduced to Sidney Herbert and his wife while on vacation in Italy. Mrs. Herbert was instrumental in getting Nightingale the position as the superintendent of the Establishment for Gentlewomen, the position she held prior to going to the Crimea. Sidney Herbert sent Nightingale to the Crimea and supported her throughout the war. There is no doubt that Sidney Herbert was Florence Nightingale's champion! Each contributed to the others success, although Nightingale was unnoticed since her name was rarely connected to their work.

Like Nightingale, Sidney Herbert was from the upper class and spent much of his adult life in politics, holding positions within the government. Herbert was intelligent, an eloquent speaker and known for his ability to maintain his composure, even under impossible circumstances. He worked very closely with Nightingale and their collaboration resulted in many of the changes in the military that Nightingale had envisioned and planned.

Herbert developed kidney problems at an early age. Despite his deteriorating condition, Florence placed pressure on him to continue their work, playing-down his malady.

Upon his death, Florence experienced a floodgate of emotion declaring that her “master” was taken from her. Those who knew and understood their relationship would find Nightingale’s statement ironic since she was undoubtedly the more dominant and certainly the more contentious of the two. With Sidney Herbert’s death, Nightingale believed she would no longer be able to influence the war office. She grieved his loss for a long period of time.

Florence Nightingale’s working relationship with Sidney Herbert was the first of many with educated and influential men. She had a long standing alliance with John Sutherland, a physician who was very knowledgeable about sanitation surveillance and practices. The Sutherland-Nightingale tenure lasted for many decades, and although their personalities were somewhat mismatched, they accomplished a great deal in sanitation reform in the military. Sullivan referred to himself as one of her “husbands”, one of many!

Dr. William Farr, another associate of Nightingale, was a medical statistician with the foremost ability to assist Nightingale to ascertain the death rates of soldiers in the military compared to those in the civilian population. He is credited with establishing the division of the statistics in the Army. Farr was able to show statistically how the death rates in the hospital where Florence and her nurses administered care to the soldiers was much higher than the death rates for soldiers cared-for in smaller facilities closer to the battlefield. There are those who claimed that Nightingale, once she understood and accepted Farr’s statistics, attempted to conceal the information, but that very information was included in a report she wrote and submitted to the commission investigating the war in the Crimea. The letters from Nightingale to Farr, during this period of questioning outcomes and death rates, are missing and were possibly destroyed.

Florence Nightingale placed a great deal of trust in the knowledge that grew from numbers. Her knowledge of statistics and their use are evident in the coxcombs (pie charts) diagrams she developed showing the death rates, by month, of the soldiers in the Crimean war. Her achievements in this area, led to her being elected to the Statistical Congress in 1858, and in the same year, she was nominated as the first woman to be elected as a fellow of the Statistical Society of London. These are astonishing achievements for a woman during this period of time.

At one point, Nightingale and Jowett had the idea to establish a chair in statistics at Oxford University, one that would be subsidized with 4000 pounds. They approached Jowett's colleagues, who were reluctant, being that the subject of statistics was not taught in the University. Because of the uncertainty, Nightingale eventually withdrew her support.

The highly substantive education Florence Nightingale received from her father, planted the seeds of confidence that made it possible for her to exercise all of her ability and keen intelligence in a world dominated by highly educated men, and to do so as a peer. Her working relationship with men were but another major departure from the cultural institution of the period in which she lived. There was little precedent; she created the paradigm for such relationships. Some of her attributed abrasive characteristics may have been overemphasized and exaggerated being that she was an upper class, unmarried woman living at a time when the roles of men and women were solidly grounded in codes of etiquette. Women comported themselves in a sensitive and genteel manner, one she defied!

India

Nightingale's attention was turned towards the east to India, an impoverished country occupied by the British with full military presence. Sanitary conditions were much worse than those that had plagued England, resulting in similar, but more serious, health issues among soldiers. Nightingale served in a consultative role and began work gathering the information needed to understand the extent of the problems. A Royal Commission was assembled to study the problems and, once again, Nightingale was able to influence the appointment of committee members. Progress was slow and when the report was released, it was not well received. The medical community in India believed the work they had done was not recognized in the report, and questions were raised concerning the legitimacy of Nightingale's statistics. Changes in sanitation in India came much more slowly and to a lesser extent than change in England. There were major issues with the water supply and land irrigation as well as physical and cultural barriers that were difficult to overcome. The Indian project would take-up much of Nightingale's time for many years. She worked to improve conditions until she lacked the ability to do so, because of age and declining health.

Popularity

There are two Florence Nightingales, the one who came from a rich family more than one-hundred and fifty years ago, became a nurse, cared for soldiers under the worst conditions, got terribly sick, returned home as "the Lady with the Lamp", and became a heroine of iconic proportions, then faded away surfacing on rare occasions to the surprise of everyone. There are scores of books about the Lady with the Lamp and the story of her life is always carefully documented with saint-like style qualities.

The other Florence Nightingale was of a humankind, and not from heaven but from England. She had the same rich parents, a great education, a deep spiritual devotion, a repugnance for the idle and subjugated existence of women, a war and a lamp, and another fifty years of life, most of which were spent in milestone achievements related to the improvement of the health and well-being, at many levels, for soldiers and civilians alike. She was the nurse who made nursing modern.

Knowing she could never achieve any of her goals through a direct path, she aligned herself with brilliant advisors and politically powerful men who shared her interests in sanitation. Most of her work was conducted from the bedroom in her home.

Nightingale was totally aware of her fame and notoriety. She needed assistance to manage her mail, receiving expressions of gratitude, accolades for her heroism, and requests for money and even proposals of marriage. There were biographers soliciting her story, invitations to stately functions, and she was showered with gifts. Her photograph was in high demand. She was aware that there existed statues of her and that new born baby girls were being named Florence. The queen offered her residence at Westminster and, like all the every other invitation and request, she declined! When attempts were made to coerce her, she would erupt with agitation and protest.

Florence Nightingale thought deeply about religion and spirituality. She was in communion with God in a way that emulated the spiritual relationship between a religious sister and her God. She wore black dresses and is often seen in photographs with her head covered with a shawl, which may have served as a symbol for the nun's veil. She was interested

in the activities of nuns and had in her possession the rules of an order of French religious sisters. The documents were found after she died.

Old Age and Death

From most accounts, old age came upon Florence Nightingale gracefully and with dignity, and with a lessening of her chronic symptoms. It was the period in her life during which she began to turn her attention from work towards more social encounters with family, acquaintances and visits by probationers or graduate from the nursing school. She developed a closer relationship with her sister and mother, both who preceded her in death. For a period of time, she was her mother's caretaker in their Lea Hurst home which had been inherited by her cousin Shore after the death of Florence's father.

Nightingale developed a close relationship with her brother-in-law Harry Verney. She also established close ties with some of his children, all from a previous marriage to that of her sister. She was especially fond of Margaret, who was the wife of Harry's eldest son.

Florence was good at both gift giving and advice giving, especially as it related to one's health and well-being. Towards the end of her life, she became feeble and eventually was blind. During the last few years of her life, she was awarded the Order of Merit medal, given only to those whose contributions to England were of the greatest magnitude and exceeding all expectation, and this award constituted another first for a woman, as Florence Nightingale was the first woman recipient of such an esteemed and high honor. Because of her condition, the medal was presented to her in her home, and it is not clear whether she understood the honor being bestowed upon her.

Florence Nightingale died in her sleep on August 13, 1910 after reaching her 90th year. Although she experienced some renewed attention and notoriety from the beginning of the twentieth century, her isolation during most of her life led many to believe she had died years earlier. Her disdain for notoriety was honored by her family who arranged for a simple burial in the cemetery of St. Margaret's church where there was a family plot. And, in accordance with her wishes, the family monument was inscribed with the initials FN and the dates of her birth, 13 May 1820 and her death, 13 August, 1910, nothing more!

While Nightingale's wishes for a simple interment were honored, the public commemorated her passing in a more celebratory manner. A memorial service was held at St Paul's cathedral and the 2,000 in attendance represented the full gamut of society, from representatives of the King and Queen to students attending the Nightingale Training School.

Afterthought

Florence Nightingale's short public life of fame provided her with a highly esteemed place in the annals of British society, one unheard of for a woman in Victorian England. Her prestige rivaled that of Queen Victoria, and in fact; the Queen was among Nightingale's most ardent admirers.

Florence Nightingale's long private life, understood mostly through her letters, notes and other documents, was conveyed through the work of many biographers but there were gaps that made her vulnerable to speculation, in some cases exaggerated speculation. Her accomplishments during the last 50 years of her life tell a story of power and influence, guided and directed by a commitment that comes only to those who have mastered their

subject matter so well that it results in a deep conviction. Nightingale was one of the world's leading authorities on health and sanitation, which extended into other areas like the education of nurses and the construction of hospitals.

Like Maria Montessori, Florence Nightingale is among the few whose work crossed hundreds of cultural barriers in hundreds of countries worldwide. And yet, all of her work, leading to major health and sanitation improvements, was mostly carried forward under the names of others as she remained secluded in the shadows, escaping honor, notoriety and fame, until her death when she could no longer restrain the public from paying her long overdue homage.

Anyone who takes the time to read about and understand the magnitude of her achievements, even when her actions were questionable, will come to understand the genius of this woman Florence Nightingale. And, considering the life of sheer luxury she turned away from, for one of a constant struggle, we, and especially her ardent critics, sceptics and doubters, must ask...

Who among us has given so much for so little in return?

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