

THE LIFE OF  
FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE



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*Mrs. Nightingale and her daughters*  
1828  
from a water-colour drawing in the possession of Mrs. Canliffe

**THE LIFE**  
**OF**  
**FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE**

**BY**  
**SIR EDWARD COOK**

**IN TWO VOLUMES**

**VOL. I**  
**(1820-1861)**

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## PREFACE

MEN and women are divided, in relation to their papers, into hoarders and scatterers. Miss Nightingale was a hoarder, and as she lived to be 90 the accumulation of papers, stored in her house at the time of her death, was very great. The papers referring to years up to 1861 had been neatly done up by herself, and it was evident that not everything had been kept. After that date, time and strength to sort and weed had been wanting, and Miss Nightingale seems to have thrown little away. Even soiled sheets of blotting-paper, on which she had made notes in pencil, were preserved. By a Will executed in 1896 she had directed that all her letters, papers, and manuscripts, with some specific exceptions, should be destroyed. By a Codicil executed in the following year she revoked this direction, and bequeathed the letters, papers, and manuscripts to her cousin, Mr. Henry Bonham Carter. After her death the papers were sorted chronologically by his direction, and they have formed the principal foundation of this Memoir.

Of expressly autobiographical notes, Miss Nightingale left very few. At the date of the Codicil above mentioned she seems to have contemplated the probability of some authoritative record of her life; for in that year she wrote a short summary of what she called "My Responsibility to India," detailing her relations with successive Secretaries of State, Governors-General, and other administrators. Her memory in these matters was still accurate, for the summary is fully borne out by letters and other papers of the several dates: it adds some personal details. In private letters she sometimes recounted, at later times, episodes or experiences in her life, but such references are

few. Nor, except for a few years, did Miss Nightingale keep any formal diary; and during the Crimean episode she was too incessantly busy with her multitudinous duties to find time for many private notes.

The principal authority for Miss Nightingale's Life is thus the collection of papers aforesaid, and these are very copious in information. The records, in one sort or another, of her earlier years are full. The papers relating to her work during the Crimean War are voluminous, and I have supplemented the study of these by consulting the official documents concerning Miss Nightingale's mission which are preserved, among War Office papers, in the Public Record Office. Her papers relating to public affairs during the years 1856 to 1861 are also very voluminous. After the latter date she seems, as already stated, to have kept almost everything, even every advertisement, that she received. She often made notes for important letters that she sent, and sometimes kept copies of them. Of official documents, of printed memoranda, pamphlets, reports, and returns, she accumulated an immense collection. And though she was not a regular diarist, she was in the habit of jotting down on sheets of notepaper her engagements, impressions, thoughts, meditations, as also in many cases reports of conversations.

The collection of letters received by Miss Nightingale, and of her notes for letters sent by her, has been supplemented, through the kindness of many of her correspondents or their representatives, by letters which were received from her. I am more especially indebted in this respect to the care of the late Sir Douglas Galton, whose docketed collection of letters from Miss Nightingale, taken in conjunction with a long series of his letters to her, forms a main authority for much of the record of her activity in public affairs. Her letters to Julius and Mary Mohl, returned to her after the death of the latter, are, in another way, of peculiar interest. I am particularly indebted, among the lenders of letters addressed to nursing friends, to Miss Pringle and to the father of the late Mrs. Daniel Morris (Miss Rachel Williams). Miss Pringle has also favoured me with personal reminiscences.

For permission to print letters written to Miss Nightin-

gale, I am indebted to many of her relations, friends, and correspondents, or their representatives; to so many, indeed, that I ask them to accept here a general acknowledgment. I am especially indebted to the King, who has been pleased to permit the publication of letters from Queen Victoria and some other members of the Royal Family. The German Emperor has graciously given a like permission in the case of correspondence with the Empress Frederick. The Dowager Grand Duchess (Luise) of Baden has allowed me to quote from a long series of letters addressed by her to Miss Nightingale.

Next to the letters and other papers, above described, the most valuable material for the Life of Miss Nightingale is contained in her own printed writings—many of them published, some (and these, from the biographical point of view, the most important) privately printed. In the case of the Crimean War, material under both of these heads is particularly abundant. Her published *Notes on Hospitals* and *Notes on Nursing* and other works relating to those subjects, together with her privately circulated *Addresses to Probationers*, supplement her private records. For her inner life, her privately printed book, *Suggestions for Thought*, is of special importance.

A List of Miss Nightingale's Printed Writings (whether published or privately circulated) is given at the end of the second volume (*Appendix A*). My purpose in compiling this List was biographical illustration, not bibliographical minuteness. I have not included every scrap from Miss Nightingale's pen which has appeared in print, but have given every piece which is directly or indirectly referred to in the Memoir, or which is of any importance. The List will, I hope, serve a double purpose. It enables me to abbreviate in the text the references to my authorities; and it provides, in chronological order, a conspectus of Miss Nightingale's varied activities, so far as they were reflected in her printed writings.

Lastly, there is much biographical material, not only in Blue-books and official reports, but in writings about Miss Nightingale. Except in the case of the Crimean War,



where many eye-witnesses recorded their observations or impressions, this material is not all of great value. Throughout her subsequent life, Miss Nightingale was screened from the public gaze; a somewhat legendary figure grew up, and it is that which for the most part appears in books about her. This, however, is a subject fully dealt with in an Introductory chapter. In *Appendix B* I give a short List of Writings about Miss Nightingale. Here, again, the purpose is not bibliographical. There is a great mass of such writing, and a complete list would have been altogether outside the scope of a biography. I have included only first-hand authorities or such other books, etc., as for one reason or another (explained in the notes upon each item) seemed relevant to the Memoir. This second List also serves the purpose of simplifying references in the text.

In a third Appendix (*C*) I have enumerated the principal portraits of Miss Nightingale. Notes on those reproduced in this book will there be found. I am indebted to the kindness of Sir William Richmond and Sir Harry Verney for the inclusion of the portrait which forms the frontispiece to the second volume, and to Mrs. Cunliffe for the frontispiece to the present volume.

To Miss Nightingale's executors I am indebted for the confidence which they have shown in entrusting her Papers to my discretion. A biography is worth nothing unless it is sincere. The aim of the present book has been to tell the truth about the subject of it, and I have done my work under no conscious temptation to suppress, exaggerate, extenuate, or distort. From Miss Nightingale's executors, and from other of her friends and relations, I have received help and information which has been of the greatest assistance. More especially I am indebted to her cousin, Mrs. Vaughan Nash, who has been good enough to read my book, both in manuscript and in proof, and who has favoured me throughout with valuable information, corrections, suggestions, and criticisms. This obligation makes it the more incumbent upon me to add that for any faults in the book, whether of commission or of omission, I alone must bear the blame.

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## INTRODUCTORY

AMONG Miss Nightingale's memoranda on books and reading, there is this injunction: "The preface of a book ought to set forth the importance of what it is going to treat of, so that the reader may understand what he is reading for." The saying is typical of the methodical and positive spirit which, as we shall learn, was one of the dominant strains in Miss Nightingale's work and character. She wanted to know at every stage precisely what a person, or a book, or an institution was driving at. "Of all human sounds," she said, "I think the words *I don't know* are the saddest." Unless a book had something of definite importance to say, it had better, she thought, not be written; and in order to save the reader's time and fix his attention, he should be told at once wherein the significance of the book consists. This, though it may be a hard saying, is perhaps not unwholesome even to biographers. At any rate, as Miss Nightingale's biographer, I am moved to obey her injunction. I propose, therefore, in this Introductory chapter to state wherein, as I conceive, the significance and importance of Miss Nightingale's life consists, and what the work was that she did in the world.

### I

"In the course of a life's experience such as scarcely any one has ever had, I have always found," said Miss Nightingale,<sup>1</sup> "that no one ever deserves his or her character. Be it better or worse than the real one, it is always unlike the real one." Of no one is this saying more true than of herself. "It has been your fate," said Mr. Jowett to her once, "to

<sup>1</sup> In a letter to Madame Mohl, December 13, 1871.

become a Legend in your lifetime." Now, nothing is more persistent than a legend; and the legend of Florence Nightingale became fixed early in her life—at a time, indeed, antecedent to that at which her best work in the world, as she thought, had begun. The popular imagination of Miss Nightingale is of a girl of high degree who, moved by a wave of pity, forsook the pleasures of fashionable life for the horrors of the Crimean War; who went about the hospitals of Scutari with a lamp, scattering flowers of comfort and ministrations; who retired at the close of the war into private life, and lived thenceforth in the seclusion of an invalid's room—a seclusion varied only by good deeds to hospitals and nurses and by gracious and sentimental pieties. I do not mean, of course, that this was all that anybody knew or wrote about her. Any such suggestion would be far from the truth. But the popular idea of Florence Nightingale's life has been based on some such lines as I have indicated, and the general conception of her character is to this day founded upon them. The legend was fixed by Longfellow's poem and Miss Yonge's *Golden Deeds*. Its growth was favoured by the fact of Miss Nightingale's seclusion, by the hidden, almost the secretive, manner in which she worked, by her shrinking from publicity, by her extreme reticence about herself. It is only now, when her Papers are accessible, that her real life can be known. There are some elements of truth in the popular legend, but it is so remote from the whole truth as to convey in general impression everything but the truth. The real Florence Nightingale was very different from the legendary, but also greater. Her life was built on larger lines, her work had more importance, than belong to the legend.

The Crimean War was not the first thing, and still less was it the last, that is significant in Miss Nightingale's life. The story of her earlier years is that of the building up of a character. It shows us a girl of high natural ability and of considerable attractions feeling her way to an ideal alike in practice and in speculation. Having found it, she was thrown into revolt against the environment of her home. We shall see her pursuing her ideal with consistent, though with self-torturing, tenacity against alike the obstacles and the



temptations of circumstance. She had already served an apprenticeship when the call to the Crimea came. It was a call not to "sacrifice," but to the fulfilment of her dearest wishes for a life of active usefulness. Such is the theme of the *First Part*, which I have called "Aspiration."

Many other women have passed through similar experiences. But there is special significance in them in the case of Florence Nightingale—a significance both historic and personal. The glamour that surrounded her service in the Crimea, the wide-world publicity that was given to her name and deeds, invested with peculiar importance her fight for freedom. To do "as Florence Nightingale did" became an object of imitation which the well-to-do world was henceforth readier to condone, or even to approve; and thus the story of Miss Nightingale's earlier years is the history of a pioneer, on one side, in the emancipation of women.

For the understanding of her own later life, the earlier years are all-important. They give the clue to her character, and explain much that would otherwise be puzzling or confused. Through great difficulties and at a heavy price she had purchased her birthright—her ideal of self-expression in work. On her return from the Crimea she was placed, on the one hand, owing to her fame, in a position of special opportunity; on the other hand, owing to illness, in a position of special disability. She shaped her life henceforward so as to make these two factors conform to the continued fulfilment of her ideal. I need not here forestall what subsequent chapters will abundantly illustrate. I will only say that the resultant effect was a manner of life and work, both extraordinary, and, to me at least, of the greatest interest.

The *Second Part* of the Memoir is devoted to the Crimean War. The popular conception with regard to Miss Nightingale's work during this episode in her life is not untrue so far as it goes, but it is amazingly short of the whole truth as now ascertainable from her Papers. The popular imagination pictures Florence Nightingale at Scutari and in the Crimea as "the ministering angel." And such in very truth

she was. But the deeper significance of her work in the Crimean War lies elsewhere. It was as Administrator and Reformer, more than as Angel, that she showed her peculiar powers. Queen Victoria, with native shrewdness and a touch of humour, hit off the truth about Miss Nightingale's services in the Crimea in concise words: "Such a clear head, I wish we had her at the War Office."

The influence of Miss Nightingale's service in the Crimea was great. Some of it is obvious, and on the moral side Longfellow's poem said the first, and the last, word. She may also be accounted, if not the founder, yet the promoter of Female Nursing in war, and the Red Cross Societies throughout the world are, as we shall hear, the direct outcome of her labours in the Crimea. The indirect, and less obvious, results were in many spheres. From a sick-room in the West End of London Miss Nightingale played a part—and a much larger part than could be known without access to her Papers—in reforming the sanitary administration of the British army, in reconstructing hospitals throughout the world, in founding the modern art of nursing, in setting up a sanitary administration in India, and in promoting various other reforms in that country

Miss Nightingale's return from the Crimea, it will thus be seen, was not the end of her active life. In a sense it was the beginning. The nursing at Scutari and in the Crimea was an episode. The fame which she shunned, but which nevertheless came to her, gave her a starting-point for doing work which was destined, as she hoped, and as in large measure was granted, to be of permanent service to her country and the world. The first chapter of the *Third Part* shows her laying her plans for the health of the British soldier, and the subsequent chapters tell what followed. This is the period of Miss Nightingale's close co-operation with Sidney Herbert. To the writer this later phase of Miss Nightingale's life—with its ingenious adjustment of means to ends, its masterful resourcefulness, its incessant industry, and then with its perpetual struggle against physical weakness and its extraordinary power of devoted concentration—has seemed not less interesting than the Crimean episode.

The *Fourth Part* describes, as its main themes, the work which Miss Nightingale did, concurrently with that described in the preceding Part, as Hospital Reformer and the Founder of Modern Nursing. Other chapters introduce two topics which might at first sight seem widely separate, but which were yet closely associated in Miss Nightingale's mind. They deal with her, respectively, as a Passionate Statistician and as a Religious Thinker. The nature of her speculations is fully explained in the latter chapters, and elsewhere in the memoir. It will be seen that Miss Nightingale had thought out a scheme of religious belief which widely differed from the creeds of Christian orthodoxy, whether Catholic or Protestant, but which yet admitted of accommodation to much of their language and formularies. It admitted also, as will appear in due course, of close alliance with mysticism. Miss Nightingale believed intensely in a Personal God and in personal religion. The language which expressed most adequately to her the sense of union with God was the language of the Greek and Christian mystics. But "law" was to her "the thought of God"; union with God meant co-operation with Him towards human perfectibility; and for the discovery of "the thought of God" statistics were to her mind an indispensable means.

In the *Fifth Part* we are introduced to a new interest in Miss Nightingale's life, a new sphere of her work. For forty years she worked at Indian questions. She took up the subject at first through interest in the army. It was a natural supplement to her efforts for the health of the British soldier at home, to make a like attempt on behalf of the army in India. Gradually she was drawn into other questions, and she became a keen Indian reformer all along the line. Her assiduity, her persistence, her ingenuity were as marked in this sphere as in others; it was only her immediate success that was less.

In relation to the primary object with which she began her Indian campaigns, Miss Nightingale's life and work have great importance. The Royal Commission of 1859-63, which was due to her, and the measures taken in consequence of its Report, were the starting-point of a new era in sanitary

improvement for the army. The results have been most salutary. Miss Nightingale's friendship with Lord Stanley and with Sir John Lawrence here served her somewhat as that with Mr. Herbert served in the earlier campaign. In the wider sphere of Indian sanitation generally Miss Nightingale's efforts were not so successful. The field was perhaps too vast, the conditions were too adverse, for any great and immediate success to be possible. Yet this and her other efforts for India were the part of Miss Nightingale's life and work to which she attached most importance, and by the record of which she set most store. Even in the Will (afterwards revoked) directing her Papers to be destroyed, she made exception of those relating to India; and, as already stated in the preface, one of her few pieces of autobiographical record related to her Indian work. Perhaps it was the special affection which a mother often feels for the least robust or least successful child. Perhaps it was that she took long views; and that, foreseeing a future time when many of the reforms for which she had toiled might be accomplished, she desired to be remembered as a pioneer. "Sanitation," said a high authority in 1894, "is the Cinderella of the Indian administrative family."<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of finding money and a reluctance to introduce Western reforms in advance of Eastern opinion are objections with which we shall often meet in the correspondence of Indian officials with Miss Nightingale, and they are still raised in the present day.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Under-Secretary for India, in his Budget Statement for 1913, declared that "the service which has the strongest claim after education on the resources of the Government is sanitation," and explained that "the Budget estimate of expenditure for sanitation comes this year to nearly £2,000,000, showing an increase of 112 per cent over the expenditure of three years ago." So perhaps Cinderella is to go to the ball; if ever the glass slipper is

<sup>1</sup> Sir Auckland Colvin in the *Journal of the Society of Arts*, May 11, 1894, p. 515.

<sup>2</sup> As, for instance, in some of the speeches in the House of Lords on June 9, 1913, and in a leading article in the *Times* of the following day. The speech of Lord Middleton, in introducing the subject, was, on the other hand, upon Miss Nightingale's lines, being founded upon the Report of her Royal Commission of 1859-63. Some pages (194-197) in Mr. George Peel's *The Future of England* (1911) are on similar lines.

found, let it be remembered, as this Memoir will show, that Miss Nightingale was the good fairy.

Her Indian work continued as long as she was able to work at all, and from 1862 onwards it forms one of the recurring themes in our story. The *Sixth Part*, while continuing that subject, introduces another sphere in which Miss Nightingale's life and work have important significance. From the reform of Hospital Nursing she turned, in conjunction with the late Mr. William Rathbone, to the reform of workhouse nursing. And as one thing led to another, it will be seen that Miss Nightingale deserves to be remembered also as a Poor Law Reformer.

The *Seventh Part* comprises the last thirty-eight years of Miss Nightingale's life (1872-1910), and a word or two may here be said to explain an apparent alteration of scale. In a biography the scale must be proportionate not to the number of the years, but to their richness in characteristic significance. After 1872, the year in which (as Miss Nightingale put it) she went "out of office," her life was less full than theretofore in new activities. The germinant seeds had all been sown. But these later years, though they have admitted of more summary treatment, were full of interest. The chapters in which they are recorded deal first with Miss Nightingale's literary work, and more especially with her studies in Plato and the Christian mystics. These studies were in part a result of her close friendship of thirty years with Mr. Jowett. Then, too, occasion is found for an endeavour to portray Miss Nightingale as the Mother-Chief (for so they called her) of the Nurses. It is only by access to her enormous correspondence in this sort that the range and extent of her personal influence can be measured. Her ideal of the nursing vocation stands out very clearly from the famous "Nurses' Battle" which occupied much of her later years. She found an opportunity during the same period to start an important experiment in Rural Hygiene. At the same time she was preaching indefatigably the need of Health missionaries in Indian villages. And then came the end. To the time of labour, there succeeds in every life,

says Ruskin, "the time of death; which in happy lives is very short, but always a *time*." In the case of Miss Nightingale the time was long. She lived for many years after the power to labour was gone.

## II

So much, by way of preface, in explanation of the significance of Miss Nightingale's life and work. But this book endeavours to depict a character, as well as to record a career. There has been much discussion, in our days as in others, of the proper scope and method of biography, and various models are held up, in one sense or another, to practitioners in this difficult art. The questions are propounded, whether biography should describe a person's life or his character? his work or how he did it? If the person did anything worthy of record, a biography should, surely, describe alike the life and the character, the work and the methods. The biographer may fail in his attempt; but in the case of Miss Nightingale the attempt is peculiarly necessary, because all that she did and the manner in which she did it were, as it has seemed to me, characteristic of a strongly-marked personality behind them.

This book is, however, a biography and not a history. It is not a history of the Crimean War, nor of nursing, nor of Indian administration. Something on all these matters will be found in it; but only so much of detail as was necessary to place Miss Nightingale's work in its true light and to exhibit her characteristic methods. So, also, many other persons will pass across the stage—persons drawn from a great many different classes, occupations, walks in life; but the book does not aim at giving a detailed picture of "Miss Nightingale's circle." Her relations, her friends, her acquaintances, her correspondents only concern us here in so far as their dealings with her affected her work, or illustrate her character.

Here, again—to revert to what has been said above—it will be found, I think, that this book possesses a certain significance as correcting, or supplementing, a popular legend. A preacher, in an obituary sermon upon Miss Nightingale, said that all her work was done "by force of

simple goodness." Assuredly Miss Nightingale was a good woman, and there was also a certain simplicity about her. But there was much else. A man of affairs, who in the course of a long and varied life had come in contact with many of the acutest intellects and greatest administrators of the time, said of Miss Nightingale that hers was the clearest brain he had ever known in man or woman. Strength of head was quite as marked in her as goodness of heart, and she had at least as much of adroitness as of simplicity. Her character was in fact curiously many-sided. A remarkable variety of interests, motives, methods will be found coming into play in the course of this record. The Florence Nightingale who will be shown in it—by her acts, her methods, her sayings, her ways of looking at things and people—is a very different person from Santa Filomena. Miss Nightingale has been given a place among the saints in the popular calendars of many nations; and she deserves the canonisation, but not entirely for the popular reasons. Her character, as I have endeavoured to depict it, was stronger, more spacious, and, as I have felt, more lovable than that of The Lady with the Lamp.

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