

A WOMAN OF DESTINY.*

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In our article last week we dealt chiefly with that period of Miss Nightingale's life in which her destiny was unrecognized by affectionate relatives, who sought in vain to hinder its fulfilment, and could only devote the briefest space to allusion to her work in the Crimean War, when those same relations, who had thought her desire to nurse the sick akin to a wish to be a kitchen-maid, saw and were proud of her correspondence with destiny, and recognized the genius which the whole country acclaimed. To this work, as well as to that, on her return from the Crimea for the health of the soldiers, which occupy much of the remainder of the first volume, we must now refer in greater detail.

THE CRIMEAN WAR.

Miss Nightingale's work in the Crimea, though not the greatest service which she rendered to the country—magnificent as her work there was—is the best known part of her career. The Government which urged her to accept the office of Superintendent of the female nursing establishment in the English General Military Hospitals in Turkey, placed in her hands everything relating to the distribution of the nurses and the allotment of their duties, subject to the approval of the Chief Medical Officer. The selection of the nurses was placed solely under her control, with also the power of control and dismissal. But, incredible as it may seem, considering the condition of the hospitals, the "intrusion of women into the rough work of war" was resented by the military authorities. Miss Nightingale was alive to this danger, as to the possibilities of friction with the medical officers, and the probability of religious disputation, for "no work, however beneficent, has ever been found beyond the capacity of the *odium theologicum* to mar and embitter."

How she triumphantly surmounted the almost insuperable difficulties of the position, and lived to receive the approbation of her Sovereign, the recognition of the public, and the devotion of the British Soldier are now matters of history; indeed, her work as the soldiers' friend is no less admirable than her work for the sick.

"It was a common belief of the time that it was in the nature of the British soldier to be drunken. The same idea was entertained

of the British nurse. She utterly refused to believe it: she set herself in her determined and resourceful way to put measures of reform into practice." She established reading huts in the Barrack Hospital, furnishing them with books, newspapers, writing materials, prints and games, and Miss Nightingale has stated that their behaviour was "uniformly quiet and well bred. The good manners no less than the uncomplaining heroism of the common soldier made an indelible impression upon the Lady-in-Chief."

"It was out of her experiences in the Crimean War that grew her love for the British soldier, to whose health, care and comfort, at home and in India, she was to devote many years of her long life. In extreme old age, when failing powers were not equally alert to every call, she would sometimes show listlessness if her companion talked of nurses and nursing, but the old light would ever come into her eye, and the faltering mind would instantly stand at attention, upon the slightest reference to the British soldier."

One or two stories in relation to the nurses must be related before we leave this subject. Miss Nightingale's vehement objection when Mr. Sidney Herbert, delighted with the success of her experiment, sent out another party, in charge of Miss Stanley, is well known. She feared "the destruction of the standard she was painfully creating, and the gravest peril to an experiment, still on its trial, and ever subject to hostile criticism."

Miss Nightingale proposed sending some of the nuns, either of the first or second batch, back to England, but Father Cuffe said that to send them away would be "like the driving of the Blessed Virgin through the desert by Herod."

In spite of all her anxieties, Miss Nightingale's strong sense of humour would peep out. Writing to Mr. Herbert of the verminous condition of the hospitals, she wrote, "Indeed, the vermin might, if they had but 'unity of purpose,' carry off the four miles of beds on their backs, and march with them into the War Office, Horse Guards, S.W."

Then there were matrimonial difficulties with the nurses. One would not have supposed them especially attractive, for Miss Nightingale had written to Mr. Herbert, "I must bar these fat drunken old dames. Above fourteen stone we will not have; the provision of bedsteads is not strong enough." But the British soldier is susceptible, and "one morning six nurses came in to Miss Nightingale, declaring that they one and all wished to be married. They were followed by six

* "The Life of Florence Nightingale." By Sir Edward Cook. Macmillan & Co., Ltd. 30s. net.

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