

training (doing, we must admit, scant justice to Friederike Fliedner) concerning which Florence Nightingale wrote years later, "The nursing there was *nil* . . . the hygiene horrid. The hospital was certainly the worst part of Kaiserswerth. I took all the training that was to be had—there was none to be had in England—Kaiserswerth was far from having trained me."

For more than four years Florence Nightingale pleaded to be allowed to go to Kaiserswerth and then achieved only two weeks. She left there, says her diary, "feeling so brave as if nothing could ever vex her again."

"Poor Mrs. William Shore Nightingale, mother of the chained eagle, trying to tie down the wings which ached for sky flights, trying to make a clucking young hen out of her soaring bird! What queer twist had fate thrown into the tinkling stream of Mrs. Nightingale's existence that this whirlpool of a girl should happen along it. But the eagle must soar, the whirlpool must seethe, and Florence went on soaring till in 1851 her sister Parthe was ill and was ordered to Carlsbad. Carlsbad! Florence jumped. Carlsbad was near Kaiserswerth. Instantly she had her plan; mother and sister to Carlsbad, she to Kaiserswerth. . . . The bewildered mother, rather worn out with this concoction of steel springs and pertinacity which was somehow her daughter, consented, and to Kaiserswerth went Florence, and stayed the three months."

She went out to the Crimea with plenary authority over all the nurses (as necessary now as then to secure efficiency). Mr. Sidney Herbert told her that he thought he could secure her the fullest assistance and co-operation from the medical staff (but on this point events proved him to have been over optimistic) and he promised her also an unlimited power of drawing on the Government for whatever she thought requisite for the success of her mission.

To this authority Miss Nightingale clung tenaciously. Not from any motives of self-aggrandisement but for the good of the cause she had so deeply at heart.

The following incident shows that she had small use for sentimentality. When the *Vectis* was nearing Scutari, and one of the nurses exclaimed "Oh, dear Miss Nightingale, when we land don't let there be any red-tape delays; let us get straight to nursing the poor fellows," she replied tersely, well knowing that cleanliness is the basis of all good nursing, "The strongest will be wanted at the wash-tub."

Some of the first things she asked for on arrival at the Barrack Hospital at Scutari from Mr. Macdonald of the *Times* Fund were 200 hard scrubbing brushes, and sacking for washing the floors. And well she might! Mr. Macdonald stated: "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."

And here is a contemporary statement in a letter by Dr. Edward Menzies, chief medical officer of the hospital.

"I beg to state that every preparation that kindness and humanity could suggest was in readiness to alleviate the sufferings of both sick and wounded."

("No towels. No soap. Meat boiled four hours. The helpless unfed. Vermin. Open sewers. No shirts. Sheets made of canvas!")

The chief medical officer proceeds:—

"There is no want of either linen or bandages but an ample supply of both." But the *Times* stuck to its story, and "Macdonald and the *Times* Fund stood back of Florence Nightingale, and saved uncounted lives. He and she clothed and fed uncounted more."

But Miss Nightingale's demonstration in the Crimean hospitals, magnificent as it was, was but an episode in her life's work. At the end of two years she returned

incognito to Lea Hurst without warning. She dreaded functions and honours, and "in the last analysis the string had been stretched beyond vibration either to pleasure or to pain; she was utterly tired; she must rest."

After a brief rest came the preparation of a report for a Royal Commission, advice on the plans for Netley Hospital, designed on the old-corridor system, which she condemned, and concerning which Lord Palmerston remarked the object was not to cure patients but to put up a building which should "cut a dash from the Southampton River." She failed to get it altered. But she got put into the Report of her Royal Commission "that all new hospitals should be constructed in separate pavilions." She invented a new variety of diagram for showing statistics, and Dr. Farr, king of statisticians, thought it "the best ever written." In all branches of public services the friends of health reform were now coming to her. The director of the Navy Medical Department begged her "to take up the sailors." She got leave to use a canteen as a reading room for the soldiers at Aldershot; and she gave the funds, and the soldiers liked it so well that it had to be enlarged. She made suggestions for troops going to China, which were mostly adopted. And all the time there was the difficult affair of the Royal Commission, with its four sub-commissions, and their meetings in her rooms, which came to be known as the "little War Office." She wrote "Notes on Nursing," which was an instant success and was translated into French, German and other languages, and in 1859 she began the Nightingale Training School for Nurses, with the £40,000 presented to her by the nation, at St. Thomas's Hospital, "where the first class of thirteen was graduated in 1861, and the spirit of Florence Nightingale was breathed into this thirteen-fold instrument of healing. The experiment succeeded; the movement spread; young nurses were sent out carrying expert knowledge, carrying a new spirit to be matrons of infirmaries, of workhouses, of new training schools. . . They were a living wonder wherever they went."

"To Florence Nightingale nursing was joy. Consecrated, dedicated, she was not a sentimental enthusiast, but a hard worker; she fed to her flame days and nights of incredible labour." If she was hard upon herself, she was equally merciless in her judgment of others. She thus described a nurse—in a memorandum for reference—"As self-comfortable a jackass as ever I saw," and of another caller she directed "Please choke off this woman and tell her I shall never be well enough to see her either here or hereafter."

"There were many facets to that diamond called Florence Nightingale." We could go on quoting indefinitely of her work from an invalid's room, of her deep interest in the Indian Army, sanitation, and other matters. It is told of her that in 1857 when she was sleeping two hours a night and keeping to one room that she wrote to the Viceroy of India after the Mutiny, offering to go out at twenty-four hours notice if there was anything for her to do in her "line of business."

It is not surprising that "she never bored people. She was like a spring of water, bubbling, changing; a constant surprise; a constant tonic—a drastic tonic often. Her friendship was an "accolade to the great," and her test of friendship was "Will you help me in my work?" She could see few people but she sent all sorts of people notes that were like her voice speaking, vivid, colloquial notes, "hot from the girdle of her personality." She entirely approved of women's suffrage. "It is so important for a woman to be a person." "The brain cut like a Damascus knife through the immaterial into the core of things."

The superb brain, the incisive pen, the silvery voice are stilled, the mortal remains of Florence Nightingale

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)