

NIGHTINGALEIANA.

THE CRIMEAN BANQUET AT EDINBURGH,

October 31st, 1856.

The banquet to the Crimean soldiers in Edinburgh, which took place in the Corn Exchange there on Friday evening, was a most brilliant and successful demonstration. Behind the platform table was a huge military trophy, consisting in great part of spoils taken from our recent enemies, over which waved the flags of the gallant regiments invited to the banquet. Surmounting the whole was emblazoned the significant scroll "Welcome to Auld Reekie." At the bottom of the hall were emblematic figures and illuminations, surmounted with a scroll bearing the name of Florence Nightingale.

Sir John M'Niell, who was received with loud applause, in proposing Miss Florence Nightingale, spoke as follows:—

"If we would justly estimate our special obligations to the men who fought for the freedom of Europe in the Crimea, we must look not only to what they have achieved, but also to what they have endured. In the chill rains of December and the bitter colds of January, when his strength was sinking from privation and fatigue and the enervating diseases that follow in their train, he preserved unimpaired the honourable pride of a British soldier in the midst of all his sufferings. He was determined to do his duty whatever might betide. He never lost heart; he never yielded an inch of ground, and not a murmur ever escaped his lips. This, to my mind, is proof of a loftier heroism than even that which was displayed in the devoted gallantry of Alma, Balaclava, or Inkerman.

"Of all the duties which a nation owes to its soldiers, none is more obviously demanded by justice, humanity, sound policy, and even by economy, than the duty of providing for them, when struck down by wounds or by sickness contracted in the performance of their duty, all the care, kindness and comfort, as well as the skilful treatment which their situation requires. But for some time during the late war, whatever were the soldier's sufferings in camp, they were little mitigated by his removal to hospital, however skilful and assiduous the medical officers might have been.

"The truth is that the system upon which our military hospitals were conducted appears to be antiquated and defective. The sick who were landed at Scutari from the Crimea were generally received into hospital in a loathsome condition, and without any change of linen. The hospital authorities did not consider themselves at liberty to provide them with linen, because, according to the rules of the service, a man going into hospital ought to take his linen with him. But this it was impossible for him to do. When he embarked from Bulgaria for the Crimea in September, 1854, he had been ordered to leave behind him his squad bag, which contained the greater part of his linen and spare clothing. Those bags were stored at Scutari, where I understand they all remained until January, and nearly all till March, 1855. And when the sick and wounded arrived at the hospital at Scutari in the condition I have stated, the fact that their squad bags were there appears to have been overlooked, and their own linen, which was lying in those bags, within a few yards of where they were suffering in filth and rags for want of it, was not made available to them. Who was responsible for this omission it would be useless to inquire. Of course nobody is to blame, unless, perhaps, I should be blamed for letting the cat out of the squad bag. But though I am unable to tell you who was responsible for leaving the sick in their wretched condition, I am able to tell you who rescued them from it. Florence Nightingale found them in that condition, and except the aid she received from the *Times* fund, provided at her own expense linen for the numerous patients which could

not have cost less than £2,000 or £3,000. She found the hospital unprovided with any establishment for washing the linen, and with the aid of the ladies and the nurses made arrangements for that purpose, some of the ladies taking an active share in that menial labour. She found the hospital without any trained cooks, and she established a private kitchen, in which food fitted for those who were most reduced was prepared, and I have no doubt contributed to save the life of many a brave man. Foreseeing that the accommodation would be insufficient, she urged the repair of a large wing of the Barrack Hospital, which was so dilapidated as to be uninhabitable, and the repairs were commenced; but the workmen soon struck, because they were unpaid, and the officer who had charge of the work could not procure the requisite funds. She advanced them from her own means, and curiously enough the very day on which those repairs were completed, a number of sick and wounded, sufficient to fill that wing, and for whom there was no other accommodation, arrived from the Crimea and were placed there. But the wards were as empty as barns, and the hospital authorities declined to provide the requisite furniture. She purchased it at her own cost, and furnished the wards, but the amount has since been repaid.

"I mention these things—and I might tell you many more—because many of you may not know or may not remember them, and very few, I am sure, have ever heard, or will ever hear, of them from her. But it is needless to dwell further upon the services to the sick and wounded which are known to the whole world, which have redounded to the honour of the nation which has made her name dear to the Army and to the country, and which secure to her a place in the history of our times as the worthy leader of one of the most remarkable movements which this war, in many respects memorable, has produced. I cannot, however, refrain from stating one or two facts creditable to the soldiers of the British Army which ought to be known. Miss Nightingale had, of course, occasions to be in hospital wards at all hours, and she informed me that she never on any occasion had heard even an oath from a soldier. In answer to my inquiry whether she had observed on the part of the soldiers much reluctance to leave the hospital and return to their duty in the Crimea, Miss Nightingale replied, that she did not remember having been asked to write one letter for any soldier with a view to prolong his stay in the hospital, but she believed she had written 500 to 600 for men who wished to inform their officers that they considered themselves fit for duty. Such is the character which the soldiers of the Army in the East have established for themselves—in action, in camp during the worst times—and in hospital. Let us hope that the moral and material improvement, the higher standard of feeling and of comfort which the wise benevolence and patriotism of Miss Nightingale and the other ladies who aided her efforts have introduced into our military hospitals will not be permitted to pass away with the occasion that gave rise to them. While we can obtain advice and assistance from the calm, practical intellect of Florence Nightingale, let us hope that the nation may be enabled to reap the full benefit of her enlightened judgment and great capacity in that department in which she has in this country and in our time no equal. And now let me propose to you the toast which has been entrusted to me

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE."

This toast was responded to with the highest enthusiasm. It was the most important of the evening.

The above report is from the *Illustrated Times*.

Chesterfield Town Council have decided to hand over Miss Florence Nightingale's Crimean carriage to St. Thomas's Hospital, London, with which she had a close connection.

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