

Here let us note in passing the loss to the world in early Victorian days, of the service of innumerable capable and ardent young women between the ages of twenty and thirty or more, who were held fast by convention in their mothers' drawing rooms, submitting to the "dire compulsion of infertile days" and confiding to their diaries their divine discontent. If of exceptionally strong purpose, they escaped the stranglehold and eventually found their niche in the world, it was for the most part with diminished powers, and a lessening of precious youthful enthusiasm.

Even Florence Nightingale was not free from this paralysing influence. She wrote in some "Suggestions for Thought" privately printed in 1860: "My people were like children playing on the shore of the eighteenth century. I was their hobby horse, their plaything; and they drove me to and fro, dear souls! never weary of the play themselves, till I, who had grown to woman's estate and to the ideas of the nineteenth century, lay down exhausted, my mind closed to hope, my heart to strength."

But this is a digression.

The months spent by Florence Nightingale with the Bracebridges in the Near East, though she did not know it, were to be an important factor in making clearer her "Call." In Rome they met the Sidney Herberts, Dr. Manning and Miss Mary Stanley, elder sister of that Arthur Stanley who was afterwards Dean of Westminster. She was eight years older than Florence Nightingale, "a strange emotional creature, not much controlled by reason; and offered Florence a kind of admiring devotion which it was difficult to resist."

On a Nile sailing boat Miss Nightingale pored over the works of Bunsen and Lepsius, recognised authorities on Egyptology—that same M. de Bunsen, Prussian Minister at the Court of St. James, who had promised to get her details about the work of women in his own country, and later had given her reports and pamphlets about the Deaconesses' Institute at Kaiserswerth, which were now shortly to bear fruit.

It was in Greece that her Call came to her again, clear, insistent. "At this time her whole mind, conscious and unconscious, was so absorbed in the effort to find out what was required from her, and to fit herself to do it, that her intense thoughts sometimes took the form of visions coloured by the scenes about her. Once, standing at the Pass of Thermopylæ and looking at a rainbow spanning the heavens 'like finite human life between two eternities,' she seemed to see in it spirits that might answer her agonised question. The spirits of childhood—amethyst, sapphire, turquoise, as they got further from the heaven whence they came, said that life was not meant only for enjoyment; the emerald spirit of youth said that it was not a book out of which the intellect could take in knowledge and be satisfied; golden manhood said neither was it a school, 'for thee to be intent on working up all the materials into thine own improvement. Thinkest thou 'His Kingdom come' means 'thy salvation'? Old age already glowing with the colour of the burning seraphim, love made perfect in disinterestedness, assured her that life was something more than a valley of tears.

"At last, all the colours seemed to unite into one white ray of truth, and to say in a voice like the wind 'Life is a battle—a struggle against the principle of evil both in thine own soul and in the world—Christ is our Leonidas, this world is our Thermopylæ.'

"The words seemed actually to sound in her ears. She realised with an intensity that made it seem to come through the senses, that she was being told never to abandon the struggle against evil, and to carry it on inside herself and in the world, through all the stages of this life and if necessary through many stages of existence, till God's Kingdom was won.

"The rainbow had faded and the sun was sinking; she knelt on the turf with her face toward it and said: 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Give me to-morrow my work to do. Yet not my work but Thine.'

"Florence did not write about these visions to the family: nor did she tell them of the terrible inward struggle that was still going on. . . . But she wrote quite enough about her thoughts to make Parthe reproach her with sending home nothing but 'fancies' instead of realities. So she made efforts to write about politics and the people she saw. Her political disquisitions, though tinged with the republicanism which seemed a little out of place in the letters of an English lady, were full of knowledge and humour, and showed that she had been quite at the centre of things, and had received attention from many important personages—so they were welcome at Embley."

The story of Athena, the owl to which Miss Nightingale was so devoted, is well known. It is not so well known, however, that it was at this time (1850) "on the Acropolis one day she found a crowd of boys tormenting a little owl which had fallen out of its nest in the pediment of the Parthenon. She flew to the rescue, and the redeemed Athena soon became an important member of the Bracebridges' party."

It was by Mrs. Bracebridge's magic that Florence Nightingale suddenly achieved her heart's desire. At eight o'clock on the last evening of July, 1850, she arrived at Kaiserswerth.

An effort to do so the previous year had ended in deep disappointment. Mrs. Nightingale had planned to go to Frankfurt. "Quite near to Frankfurt was Kaiserswerth, where the deaconesses were. With the Mohl's help she might visit them. It was possible that she might get in a little training. All was prepared; trunks were packed and passports obtained, and they were on the point of starting when news came of riots in Frankfurt. Impossible for English ladies to risk travelling on the Continent. Mrs. Nightingale quickly decided to go to Malvern instead, and very soon Florence found herself there, cursing and swearing at the perverseness of fate with one part of her mind, dwelling more and more sadly on her own failings with another part of it, but with the surface of it, at least, thoroughly enjoying the humours of the water cure."

But now she was actually at Kaiserswerth. She had started from Pymont at 5 a.m. "All day she had been travelling and as she went on she felt more and more like a pilgrim. When she saw the wide green waters of the Rhine she said to herself that this was her Kedron, far dearer to her than Nile; and when in the summer twilight she at last saw the low buildings of Kaiserswerth, she could hardly believe that she was there. She and her maid, Trout, stayed at the inn, but early in the morning Florence called on Pastor Fliedner, who joyfully agreed to take her over his hospital and his orphanage and his infant school and to show her the work of his deaconesses. With him was his second wife, 'Mutter Caroline,' who had taken over all Friederike's work and now greeted the English Fraülein with a most beaming smile. Both the Fliedners were direct and simple, and obviously overflowing with cheerful energy. Flo liked and revered them both at once, and when, after dining with them, and sitting talking with them in the garden through the August afternoon, she was told that she might be admitted into the *Diaconissen Anstalt* (Deaconesses' Institution) it seemed almost too good to be true. Joyfully, she went back to the inn to send Trout off to the Bracebridges and to collect her things. Lying in bed in her own little room within the *Anstalt* she felt very strange. But how different this was from the awful sinking of heart she had so often experienced in London drawing rooms! There her courage sank into her very shoes; here she felt it rising to the occasion. Certainly this was God's work!

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