

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, 1820-1856.

A STUDY OF HER LIFE DOWN TO THE END OF THE CRIMEAN WAR. BY I. B. O'MALLEY.*

(Concluded from page 230.)

Of the work of Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War all the world knows how a letter from her offering her services crossed one from Mr. Sidney Herbert (Secretary of War), definitely inviting her to do what had never been done before, and organise a staff of female nurses for service in the military hospitals near the seat of war. No need to enlarge here upon the oft-told tale. The *Times* correspondent wrote home that the hospitals at Scutari had not the commonest appliances of a workhouse sick ward, and that "the men must die owing to the medical staff of the British Army having forgotten that old rags are necessary for the dressing of wounds."

Mr. Sidney Herbert told Miss Nightingale in his letter to her that the number of medical officers and assistant surgeons at the front had been greatly increased, that medical stores had been sent out in profusion and that by the ton weight, together with 15,000 pairs of sheets and medicine, wine and arrowroot in the same proportion. It only remained for the human beings to administer this, but they must be the right human beings. Sidney Herbert was more conscious than most of his colleagues of the difficulty of securing these; also "the feeling between Protestants and Roman Catholics was still extraordinarily violent. A very large number of the British soldiers at the front were Irish Catholics who might even be told by their priests that they could not receive the attention of heretic nurses without danger to their immortal souls. On the other hand, sending a Popish nun to nurse a dying Protestant would almost certainly be regarded by certain people in England as little better than feeding a starving child with arsenic pudding."

Getting the right kind of nurses was as difficult a business as she had anticipated. Eventually there were fourteen of these. Six from St. John's House, eight Sellon Sisters, and five white nuns from Norwood. Five more nuns from Bermondsey were awaiting them in Paris. With Florence and her housekeeper (Mrs. Clarke), this would make up the party Sidney Herbert desired.

The Roman Catholic nuns did not grumble; they were all full of Christian goodness. "There's no doubt at all," said Mrs. Clarke, "but that them nuns will get into the Kingdom of Heaven long before any of us; but that is no reason whatsoever why they should have it all their own way here too, seeing ours is a Protestant Government and they be Romans."

The complications which arose from the arrival of a further party of nurses under the direction of Miss Mary Stanley, ordered to report not to Miss Nightingale but to the Senior Medical Officer, are well known, but never before has one had so clear a view of the underlying causes. One cannot doubt both that Miss Nightingale's vigorous protest and the manner in which she dealt with the situation were wholly correct.

An episode which gave Miss Nightingale an infinity of trouble was the engagement by her first, on a month's trial, of Miss X, who came to Scutari asking for paid work, with the highest recommendations. Eventually she was placed in complete charge of the free gift store, but she was not to give out anything from it without a written order from Miss Nightingale. She signed a written agreement to this effect. A few days later she also undertook the housekeeping for Miss Nightingale's quarters, and was given all the keys. Eventually it turned out that Miss X had abused her position, and exclaimed repeatedly, "I am a thief, I am

a thief." Miss Nightingale promised not to prosecute her with a generosity which was ill requited. In Scutari she clamoured for forgiveness; but when she reached England and found influential ladies willing to take up her cause, she demanded compensation.

Miss Stanley thought Miss X an injured woman and was prepared to defend her in every way. An incredible letter from the former to Miss Nightingale was docketed thus: "Does she know that she lies. Does she know that I know that she lies? Does she know that I know that she knows that she lies? Is she bad, mad or silly?—F.N."

Of the hostility of certain members of the medical staff, Miss Nightingale wrote, "Dr. Hall does not think it beneath him to broil me slowly upon the fires of my own Extra Diet kitchen, and to give out that we are private adventurers, and to be treated as such."

But all things came to an end at last, and in sending home-going nurses home, Miss Nightingale was careful, with their characters in mind, to try to help them to the right kind of work. Here are some of her terse character sketches, sent to Lady Cranworth:—

"Mrs. C.—Active, clean, useful, kind and industrious, but wholly unfitted by the impropriety of her manners for a military hospital. Mrs. H.—An excellent nurse, hard-working in cholera and fever, where she is indefatigable; one fault, intemperance, not intoxication. Mrs. A.—Active, clean, useful, *strictly honest*, kind, but the same fault, against which, however, she struggles hard; very industrious. Mrs. P.—Kind, clever, useful, good nurse, but deteriorating both as to sobriety and propriety, the latter is the more to be deplored as she is a married woman. . . . Mrs. W.—Good needlewoman, good nurse, sober, but no feeling of propriety. Mrs. S.—Perfectly sober and respectable, but unfitted by health for working much except at her needle. Mrs. L.—Sobriety and propriety irreproachable, too much of a fine lady to be a good nurse (fonder of sketching than of poulticing). . . . Mrs. J.—Sent home in disgrace on account of clandestine meetings and reckless falsehood; the case is so flagrant that she would not have been entitled to her passage home had it not been thought best, out of mercy and for her own sake, not to leave her out here."

She might well say, "I fear that you will think this list a dismal one; recollect, however, that it is not our best that we send home first."

"Eight o'clock on an August morning in Bermondsey. The streets were as stuffy, as smelly, as noisy as usual, and a little more so because of the time of year; but inside the Convent of Mercy there was even more joy and peace than usual. Less than a fortnight before, Reverend Mother had welcomed back her last Sisters from the East, and now all together they were going to enter on their Annual Retreat, and to thank God for their reunion, and for those wonderful years. The Portress's bell rang. A slight figure in a plain black cloak and bonnet stood on the doorstep. A thrill of wonder and joy passed among the nuns. It was Miss Nightingale!

"Long ago she had promised them she would come first to them on her return."

At Lea Hurst in the long light summer evening the Nightingales sat wondering about the travellers. Some forerunners had, they heard, arrived at Embley. How anxiously they waited for the return of their heroine herself! It was wonderful that she was alive still, but how grievously she must need rest. There was a step on the gravel outside. Someone passed by the drawing-room window. It was Flo!

"So Florence Nightingale had come home; but not to rest. For God did mean her to go on living, and she was right in thinking that she was only at the beginning of her work."

M. B.

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