

NIGHTINGALEIANA.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND ANIMALS.

By Mrs. I. B. O'Malley.*

The letters from Florence Nightingale about the feeding of birds published under *Nightingaleiana* in the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING for May must strike all who have studied their author's life as extraordinarily characteristic. Florence Nightingale's great quality was a sympathy which extended not only to all human beings but to all creatures capable of joy and sorrow. She literally *suffered with* those who were in pain or trouble, whether they were the heroes of Crimean battlefields or little furred and feathered creatures perishing in winter frosts or in man-made traps. But she did not suffer passively; from childhood on her instinct was to be up and doing, seeking some relief for the trouble of the world. And, because her illuminating imagination was accompanied by strong commonsense, she realised very early that if she wanted to help she must learn how to do it, otherwise her well-meant efforts might only increase pain.

The Vicar of the church near the Nightingales' country house in Hampshire was fond of relating a tale of Florence's early youth. He and she were riding one afternoon when they met the local shepherd without his dog. On being questioned he said that some boys had thrown stones at the dog and so injured his leg that he could not walk and would have to be destroyed. Florence, hearing that the dog was alone in the shepherd's hut, asked leave to visit him, and at once dragged the Vicar there. They found the poor fellow in great pain; the Vicar turned away from the beseeching eyes and murmured that the sooner he was put out of his misery the better. "But," cried his young companion, "is there nothing to be done?"

The Vicar, who had practised first-aid among his flock, said that the pain might be relieved by hot fomentations; but he pointed out that there was no hot water, no fire, no flannel and that even if anything could be done at the moment, it would be useless unless it were kept up. The eager child beside him listened to none of these objections; she found sticks, she found water, she found a kettle, and when she could not find anything to soak in the hot water she ran to the nearest cottage and persuaded the good wife there to sacrifice her one flannel petticoat, promising that she should receive in return one of Miss Nightingale's own. The dog's pain was relieved; Florence nursed him till his master returned and could be taught how to make fomentations. When she reached home very late for dinner her mother was horrified to find that she wanted to rush off again immediately to take her best petticoats to a cottage woman, and to sit up with a sick dog. For many days she spent hours in the shepherd's cottage attending to the grateful patient there. He recovered; his master thought it a miracle, and Florence's family wondered that she would insist on going into dirty cottages, and doing work there which was not *fit* for a young lady.

For many years after that they had to shut their eyes to much of what she was doing, and she had to keep silence about the things for which she cared most, and to conceal her efforts to acquire medical knowledge. But love for animals which were not in cottages and did not require nursing was one of the feelings she shared with her family. At their two country houses, one in the South and one in the North of England, they watched and helped the birds, as the letters to the "Dicky Bird Society" show. The Nightingale children were encouraged to keep pets and to be familiar with farm animals; many of Florence's childish letters are about these, and she speaks of her particular affection for a pig called Toby. She had many beloved

horses and dogs, one dog especially was a dear friend for many years. There are innumerable references to him in her letters and among the papers she left to her family at her death is an envelope containing a lock of white and tan hair and inscribed "Dear Teazer, 1846."

When Florence Nightingale travelled with her family or her friends she observed the animals everywhere, as she did the people, enquired into their conditions and seized any chance that came her way of helping them. When sailing on the Nile in 1850 she was given one of the little colour-changing lizards, called chameleons, that live in the Egyptian sand. Her private diary, in which she recorded her deep thoughts about ancient Egypt and her sad ones about the problems of her own life, has also many entries about the health and spirits of this chameleon, and another she got to keep him company when he seemed depressed. One of the last mornings she could have spent in visiting the great temples which moved her so deeply had to be given instead to finding a good place in which to leave the chameleons, since she had decided that they could not be happy in captivity.

A little later, in Athens, Florence rescued a tiny owl, which had fallen from a nest in the Parthenon and was being tormented by some boys. "Athena" began her career somewhat regrettably by eating up an Athenian grasshopper which Florence had also saved, but, later, returned in triumph to England and became an important member of the Nightingale family circle. She died just as Florence was starting for the Crimean war hospitals, and onlookers noticed that the only time Miss Nightingale's calm serenity gave way was when she shed bitter tears over the death of her little owl.

I will not enter here into Florence Nightingale's strong and bitter feelings about the sufferings of the horses in the Crimea. She could do nothing for those poor victims of human stupidity, and therefore she seldom spoke of them; but her few allusions to them show that their sufferings remained engraved on her mind. When she returned to England she brought with her three little boys whom she had rescued from various perils and miseries, a large Russian puppy given her by some of her ex-patients, and a little grey cat found by a British soldier in the knapsack of a dead Russian.

This cat, alas, died on the voyage; but it was to cats that Florence Nightingale finally turned for that animal companionship which was so indispensable to her. When she was lying ill in her house in London after the war her friend Madame Mohl sent her a kitten from Paris, then another to keep it company, and after this the cats, as she said, took possession of her house. She was most anxious to learn their exact requirements, in sickness and in health, and to see that all was perfectly arranged for them. "I think," she wrote in 1868, "little cats ought to be left with their Mama till they are four or five weeks old, otherwise they never know how to dress themselves. I try to do it, but they say 'What an awkward great cat that is.'" Cats associated themselves in her mind with all her later work; sometimes practically, as when she noted that one of the War Office reforms, for which she had had to fight hard, but which she had gained, was an official allowance of sevenpence a week for the War Office cat; sometimes more fancifully, as when she called her most treasured kittens Tom and Bart, and besought Sir James Paget, to tell the authorities of the two hospitals this and to assure them that she could not give a greater proof of her strong and equal affection. A feeling that went deeper than fancy made her believe that her best loved cats somehow understood her and gave her a friendship which had a peculiar value to her. Who can say that she was wrong? This most practical of women was also a Seer and may have looked more deeply into animal as well as human nature than those who love less.

* Authoress of "Florence Nightingale, 1820-1856."

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