

"FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE: A STUDY IN FREEDOM."

Whenever there is War, the work and the wonder of Florence Nightingale comes to the fore, and inspires our exchange of gifts and comments referring to her. Thus we have recently received Lytton Strachey's "Florence Nightingale," which we had not previously read the charming lettercard, referred to overleaf sent by Professor Annie W. Goodrich, R.N., and a copy of *The Aberdeen University Review*, No. 82, Winter, 1940, which contains a valuable article, "Florence Nightingale—A Study in Freedom," by Mrs. M. J. S. Harris—all of which will be passed over to the History Section of the British College of Nurses at an early date.

The article by Mrs. Harris emphasises the almost death-struggle of Florence Nightingale to free her soul from bondage, such as many women endured in the middle of the last century. Did she not write "Life is not a green pasture and a still water, as our homes make it. Life is to some a forty days' fasting under the carrying of the Cross: to some it is a crucifixion; to all a struggle for truth, for safety." Mrs. Harris opens her article thus: "The history of education in North-East Scotland holds many examples of stern combat with the hindering circumstances of poverty, friendlessness and lack of opportunity. Lately a better day dawned for all who would struggle towards the light. Now our lamps are threatened with extinction. Do the wise still carry oil in their vessels? Who can instruct us in the way of combating the habits our great possessions have laid on us? An officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps, soon after returning from Dunkirk, wrote: "Guns or butter? We have had the butter, and have the guns. But leadership with inspiration has been given us, and if we can purge our souls of the fat accumulated in years of ease and comfort, we will become lean and strong, and ward off this fatty degeneration."

In the history of Britain, forerunners are not lacking in this path of the "lean and strong." One such supremely was Florence Nightingale, and the story of her struggle to realise herself through service has profound attraction to-day, when, as never before in our history, there is need for men and women to be what she longed to be, "morally active."

Her faithful biographer, Sir Edward Cook, writes of her girlhood, lapped in ease, "Her faculties were not brought outwards, but were left, by the conditions of her life, to devour themselves inwardly." And this was true in spite of generous education, studies in Latin and Greek and modern languages, travel in Europe, and personal contacts with many actively engaged in antiquarian research, political reform and the arts.

"To the reader of the recorded thoughts of her twenties, it becomes evident that all Miss Nightingale's activities were now becoming subject to attack from within. She wrote: 'Pursuing an aim not to be found in life is its true misery.' She herself knew at times what she wanted. It came to her in the human scene, especially in London." "You cannot get out of a carriage at a party without seeing what is in the faces making the lane on either side, and without feeling tempted to rush back and say, 'Those are my brothers and sisters.'" But "the proprieties prevented."

At times this inner force became dangerously insistent.

Back in London after foreign travel, when Rome was threatened by invasion by a foreign foe, she wrote to a friend:

"I must exhale my rage and indignation before I have lost all notions of absolute right and wrong . . . When I think of that afternoon at the Villa Mellini . . . of Rome, bathed in her crimson and purple shadows, lying at our feet, and St. Michael spreading his wings over all—the Angel

of Regeneration we thought him then—my eyes fill with tears. But he will be the Angel of the Regeneration yet . . . They must carry out their defence to the last. I should like to see them fight the streets, inch by inch, till the last man dies at his barricade, till St. Peter's is level with the ground, till the Vatican is blown into the air. Then would this be the last of such brutal, not house-breaking, but city breakings . . . If I were in Rome, I should be the first to fire the Sistine, turning my head aside, and Michael Angelo would cry: 'Well done,' as he saw his work destroyed."

Alas! for the illusory hope of the "war to end war"! But we see here the spirit of Florence Nightingale, a spirit of truth and freedom in action, and recognise in this bold outcry, "The same chivalry that has spoken to us to-day in the rousing words of Mr. Churchill to the nation."

Mrs. Harris's extraordinary interesting article touches on the influence of Kaiserswerth—from which Miss Nightingale wrote to her mother, "I find the deepest interest in everything here and am so well in body and mind. This is Life." The turning point in her long uphill struggle had come, and she began to take possession of herself . . . More than ever now she was bent on training other women in the art that most appealed to herself, but she realised that Kaiserswerth had not advanced her far in efficiency." We nurses know the rest of the story.

"Wealth, influence, friendship, family ties, all that she had abandoned in order to find her own freedom, came under tribute to her work in the Crimea, in relief of suffering and need, and followed her leading, when later many gates were flung open into new fields of effort. The way Florence Nightingale showed has wound in with regions she never entered."

May it never be closed. "To find out what we can do, one's individual place, as well as the General End, is man's task." So she believed and so she lived.

"We see plainly enough in our own country how they all hold swords, being expert in war; every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night." But is the King therefore safe? "We look from England across the Channel, and see our brothers and sisters "bound who should be free." In our hearts we want to say to them, "Every bondsman has within himself the power to cancel his activity." But can we pay the price of asserting such blood-brotherhood? The lamp of Florence Nightingale shows us the way.

"No Question is Ever Settled Until it is Settled Right."

"However the battle is ended, though proudly the victor comes, with flaunting flags and neighing nags and echoing roll of drums; still truth proclaims this motto in letters of living light, no question is ever settled until it is settled right."—*Ella Wheeler Wilcox.*

REOPENING OF CLUB FOR SERVICE WOMEN OF THE EMPIRE.

The King George and Queen Elizabeth Club for Service Women of the Empire has been reopened at 56, Sloane Street, which has been lent for the duration of the war by Miss Evelyn Barrington, of Mortimer, Berks.

Bed, bath, and breakfast are provided from 2s. 6d. a night, and non-residents can have well-cooked meals at reasonable cost. There is a fine drawing-room and dining-room, and all the bedrooms are nicely furnished.

Let us hope it will escape the sad fate of Nightingale House, 15, Manchester Square, where the Club took over from the Florence Nightingale International Foundation, the closing of which is deeply regretted by nurses all over the world.

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