ANNIE MATHESON

THE LIFE OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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PREFACE

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It is hardly necessary to say that this little biography is based mainly upon the work of others, though I hope and believe it is honest enough to have an individuality of its own and it has certainly cost endless individual labour and anxiety. Few tasks in literature are in practice more worrying than the responsibility of “piecing together” other people’s fragments, and “the great unknown” who in reviewing my “Leaves of Prose” thought I had found an easy way of turning myself into respectable cement for a tessellated pavement made of other people’s chipped marble, was evidently a stranger to my particular temperament. Where I have been free to express myself without regard to others, to use only my own language, and utter only my own views, I have had something of the feeling of a child out for a holiday, and of course the greater part of the book is in my own words. But I have often, for obvious reasons, chosen the humbler task, because, wherever it is possible, it is good that my readers should have their impressions at first hand, and in regard to Kinglake especially, from whose non-copyright volumes I have given many a page, his masculine tribute to Miss Nightingale is of infinitely more value than any words which could come from me.

My publisher has kindly allowed me to leave many questions of copyright to him, but I wish, not the less—rather the more—to thank all those authors and publishers who have permitted use of their material and whose names

will, in many instances, be found incorporated in the text or in the accompanying footnotes. I have not thought it necessary in every instance to give a reference to volume and page, though occasionally, for some special reason of my own, I have done so.

Of those in closest touch with Miss Nightingale during her lifetime, whose help with original material has been invaluable, not more than one can be thanked by name. But to Mrs. Tooley for her large-hearted generosity with regard to her own admirable biography—to which I owe far more than the mere quotations so kindly permitted, and in most cases so clearly acknowledged in the text—it is a great pleasure to express my thanksgiving publicly.

There are many others who have helped me, and not once with regard to the little sketch have I met with any unkindness or rebuff. Indeed, so various are the acknowledgments due, and so sincere the gratitude I feel, that I scarcely know where to begin.

To Miss Rickards, for the pages from her beautiful life of Felicia Skene, I wish to record heartfelt thanks; and also to Messrs. Burns and Oates with regard to lengthy quotations from the letters of Sister Aloysius—a deeply interesting little volume published by them in 1904, under the title of “A Sister of Mercy’s Memories of the Crimea;” to Dr. Hagberg Wright of the London Library for the prolonged loan of a whole library of books of reference and the help always accessible to his subscribers; and to the librarian of the Derby Free Library for aid in verifying pedigree. Also to Lord Stanmore for his generous permission to use long extracts from his father’s “Life of Lord Herbert,” from which more

than one valuable letter has been taken; and to Mr. John Murray for sanctioning this and for like privileges in relation to the lives of Sir John MacNeill and Sir Bartle Frere. To Messrs. William Blackwood, Messrs. Cassell, Messrs. G. P. Putnam and Sons, as well as to the editors and publishers of the *Times*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Morning Post*, and *Evening News*, I wish to add my thanks to those of my publisher.

To any reader of this book it will be clear how great a debt I owe to General Evatt, and he knows, I think, how sincerely I recognize it. Mr. Stephen Paget, the writer of the article on Miss Nightingale in the Dictionary of National Biography, has not only permitted me to quote from that—a privilege for which I must also thank Messrs. Smith Elder, and Sir Sidney Lee—but has, in addition, put me in the way of other priceless material wherewith to do honour to the subject of this biography. I have long been grateful to him for the inspiration and charm of his own “Confessio Medici”—there is now this other obligation to add to that.

Nor can I forgo cordial acknowledgments to the writer and also the publisher of the charming sketch of Miss Nightingale’s Life published some years ago by the Pilgrim Press and entitled “The Story of Florence Nightingale.”

To my friend Dr. Lewis N. Chase I owe the rare privilege of an introduction to Mr. Walker, the sculptor, who has so graciously permitted for my frontispiece a reproduction of the statue he has just completed as a part of our national memorial to Miss Nightingale.

I desire to thank Miss Rosalind Paget for directing me to sources of information and bestowing on me treasures of time and of memory, as well as Miss Eleanor F. Rathbone

and the writer of Sir John MacNeill's Life for help given by their books, and Miss Marion Holmes for permission to quote from her inspiring monograph; and last, but by no means least, to express my sense of the self-sacrificing magnanimity with which Miss E. Brierly, the present editor of *Nursing Notes*, at once offered me and placed in my hands—what I should never have dreamed of asking, even had I been a friend of old standing, instead of a comparative stranger—everything she herself had gathered together and preserved as bearing on the life of Florence Nightingale.

When, under the influence of certain articles in the *Times*, I undertook to write this volume for Messrs. Nelson, I knew nothing of the other biographies in the field. Nor had I any idea that an officially authorized life was about to be written by Sir Edward Cook, a biographer with an intellectual equipment far beyond my own, but who will not perhaps grudge me the name of friend, since his courteous considerateness for all leads many others to make a like claim, and the knowledge that he would put no obstacle in my path has spared me what might have been a serious difficulty. Had I known all this, a decent modesty might have prevented my undertaking. But in every direction unforeseen help has been showered upon me, and nothing but my own inexorable limitations have stood in my way.

If there be any who, by their books, or in any other way, have helped me, but whom by some unhappy oversight I have omitted to name in these brief documentary thanks, I must earnestly beg them to believe that such an error is contrary to my intention and goodwill.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER FOR THE ELDERS IN MY AUDIENCE

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It is my hope that my younger readers may find this volume all the more to their liking if it is not without interest to people of my own generation. Girls and boys of fourteen to sixteen are already on the threshold of manhood and womanhood, but even of children I am sure it is true that they hate to be “written down to,” since they are eagerly drinking in hopes and ideas which they cannot always put into words, and to such hopes and ideas they give eager sympathy of heart and curiosity of mind.

Florence Nightingale’s Home, Embley Park, Romsey, Hants.

For one of her St. Thomas's nurses, among the first nine women to be decorated with the Red Cross, the heroine of this story wrote what might well be the marching orders of many a good soldier in the divine army, and not least, perhaps, of those boy scouts and girl guides who would like better a life of adventure than the discipline of a big school or the "duties enough and little cares" of a luxurious home; and as the words have not, so far as I am aware, appeared in print before, it may be worth while to give them here:—

> "Soldiers," she wrote, "must obey orders. And to you the 'roughing' it has been the resigning yourself to 'comforts' which you detested and to work which you did not want, while the work which wanted you was within reach. A severe kind of 'roughing' indeed—perhaps the severest, as I know by sad experience.
>
> "But it will not last. This short war is not life. But all will depend—your possible future in the work, we pray for you, O my Cape of Good Hope—upon the name you gain here. That name I know will be of one who obeys authority, however unreasonable, in the name of Him who is above all, and who is Reason itself—of one who submits to disagreeables, however unjust, for the work's sake and for His who tells us to love those we don't like—a precept I follow oh so badly—of one who never criticizes so that it can even be guessed at that she has criticism in her heart—and who helps her companions to submit by her own noble example....

> “I have sometimes found in my life that the very hindrances I had been deploring were there expressly to fit me for the next step in my life. (This was the case—hindrances of *years*—before the Crimean War.)” And elsewhere she writes: “To have secured for you all the *circumstances* we wished for your work, I would gladly have given my life. But you are made to rise above circumstances; perhaps this is God’s way—His ways are not as our ways—of preparing you for the great work which I am persuaded He has in store for you some day.”

It is touching to find her adding in parenthesis that before her own work was given to her by the Great Unseen Commander, she had ten years of contradictions and disappointments, and adding, as if with a sigh from the heart, “And oh, how badly I did it!”

There we have the humility of true greatness. All her work was amazing in its fruitfulness, but those who knew her best feel sometimes that the part of her work which was greatest of all and will endure longest is just the part of which most people know least. I mean her great labour of love for India, which I cannot doubt has already saved the lives of millions, and will in the future save the health and working power of millions more.

Florence Nightingale would have enriched our calendar of uncanonized saints even if her disciplined high-hearted goodness had exercised an unseen spell by simply *being*, and had, by some limitation of body or of circumstance, been cut off from much active *doing*: for so loving and obedient a human will, looking ever to the Highest, as a

handmaiden watches the eyes of her mistress, is always and everywhere a humane influence and a divine offering. But in her life—a light set on a hill—being and doing went hand in hand in twofold beauty and strength, for even through those years when she lay on her bed, a secluded prisoner, her activities were world-wide.

In addition to the work for which she is most widely revered and loved, Miss Nightingale did three things—each leaving a golden imprint upon the history of our time:—

She broke down a “Chinese wall” of prejudice with regard to the occupations of women, and opened up a new and delightful sphere of hard, but congenial, work for girls.

She helped to reconstruct, on the lines of feminine common sense, the hygiene and the transport service of our army—yes, of the entire imperial army, for what is a success in one branch of our dominions cannot permanently remain unaccepted by the rest. And in all her work for our army she had, up to the time of his death, unbounded help from her friend, Lord Herbert.

Last, and perhaps greatest of all, she initiated, with the help of Sir Bartle Frere, Sir John Lawrence, and other enlightened men of her time, the reform of insanitary and death-dealing neglect throughout the length and breadth of India, thus saving countless lives, not only from death, but from what is far worse—a maimed or invalid existence of lowered vitality and lessened mental powers.

One of her friends, himself a great army doctor holding a high official position, has repeatedly spoken of her to me as the supreme embodiment of citizenship. She did indeed exemplify what Ruskin so nobly expressed in his essay on

“Queens’ Gardens”—the fact that, while men and women differ profoundly and essentially, and life would lose in beauty if they did not, the state has need of them both; for what the woman should be at her own hearth, the guardian of order, of health, of beauty, and of love, that also should she be at that wider imperial hearth where there are children to be educated, soldiers to be equipped, wounded lives to be tended, and the health of this and future generations to be diligently guarded.

“Think,” she said once to one of her nurses, “less of what you may gain than of what you may give.” Herself, she gave royally—gave her fortune, her life, her soul’s treasure. I read in a recent contemporary of high standing a review which ended with what seemed to me a very heathen sentence, which stamped itself on my memory by its arrogant narrowness. “Woman,” wrote the reviewer, “is always either frustrate or absorbed;” and there leaped to my heart the exclamation, “Here in Florence Nightingale is the answer; for in her we have one, known and read of all men, who was neither the one nor the other.” That there was supreme renunciation in her life, none who is born to womanhood can doubt; for where could there be any who would have been more superbly fitted for what she herself regarded as the natural lot of woman as wife and mother? But she, brilliant, beautiful, and worshipped, was called to a more difficult and lonely path, and if there was hidden suffering, it did but make her service of mankind the more untiring, her practical and keen-edged intellect the more active in good work, her tenderness to pain and humility of self-effacement the more beautiful and just.

It has been said, and said truly, that she did not suffer fools gladly, and she knew well how very human she was in this and in other ways, as far removed from a cold and statuesque faultlessness as are all ardent, swift, loving natures here on earth. But her words were words of wisdom when she wrote to one dear to her whom she playfully named “her Cape of Good Hope”: “Let us be persecuted for righteousness’ sake, *but not for unrighteousness*.”

The italics are mine, because in their warning they seem so singularly timely. And the entire sentence is completely in tune with that fine note with which she ends one of her delightful volumes on nursing—

“I would earnestly ask my sisters to keep clear of both the jargons now current everywhere (for they are equally jargons): of the jargon, namely, about the ‘rights’ of women which urges women to do all that men do, including the medical and other professions, merely because men do it, and without regard to whether this *is* the best that women can do; and of the jargon which urges women to do nothing that men do, merely because they are women, and should be ‘recalled to a sense of their duty as women,’ and because ‘this is women’s work,’ and ‘that is men’s,’ and ‘these are things which women should not do,’ which is all assertion and nothing more. Surely woman should bring the best she has, *whatever* that is, to the work of God’s world, without attending to either of these cries. For what are they, both of them, the one *just* as much as the other, but listening to the ‘what people will say,’ to opinion, to the ‘voices from without’? And as a wise man has said, no one

has ever done anything great or useful by listening to the voices from without.

“You do not want the effect of your good things to be, ‘How wonderful for a *woman*!’ nor would you be deterred from good things by hearing it said, ‘Yes, but she ought not to have done this, because it is not suitable for a woman.’ But you want to do the thing that is good, whether it is ‘suitable for a woman,’ or not.

“It does not make a thing good, that it is remarkable that a woman should have been able to do it. Neither does it make a thing bad, which would have been good had a man done it, that it has been done by a woman.

“Oh, leave these jargons, and go your way straight to God’s work, in simplicity and singleness of heart.”

CHAPTER I.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE: HER HOME, HER BIRTHPLACE, AND HER FAMILY

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In the heart of Derbyshire there is a quaint old church, once a private chapel, and possessing, instead of a churchyard, a bit of quiet greenness, of which the chief ornament, besides the old yew tree at the church door, is a kind of lovers' bower made by two ancient elder trees which have so intertwined their branches as to form an arbour, where in summer-time sweethearts can gossip and the children play. It belonged to a world far away from the world of to-day, when, in the high-backed pews reserved for the "quality," little Florence Nightingale, in her Sunday attire that was completed by Leghorn hat and sandal shoes, made, Sunday after Sunday, a pretty vision for the villagers, in whose cottages she was early a welcome visitor. It was just such a church as we read of in George Eliot's stories, clerk and parson dividing the service between them, and the rustic bareness of the stone walls matched by the visible bell-ropes and the benches for the labouring people. But the special story that has come down from those days suggests that the parson was more satirical than Mr. Gilfil or Mr. Tryan, and it is to be feared that when he remarked that "a lie is a very useful thing in trade," the people who quoted

him in Derby market-place merely used his “Devil’s text” as a convenience and saw no satire in it at all. Have we really travelled a little way towards honesty since those days, or have we grown more hypocritical?

The little girl in the squire’s pew grew up in a home where religious shams were not likely to be taken at their face value.

Her father, who was one of the chief supporters of the cheap schools of the neighbourhood, had his own ways of helping the poor folk on his estate, but used to reply to some of the beseeching people who wanted money from him for local charities that he was “not born generous.” Generous or not, he had very decided views about the education of his two children, Florence and Parthe. They enjoyed nearly a hundred years ago (Florence was born in 1820) as liberal a course of study as any High School girl of to-day, and no doubt it is true that the orderliness of mind and character, at which his methods aimed, proved of countless value to Florence in those later days, when her marvellous power in providing for minutest details without unnecessary fuss or friction banished the filth and chaos of the first Crimean hospitals, and transformed them into abodes of healing and of order. She grew up to be a beautiful and charming woman, for whom men would gladly have laid down their lives; yet her beauty and her charm alone could not have secured for our wounded soldiers in the Crimea, tortured by dirt and neglect, the swift change to cleanness and comfort and good nursing which her masterly and unbending methods aided her commanding personal influence to win.

But this is leaping too far ahead. As yet she is only Parthenope’s little playfellow and schoolfellow in the room devoted to “lessons” at Lea Hall, the small maiden who climbs the hill on Sundays to the church where the yew tree guards the door, and on week-days is busy or at play in the house that has been the home of her father’s family through many generations, and in the grounds of the manor that surround it.

Lea Hall is in that part of the country which Father Benson has described in his novel, “Come Rack, come Rope,” and the Nightingale children were within easy reach of Dethick Hall, where young Anthony Babington had lived. It must have added zest to their history lessons and their girlish romancings to hear of the secret passage, which was supposed to lead right into Wingfield Manor, from the underground cellar close to the old wall that showed still where Dethick had once reared its stately buildings. The fact that the farm bailiff now kept his potatoes there and could not find the opening, would only make it a constant new ground for adventure and imagination. For they would be told of course—these children—how Mary Stuart had once been a prisoner at Dethick, and Anthony had vowed to be her servant in life or death and never cease from the struggle to set her free so long as life was in him. Nor did he; for he died before her, and it was not at Wingfield, but at Fotheringay, as these little students very well knew, no doubt, that her lovely head soon afterwards was laid upon the block.

Enviable children to have such a playground of imagination at their doors! But, indeed, all children have

that, and a bare room in a slum, or a little patch of desert ground, may for them be danced over by Queen Mab and all her fairies, or guarded by the very angel who led St. Peter out of prison. Still, it is very exciting to have history written beside the doorstep where you live, and if you grow up in a home where lesson books are an important part of the day's duties, it is pleasant to find them making adventures for you on your father's own estate. It mattered nothing that the story would all be told by those contending against Anthony's particular form of religion, who would be ready to paint him with as black an ink as their regard for justice would allow. To a child, that would rather enhance the vividness of it all. And there was the actual kitchen still standing, with its little harmless-looking trapdoor in the roof that leads into the secret chamber, where the persecuted priests used to hide when they came to celebrate a secret Mass. No wonder the two children delighted in Dethick, and wove many a tale about it. For had they not seen with their very own eyes the great open fireplace in that kitchen, where venison used to be roasted, and the very roasting-jack hanging from its central beam where all the roof-beams were black with age and dark with many tragic memories?

Dethick is but one of the three villages included in the ancient manor, the other two are Lea and Holloway; and in the days of King John, long before it came to the Nightingales, the De Alveleys had built a chapel there. Those who have read Mr. Skipton's life of Nicholas Ferrar and know their John Inglesant, will be interested to hear that half this manor had passed through the hands of the Ferrars among others, and another portion had belonged to families

whose names suggest a French origin. But the two inheritances had now met in the hands of the Nightingales.

It is a very enchanting part of the Midlands. The silvery Derwent winds through the valleys, keeping fresh the fields of buttercups and meadowsweet and clover, and in the tall hedges wild roses mingle their sweetness with the more powerful fragrance of the honeysuckle, until both yield to the strange and overwhelming perfume of the elder tree. The limestone hills, with their bold and mountainlike outline, their tiny rills, and exquisite ferns, had been less spoiled in those days by the tramp of tourists; and the purity of the air, the peacefulness of the upland solitudes, would have a wholesome share in the “grace that can mould the maiden’s form by silent sympathy.”

Florence Nightingale’s Father.

It was a very youthful little maiden as yet who had been transplanted into these English wilds from the glory and the sunshine of the Italy where she was born. After the valley of the Arno and the splendours of Florence, it may have

seemed somewhat cold and bracing at times. Rightly or wrongly, the father of the little girls—for our heroine's sister, named after another Italian city, shared all her life at this time—seems to a mere outsider a little cold and bracing too. He came of a very old family, and we hear of his "pride of birth." His wife, on the other hand, whom Florence Nightingale resembled, lives before us in more warm and glowing colours, as one who did much to break down the barriers of caste and, with a heart of overflowing love, "went about doing good." Both were people of real cultivation—good breeding being theirs by a happy inheritance—and each seems to have had a strong and distinctive personality. It might not be easy to say to which of the two the little daughter, who grew to such world-wide fame, owed most; but probably the equipment for her life-work was fairly divided between the two. There is no magnet so powerful as force of character, and it is clear that her father possessed moral and intellectual force of a notable sort. Love, in the sense of enthusiasm for humanity, will always be the heaven-born gift of one in whom religion is such a reality as it was with Florence Nightingale, but religious ardour may be sadly ineffective if defeated by the slack habits of a lifetime, or even by a moral and mental vagueness that befogs holy intentions. Mr. Edward Nightingale's daughters were disciplined in a schoolroom where slackness and disorder were not permitted, and a somewhat severe training in the classics was supplemented by the example of Mrs. Nightingale's excellent housewifery, and by that fine self-control in manners and behaviour which in the old-fashioned days used to be named "deportment." Sports and

outdoor exercises were a part—and a delightful part—of the day's routine.

But let us go back a few years and give a few pages to the place of Florence Nightingale's birth and the history of her family. Her name, like that of another social reformer among Englishwomen, was linked with Italy, and she took it from the famous old Italian town in whose neighbourhood she was born. I have tried in vain to trace the authorship[1]—was it Ruskin or some less known writer?—who said of that town, "if you wish to see it to perfection, fix upon such a day as Florence owes the sun, and, climbing the hill of Bellosguardo, or past the stages of the Via Crucis to the church of San Miniato, look forth upon the scene before you. You trace the course of the Arno from the distant mountains on the right, through the heart of the city, winding along the fruitful valley toward Pisa. The city is beneath you, like a pearl set in emerald. All colours are in the landscape, and all sounds are in the air. The hills look almost heathery. The sombre olive and funereal cypress blend with the graceful acacia and the clasping vine. The hum of the insect and the carol of bird chime with the blithe voices of men; while dome, tower, mountains, the yellow river, the quaint bridges, spires, palaces, gardens, and the cloudless heavens overhanging, make up a panorama on which to gaze in trance of rapture until the spirit wearies from the exceeding beauty of the vision."

When on May 12, 1820, Florence Nightingale was born, her parents were staying at the Villa Colombaia, near to this beautiful City of Flowers; and when the question of a name for her arose, they were of one mind about it—she must be

called after the city itself. They had no sons, and this child's elder sister, their only other daughter, having been born at Naples, had taken its ancient and classical name of Parthenope.[2]

Their own family name had changed. Mr. Nightingale, who was first known as William Edward Shore, was the only son of Mr. William Shore of Tapton, in Derbyshire, and the child who was to reform England's benighted views of nursing, and do so much for the health, not only of our British troops, but also of our Indian Army, was related through that family to John Shore, a famous physician in Derby in the reign of Charles the Second, as well as to the Governor-General of India who, twenty-three years before her birth, took the title of Baron Teignmouth. It was through her father's mother, the only daughter of Mr. Evans of Cromford, that she was linked with the family of the Nightingales, whose name her father afterwards took. Mary Evans, her paternal grandmother, was the niece of "Old Peter," a rich and roystering squire, who was well liked in his own neighbourhood, in spite of his nickname of "Madman Peter" and the rages that now and then overtook him. Florence Nightingale was, however, no descendant of his, for he never married, and all his possessions, except those which he sold to Sir Richard Arkwright, the famous cotton-spinner, came to his niece, who was the mother of Miss Nightingale's father. When all this landed property came into the hands of Mr. Edward Shore, three years before his marriage and five years before Florence was born, his name was changed under the Prince Regent's sign manual from Shore to Nightingale, in accordance with Peter Nightingale's

will. But he continued to live in Italy for a great part of every year until Florence was nearly five years old, though the change of ownership on the English estate was at once felt under the new squire, who was in most ways the very opposite of that “Old Peter,” of whom we read that when he had been drinking, as was then the fashion, he would frighten away the servant-maids by rushing into the kitchen and throwing the puddings on the dust-heap.

Mr. Edward Nightingale, our heroine’s father, bore a character without fear or reproach. Educated at Edinburgh and at Trinity, Cambridge, he had afterwards travelled a good deal, at a time when travel was by no means the commonplace that it is now.

He is described as “tall and slim,” and from the descriptions we have of him it is clear that no one, even at a glance, could have missed the note of distinction in his bearing, or mistaken him for other than that which he was proud to be, the cultivated and enlightened son of a fine old family.

When we read that the lady he married was daughter of a strong Abolitionist, Mr. William Smith of Parndon, in Essex, we feel that the very name of Abolitionist belongs to a bygone past.

In those days the American Civil War was still to come, but the horizon was already beginning to blacken for it, just as in Europe, while two happy little girls were playing hide-and-seek in the gardens of Lea Hall and racing with their dogs across the meadows to Dethick, the hush before the tempest did not blind wise statesmen to those dangers in