

**FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AND NURSING IN
19TH CENTURY ENGLAND**

BACHELOR THESIS

Submitted by

Sarah Maria Frajuk

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Health Care and Nursing Science
Medical University of Graz

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Supervised by

Mag.^a Marion Trattner

Department of Health and Nursing Science

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Sarah Maria Frajuk

Abstract

Florence Nightingale is an extraordinary, remarkable person who, with strict discipline, perseverance, and ambition, achieved a milestone in nursing. Impressed by her life, I chose this topic. The aim of this paper is to find out about Florence's impact on nursing and her major achievements. The paper is based on scholarly literature about Florence Nightingale. I used literature in English which I had found in the library of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz and I also used electronic texts and internet sources.

Florence was the daughter of a wealthy family, enjoyed a remarkable and untypical education at her time and struggled to follow her calling to become a nurse. During the Crimean War she and a group of other nurses improved the sanitary conditions and saved thousands of lives of the British army. Furthermore, she was a brilliant health care reformer, campaigner, and a magnificent statistician. One of the two greatest life achievements that Nightingale is known for is her work as a pioneer of nursing and a reformer of hospital sanitation methods. Coming from a wealthy family background, Florence established nursing as a respectable profession for women, hence working against the boundaries of social class. Through her social commitment and her strong impulse to help the poor she did not only save thousands of lives but also achieved a revolutionary change in the 19th century society.

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1. Introduction

Florence Nightingale is an extraordinary, remarkable person – simply a genius – who, with strict discipline, perseverance, and ambition, achieved a milestone in nursing in that she made nursing a respectable profession for women.

During my stays in London I visited the Florence Nightingale Museum, which is located next to the St. Thomas Hospital at 2 Lambeth Palace Road. The museum follows her story and reveals the background of an extraordinary nurse and her magnificent achievements.

The life of Florence Nightingale, or *“The Lady with the Lamp”*, deeply impressed me, so it was quite easy for me to choose this topic. I also have chosen to write my first bachelor thesis in English language, because I have always wanted to improve my English and it is also a personal challenge for me. The major part of my thesis is based on scholarly literature about Florence Nightingale. I used literature in English which I had found in the library of the Karl-Franzens University of Graz and I also used electronic texts from databases and other internet sources to reach the aim of the research question.

The goal of this bachelor thesis is to find an answer to the following research questions:

What impact did Florence Nightingale have on nursing – in the 19th century and today – and what were her major achievements?

My thesis will be structured as follows: First I want to introduce the nursing situation in 19th century England. The next part deals with the life of Florence Nightingale – her privileged childhood, the decision to become a nurse, as well as her nursing work during the Crimean War. After that, I describe her life's work, her great achievements in nursing and, more specifically, I will look at how she changed the reputation of nursing as a female profession. Finally, I will summarise the main aspects and I will answer my research question.

2. Nursing in the 19th Century

During the 19th century the profession of nursing had a very bad reputation and had become a job usually done by the outcasts of society like alcoholics, immoral and illiterate people.¹ Hospitals were cheerless places, soiled and crowded with fifty or sixty beds in one wet, cold, and frosty room. Hygiene measures and clean ceilings, walls and floors did not exist.² Doctors and nurses were dirty, did not wash their hands and used soiled equipment. As a consequence, these hospitals were full of germs and many patients were infected with new, additional diseases.³ But people who entered these institutions as patients had, in most cases, no other alternative as they came from the slums and very poor living conditions. Most of the women who worked as nurses in these institutions were drunken, uneducated and sometimes even had prison records.⁴ In short, the conditions were quite bad for everyone involved.

3. Nightingale's Childhood: The Early Years

Florence was born in Italy on May 12, 1820. Her father William Edward Nightingale, also called W.E.N., and her mother, Frances Nightingale, were travelling in Europe as part of their honeymoon since their marriage in 1819 and named her after the city of her birthplace- Florence.

William Edward Nightingale was a wealthy gentleman. The heritage from his mother's uncle made him affluent.⁵ They owned two enormous country houses. The first one, Lea Hurst in Derbyshire, where they spent the winter, and another near London in Hampshire called Embley Park, where they stayed during the summer

¹ http://members.tripod.com/Marg_Hutchison/nurse-3.html

² Dodge 1954, pp. 19-20

³ Gogerly 2003, p. 7

⁴ Dodge 1954, pp. 19-20

⁵ Woodham-Smith 1955, pp. 9-12

months. So the two children grew up in a noteworthy, permissive upper-middle-class family.⁶

Florence was the daughter of a remarkable, liberal, and humanitarian family.

William Smith, her maternal grandfather, had been a Member of the House of Commons for 46 years and was engaged in many social projects. He was a campaigner and fought for the abolition of slavery, mangled factory workers, the weak and the rights of non-conformists and Jews.

Florence's father William Edward Nightingale was originally called William Shore. He inherited Lea Hurst in Derbyshire from his mother's uncle, Peter Nightingale, and with it changed his surname. The inheritance made William Edward a wealthy gentleman. He loved books, travelling, good conversations and went up to Cambridge with an income of between seven and eight thousand pounds a year and bought Embley Park in Hampshire.⁷

Frances – or Fanny – Nightingale was an outgoing person and spent much energy to be part of the best society in England.⁸ She was a beautiful woman and had a passion for entertainment, the arts and social life.⁹ One must not forget Florence's one-year older sister, Parthe. She was born in Naples in 1819 and just like Florence, was named after the Greek name of her birthplace, Parthenope.¹⁰

3.1 Education

Florence and Parthenope got a remarkable education, which was unusual for young ladies at this time. They were educated at home, first by a governess who taught them music and drawing and afterwards by their father.¹¹

⁶ Nixon 2011, pp. 4-5

⁷ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 13

⁸ Bostridge 2008, p. 41

⁹ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, pp. 13-15

¹⁰ Woodham-Smith 1955, p. 9

¹¹ *ibid.* p. 16

William Edward had been educated at Cambridge and Edinburgh and taught the girls French, Greek, Latin, Italian, German, mathematics, history and philosophy.



Fig. 1: Florence Nightingale and her sister, Parthenope

Florence was the more academic of the two sisters and early displayed her ability for mathematics, collecting and analysing data¹² while Parthenope was more fond of doing needlework and sketching.¹³ Also the characters of the two sisters were completely different: Florence was refined and shy while Parthenope was vigorous, artistic but also proprietorial and full of angry outbursts.

3.2 The Call from God

Florence's belief in God was intense and the driving force in her life.¹⁴ On February 7, 1937, three months before her seventeenth birthday, Florence wrote in her private notes that she obtained a call from God. God spoke to her and called her to his service. But she did not know what form of service she was supposed to do. Her protective instincts were strong, she took care of sick pets, doctored her dolls and visited the poor and sick in the villages near their home. However, that this call from god meant to become a nurse, did not enter her mind at this time.¹⁵ Anyway, this was only one out of four of such experiences:¹⁶

¹² http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/nightingale_01.shtml

¹³ Nixon 2011, p. 4

¹⁴ *ibid.* p. 6

¹⁵ Woodham-Smith 1955, p. 22

¹⁶ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 17

“Once on February 7, 1837, the date of her first call; once in 1853 before going to her first post at the Hospital for Poor Gentlewomen in Harley Street; once before the Crimea in 1854; and once after Sidney Herbert’s death in 1861.”¹⁷

In September 1837, the Nightingales began a journey around Europe and were travelling through Switzerland, France, and Italy for two and a half years.¹⁸

Revolution was in the air and it was an exciting time for young Florence. She saw the differences in social community lifestyles. She was a wealthy young woman and met influential people who were to become her proponents and colleagues in the future. With every journey, Florence hoped to find an answer to her call from God.¹⁹ The Nightingale’s attended social events, balls and operas and Florence acquired pleasure in the entertainment.

3.3 The Decision to Become a Nurse

Finally, in 1820 at the age of 24, seven years after Florence’s first call from God, her plans to serve in terms of nursing became more concrete. So, Florence wanted to start study nursing in Salisbury, not far away from Embley Park, where Dr. Fowler, an old family friend, was the head physician. The family, especially her mother was horror struck and furious about Florence’s plans and did not allow her to study nursing. But her parents had good reasons for their decision: In the 19th century, the upper and middle classes avoided hospitals and were nursed at home by relatives or servants because the mortality rates at this time were dismayingly high and it was safer to get a therapy at home than in hospitals.²⁰

The failure of her plan was painful and frustrating to Florence. Her mother wanted her to stay at home, shine in society, raise a family and make a good marriage. Nursing was not a job for a young, wealthy lady.

¹⁷ Woodham-Smith 1955, p. 22

¹⁸ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 17

¹⁹ Nixon 2011, p. 6

²⁰ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, pp. 27-29

3.3.1 Cassandra

The role of being a young lady in genteel society was making Florence more and more unhappy. She was a victim of class and lifestyle and felt like leading an empty existence in a gilded cage.²¹

In her novel *Cassandra* (1852), Florence wrote about the situation of women of her class. Maybe it was an attack on the Victorian family,²² because in Victorian society women were expected to make a good marriage and raise a family. So, marriage, at this time, was the only escape. She criticised the useless lives to which middle-class women were consigned. Florence is also seen in context with women in England in the last half of the nineteenth century who fought for women's rights so that they could enter the world of education and work.²³

The novel is a reflection of Florence's own feelings and experiences as a daughter of a wealthy family with remarkably intellectual gifts, who was very ambitious to follow her call to become a nurse for many years and who finally refused to do what her parents and sister wanted.²⁴

The novel ends with the following line, in which Florence calls for an awakening:

*"Awake, ... all ye that sleep, awake."
"The time is come", she says, "when women must do something more than tend the
'domestic heart'."*²⁵

Even many years later, *Cassandra* has been, and still is an inspirational piece of writing for many feminists and representatives of the women's rights movement.²⁶

²¹ Nixon 2011, pp. 5-7

²² <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jan/29/featuresreviews.guardianreview35>

²³ Stark 1979, p. 14

²⁴ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/jan/29/featuresreviews.guardianreview35>

²⁵ Stark 1979, p. 14

²⁶ Nixon 2011, p. 7

3.3.2 Shattered Dreams

Not following her dreams not only frustrated her, it also took a toll on her health. She had serious depressions and suffered nervous collapses until she was able to live her dream to serve people. Florence started to study secretly in her room. She studied Blue Books, hospital reports, got up before dawn and wrote during the night by candlelight. She was given reading material by close friends about hospitals and her notebooks were filled with a mass of facts. Florence wrote notebooks about sanitary conditions, which was to make her the first pioneer and expert in Europe.²⁷

3.3.3 Relationships

Florence had several relationships and marriage proposals, but refused them all and chose not to marry. About the philanthropist and poet Richard Monckton Milnes, the man she had come closest, she wrote in a private note:

*'I have an intellectual nature which requires satisfaction and that I find in him. I have a moral and active nature that requires satisfaction and that I would find in his life [...] I could be satisfied to spend a life with him combining our different powers in some great object. I could not satisfy this nature by spending a life in making society and arranging domestic things.'*²⁸

On her 30th birthday, Florence wrote in her diary:

*'I am 30, the age at which Christ began his mission. Now, no more childish things, nor more vain things, no more love, no more marriage.'*²⁹

Florence decided to dedicate her life to nursing.

²⁷ Woodham-Smith 1955, pp. 53-55

²⁸ Nixon 2011, p. 10

²⁹ *ibid.* p. 10

3.4 Kaiserswerth

After all these family struggles, Florence felt exhausted, unhappy and was sent abroad with family friends, Selina and Charles Bracebridge. During the winter of 1847, she met Sidney Herbert and his wife Liz in Rome and this was the beginning of a great friendship. Through Herbert and Liz, Florence met a circle of influential and intellectual people who were also intensely interested in hospital reform. Florence had already an enormous mass of information and facts on hospitals and public health.³⁰

As part of their tour, they travelled through Germany, where Florence visited Kaiserswerth for her first time, which she had known from a friend. The Institution of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine, in Düsseldorf, was an Institution for Practical Training of Deaconesses, including the support and care of a hospital, Infant and Industrial Schools, and a penal institution for women. So, the Institution was a religious community led by Theodore Fliedner, a Protestant pastor, and his wife. Florence stayed a fortnight and it was just a visit of inspection and was shown the work of the Institution. Her parents did not know anything about her side trip to Kaiserswerth. But after this visit, Florence felt happy after a long time again.³¹

Back in England, and after further struggles with her parents, Florence was finally allowed her training as a nurse at Kaiserswerth. But her mother forbade her to tell anyone of her purpose. So, she returned to Kaiserswerth for three months and learned about medicines, how to dress wounds, observed amputations, worked with children and cared for the sick and dying.³²

In a letter from 1896, Florence wrote about the Institution of Kaiserswerth, that nursing there was nothing. The hygiene conditions were horrible and this hospital was certainly the worst part of Kaiserswerth.³³

³⁰ Woodham-Smith 1955, p. 58

³¹ *ibid.* pp. 65-66

³² *ibid.* p. 72

³³ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 433

Furthermore, Florence experienced training with the Sisters of Charity in Oudinot, Paris, and obtained an authorization which allowed her to work in their hospitals and institutions, and later she received training with the Sisters of Mercy in Dublin.³⁴

3.5 The Crimean War

The Crimean War (1853 – 1856) was a turning point in British history. It was a conflict between Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and Tsarist Russia for dominance in the eastern Mediterranean.

Furthermore, three aspects that are often mentioned together with the Crimean War:

- *The Charge of Light Brigade*
- *Maladministration in the British army and*
- *Florence Nightingale*³⁵

The main causes of the Crimean War were the conflict over the holy land, Jerusalem and the fact that many of the prominent European countries were looking to expand their power and influence over areas that were left during the fall of the Ottoman Empire.³⁶

It was during the Crimean War that the public was informed by the media about the conditions at the front. The newspaper reports documented about the suffering of soldiers, the spread of diseases and the lack of nurses.

3.5.1 Florence Goes to War

'I am now in the heyday of my power.'

Florence Nightingale

³⁴ Woodham-Smith 1955, pp. 77-79

³⁵ <http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk/cms/index.php/crimean-war/introduction38>

³⁶ <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/battles/crimea/>

Sidney Herbert, the secretary of state for war and long-time friend of Florence Nightingale, wrote and asked her to lead a group of women nurses under government sponsorship to the military hospital in Scutari, Turkey. Officially, women were not allowed to serve in the army.³⁷

In a letter, Herbert wrote to her, it says: *“There is but one person in England that I know of who would be capable of organizing such a scheme...”*³⁸

Florence Nightingale accepted the offer to work as the ‘Superintendent of female nursing in the English General Military Hospitals in Turkey.’

Florence faced a new challenge. Together with 38 selected women of voluntary nurses from religious institutes and hospitals, she left for Crimea in 1854.³⁹

3.5.2 Scutari

When Florence and her team of nurses arrived in the British military hospitals in Scutari, they discovered poor hospital conditions. There was a lack of all kinds of essentials like food, cooking utensils, blankets, beds and furniture and the place was infested with fleas and rats. Furthermore, the arrival of women at a military institution establishment was seen as a serious threat so it was difficult to win their respect by following their orders.⁴⁰

For the nurses it was hard to receive the male doctor’s respect because some of them never accepted the presence of women. So Florence decided that neither she nor any woman of her team of nurses would enter a ward or attend a patient without approval of the medical officer. It was the aim of Florence to introduce the female nurses to the male staff of the military hospital and for that purpose, discipline was necessary amongst her team. So they also did housework like doing the laundry, sewing and cooking and everything that which domestic servants had to do.⁴¹

³⁷ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, pp. 80-81

³⁸ Nixon 2011, p. 13

³⁹ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, pp. 81-82

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p. 83

⁴¹ Nixon 2011, p. 14

Fortunately, the situation changed: During the Battle of Inkerman, masses of wounded and sick soldiers were brought to Scutari and doctors asked Florence and her team for help.⁴²

3.6 The Need for Reformation

The sanitary situation in British military hospitals was miserable: patients were lying on the floor, the boards under their beds were rotten, the floors were dirty, it was dark and smelly. Most deaths were caused by infections and illness rather than by battlefield injuries. The health of the soldiers was very poor and many suffered from malnutrition, scurvy, frostbites as well as from cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea.

Therefore, Florence defined the medical and sanitary needs for the hospitals and patients. For convalescents, she and her staff launched extra diets of beef broth, custard and other kinds of foods. They provided patients with many things such as clean eating utensils, shirts, sheets, blankets and purchased operating tables and screens, set up a laundry and cleaned linen.⁴³

The following excerpt of a private letter written by Florence Nightingale to Sidney Herbert on 25th of November 1854 gives a good insight into the sanitary situation in the hospitals in Scutari:

Dear Mr. Herbert

(1) It appears that in these Hospitals, the Purveyor considers washing both of linen & of the men a minor 'detail' - & during the three weeks we have been here, through our remonstrances have been performed for the men either of body linen or of bed-linen except by ourselves [...]. The dirty shirts were collected yesterday for the first time, & on Monday it is said that they are to be washed, - & we are organizing a little Washing Establishment of our own – for the bandages &c. When we came here, there was neither basin, towel, nor soap in the Wards, nor any means of personal cleanliness for the Wounded except the following.

Thirty were bathed every night by Dr. MacGrigor's orders in slipper-baths, but this does not do more than include a washing once in eighty days for 2300 men.

⁴² Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 83

⁴³ *ibid.* pp. 86-91

The consequences to all this are Fever, Cholera, Gengrene, Lice, Bugs, Fleas - & may be Erysipelas – from the using of one sponge among many wounds. [...]

(2) The fault here is, not with the Medical Officers, but in the separation of the department which affords every necessary supply, except medicines, to them - & in the insufficient supply of minor officers in the Purveying Department under Mr. Wreford, the Purv'r Gen'l, as well as in the inevitable delay in obtaining supplies, occasioned by the existence of one single Interpreter only, who is generally seen booted.

[...]

(7) Two or three hundred Stump Pillows, ditto Arm Slings, ditte Paddings for Splints – besides other Medical Appliances are being weekly manufactured & given out by us -& no provision appeared to have been made for these things before. [...]

Yours ever truly

Florence Nightingale

*P.S. Lord Napier & the Visitors generally remark that the Hospital is improved since we came. [...]*⁴⁴

Several reports from *The Times* newspaper and also letters as the one just mentioned prove the fact that Florence and her nurses improved hospital conditions and brought about a remarkable change. In another letter to Sydney Herbert, she wrote about the improved conditions in the hospitals: For example, she stated that there had been a kitchen for extra-diets; that the wards had been cleaned with mops that they handed out, 2000 shirts and also had organized washing; patients were provided beds to recover; widows and soldiers' wives provided their help too and supported nurses in preparing wards for 800 wounded soldiers which for Florence was one of the most important goals to reach.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, pp. 88-89

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp. 94-95



Fig. 2: *Improved conditions in the military hospital of Scutari, Turkey*

It is also important to mention that Florence used her own financial resources to equip the hospitals with shirts, sheets, operating tables and reorganized Scutari Hospital.

3.6.1 Improving Hospital Standards

Despite all measures to improve hospital hygiene, the death rates were rising. It turned out that the hospital had been constructed on top of an open sewer, which had been blocked. A Scottish engineer flushed out the sewers and repaired everything. In the course of this, the death rates began to fall.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Nixon 2011, p. 16

3.6.2 Mary Seacole



Fig. 3: *Mary Seacole*

Seacole was born in 1805 in Jamaica. Mary learned nursing from her mother and was a 'doctress' who practised Afro-Caribbean medicine. Like Florence, Mary sailed for the Crimea to offer their assistance to help the soldiers of the British army and independently set up a general store and an 'unofficial' surgery, also known as the British Hotel where she took care of wounded soldiers. Because of the care she gave to the soldiers, Mary was also named Mother Seacole.

Mary had the same ambition and social engagement like Florence. That is why she was called black Nightingale.⁴⁷

After her death she sank mostly into oblivion, but she was a great Victorian woman in her own right.⁴⁸

3.7 Florence's Return to England

After her collapse from 'Crimean fever' and after struggling several weeks between life and death, Florence recovered from her illness and turned back to England in 1856. Florence's influence in Scutari went beyond nursing care. She provided psychological care for soldiers, wrote letters of condolences to relatives and sent money to widows. The soldiers praised Florence for her care and commitment. Florence had a high reputation among the Royals; Queen Victoria and Prince Albert

⁴⁷ Buss 2011, p. 99

⁴⁸ <http://www.florence-nightingale.co.uk/cms/index.php/mary-seacole>

were deeply impressed by her accomplishments. Songs and poems were written about her and the image of Florence appeared as ceramic figurines on souvenirs.⁴⁹

3.7.1 The Lady with the Lamp



Florence Nightingale is known as the Lady with the Lamp. Also at night, nursing doesn't stop for her. So, whenever Florence was walking through the corridors at Scutari at night, she was always carrying a Turkish lantern to take a look at the suffering wounded soldiers.⁵⁰

Fig. 4: The Lady with the Lamp in the Military Hospital at Scutari

3.7.2 Florence's Life Work

The public attention gave Florence influence and power and the experiences at the Crimean war gave her drive and knowledge. At Scutari, Florence improved the sanitary conditions, saved thousands of lives of the British army, and prevented the rising of Crimea's death rate.⁵¹

3.7.2.1 Health Reform

Florence was a brilliant health reformer. After her great breakthrough, she knew how to use public attention. Through Queen Victoria, Florence got the monarch's support for Royal Commission and worked with Sidney Herbert, the sanitary expert Dr.

⁴⁹ Nixon 2011, pp. 19-21

⁵⁰ Bostridge 2008, p. 541

⁵¹ Nixon 2011, pp. 21-22

Sutherland and the statistician Dr. William Farr. Florence had an enormous collection of letters, reports and publications and submitted her own confidential report.⁵²

3.7.2.2 Statistics

Florence was a passionate statistician and used it to improve health care. She used data from British army files to illustrate, that most of the death were caused by diseases and not from wounds. Florence called these diagrams 'coxcombs'- it was the first pie chart.⁵³ Furthermore, Florence was the first woman member of The Royal Statistical Society.

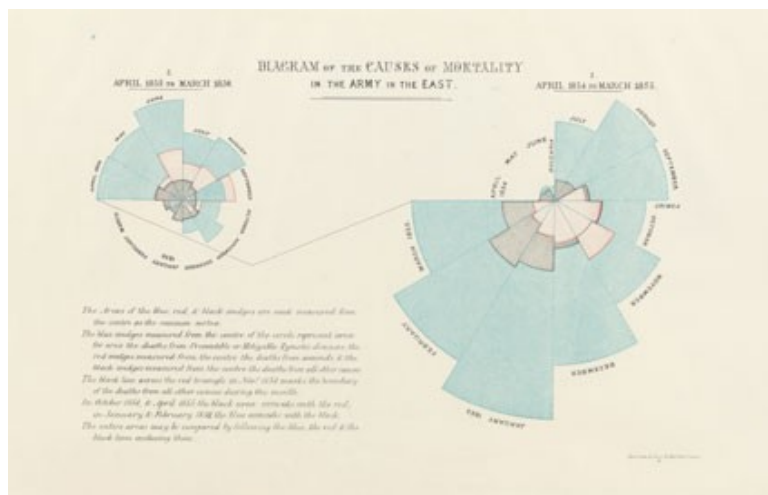


Fig. 5: Diagram of the Causes of Mortality

3.7.2.3 India

After the Crimean War Florence's attention turned to the British army in India and she continued to monitor the progress of the Army Sanitary Commission. She and her collaborators began collecting data, facts and information. The outcome was a report about *Observations on the Sanitary State of the Army In India*. In this report Florence proved that soldiers were exposed to:

⁵² Nixon 2011, p. 21

⁵³ Plichta et al, 2009, p. 1

- *alcoholism,*
- *unsanitary barracks,*
- *poor water supply,*
- *primitive drainage and*
- *bad hospitals*⁵⁴

Furthermore, she realized, that it was essential to improve the health situation of the whole local population and not only the health situation of the Indian army.⁵⁵

3.7.2.4 *The Nightingale Training School*

In honour of Florence during the Crimean War, £45,000 had been raised through public subscriptions. In 1857 a fund was set up and the money was used to establish *The Nightingale Training School* at St. Thomas' Hospital in London. Furthermore, the fund was also used to support a number of initiatives aimed at the improvement of nursing and their standards. Today, the fund continues to be managed by a Council.⁵⁶

Alumni of the Nightingale Training School became matrons of hospitals worldwide and carried on the reform of nursing in hospitals, workhouses and armed forces. Later on, the foundation of *King's College Hospital* followed and the training scheme for districted nurses was set up.

Anyway, Florence greatest attribution was to announce nursing as a respectable profession for women.⁵⁷

3.8 Notes and publications

⁵⁴ Nixon 2011, p. 23

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p. 23

⁵⁶ <http://www.thenightingalefund.org.uk>

⁵⁷ Nixon 2011, pp. 24-25

Florence was also a remarkable writer and has written over 200 books, pamphlets and 14,000 letters. She wrote on different subjects such as religion, sociology, philosophy, sanitation and army hygiene, hospital administration, statistics, and about the Indian land reform.⁵⁸ Her most important book, *Notes on Nursing – what it is and what it is not*, was published in 1860, and is a bestseller still today.

Notes on Nursing is not only a manual to teach nurses, it should be a book to support ordinary women to care for their families. She wrote that the use of fresh air, light, warmth, cleanliness, quiet and diet food is as important as medicine in order to cure their patient's symptoms and needs.⁵⁹ So, good care should be an interaction of that. Even today, books for modern nursing are based on the works of Florence Nightingale.

3.8.1 Honours & Awards

Florence received honours from all around the world. In 1883, Florence was the first recipient of the Royal Red Cross Medal for her work in the Crimea War at Scutari. Furthermore, in 1907, she was the first woman who received the Order of Merit presented by King Edward VII, and in the following year, she was granted the Freedom of the City of London. Finally, at that time Florence was recognized across the world for her pioneering work in public health.⁶⁰

3.9 Her Final Years

In 1865, Florence moved to a small house near Park Lane in London and lived there for the rest of her life. Her closest friends and supporter died and Florence often felt lonely.

'My friends drop off one by one, and I hang on...'

Florence Nightingale

⁵⁸ Nixon 2011, p. 26

⁵⁹ Nightingale 1969, p. 3-4

⁶⁰ Vicinus & Nergaard 1990, p. 438

She remained an invalid, lost her eyesight and her memory began to fail.

On August 13, 1910 Florence fell asleep and did not wake again. She was buried in the family grave at East Wellow, Hampshire.⁶¹



Fig. 6: The last photo of Florence Nightingale before she dies

⁶¹ Woodham-Smith 1955, pp. 428-429

4. Conclusion

In this paper I tried to show how important Florence Nightingale was in the reformation of hygiene and medical standards. Her leading role as a nurse resulted in lower death rates among soldiers and the improvement of sanitary conditions in general. Furthermore, coming from a wealthy family background, she established nursing as a respectable profession for women, hence working against the boundaries of social class. Through her social commitment and her strong impulse to help the poor she not only saved thousands of lives but also achieved a revolutionary change in 19th century society. Her resistance against social conventions in terms of social class or gender roles made possible to achieve great prestige. Furthermore, it made her a role model for other women and future nurses.

It was also through Nightingale's popularity that other women became encouraged to pursue medical careers. For example, Elizabeth Blackwell (1821 – 1910) - the first female medical doctor in the United States of America - was inspired by Florence Nightingale and her pioneering work. Furthermore, it was through Elizabeth Blackwell's influence that Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836 – 1917) studied medicine and also became a female pioneer in the medical field and driving force for women's education in England.⁶²

Florence always recognized the need to help other people and acted accordingly. Today, looking at other parts of our world, there is still a need to improve the health system including medical or hygiene standards. If there were more people with such a high degree of social commitment, everybody would have the chance for equal medical care regardless of health determinants.

⁶² Chung 2010, pp. 29-30

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