Nightingale continued her training by visiting nursing facilities abroad. Through her widening circle of friends and professional acquaintances, knowledge of her interest in nursing grew. In 1853, her friend Elizabeth Herbert announced that the Institution for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Distressed Circumstances needed a superintendent. The charity hospital was perfectly proper, as Nightingale noted, with "no Surgeon Students or Improper Patients there at all" (Florence, 70). The women of Nightingale’s family raised their familiar complaints, but W.E.N. could bear no more weeping and raging. While Florence negotiated her appointment, her father retreated to the Athenaeum Club and drafted a note to Parthe. “Having come to the resolution that it is entirely beyond your mental strength to give up interference in your sister’s affairs and being equally sure that your health cannot stand the strain,” he said, “we advise you to retire from London and take your books and country occupations till her proceedings are settled.” W.E.N.’s resolve failed, and the letter was never sent. Upon reflection, he decided that instead of chastising his older daughter, he would liberate his younger one. Acting on just the plan that Nightingale would advocate in Suggestions, W.E.N. gave her financial independence—£500 per year, even more than the Duke of ———’s daughter.

In August 1853, Nightingale began her work at the gentlewoman’s institution on Upper Harley Street, London. The professional advancement was limited, but the administrative experience was illuminating. She raised standards for general cleaning and housekeeping. She installed more efficient facilities, placing hot-water spigots on each floor. She drew up new contracts for medicine and groceries, much to the institution’s financial benefit. She battled the hospital’s committee until it agreed to take in women of all religions. In short, she professionalized a poorly administered charity run by well-meaning amateurs. Perhaps her most important lesson concerned the institution’s politics. She wrote her father in December 1853 that “when I entered into service here, I determined that, happen what would, I never would intrigue among the Committee. Now I perceive that I do all my business by intrigue. I propose in private to A, B, or C the resolution I think A, B, or C most capable of carrying in committee, and then leave it to them, and I always win” (Life, 1:135).

In her professional and private life, Nightingale had learned expediency and pragmatism. With her family, that meant summoning the discipline to maintain her hard-won independence. Mary Clarke Mohl chided Nightingale for not living with her family while they were in