

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

AN INTRODUCTION TO HER
LIFE AND FAMILY

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FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

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while conducting, in some cases pioneering, practical empirical research.

Throughout, Nightingale's theoretical work was integrated with practical application, consistent with the Enlightenment tradition. (The very term "social science" originated in the French Revolution, to describe the intellectual foundation needed for the "social art" that would produce a better society.) Nightingale was acutely aware that knowledge did not apply itself, that the right recommendations from a royal commission would be useless without an implementation policy and a media strategy to promote it. Thus she, with her team of collaborators, always worked out a strategy for application along with the substantive conclusions.

Nightingale herself was a formidable political actor, although she confined her role to the backroom. She never spoke in public although she wrote numerous letters to the editor, feature articles for newspapers and scholarly articles for journals. Later in life she wrote letters of endorsement for (a very select list) of political candidates (reproduced in *Society and Politics*). She knew how to threaten a recalcitrant minister or government official with bad publicity, knew the circulation of the various news and opinion outlets and governed her choices accordingly. Early in her reform career she herself briefed witnesses for her royal commissions. She understood the important role of public servants, variously recruiting them to her causes or working out ways to outmanoeuvre them. With her team, she agonized over the appointment of the right people for the royal commission or government department in question. She drafted terms of reference herself to make sure that they would be adequate. The Nightingale method will become clear in the material to come, as correspondence, draft policies and memoranda are presented along with the published political work. The introductions and annotations will show how skillfully she interwove analysis and application.

The very backward state of medicine as a whole, as well as nursing, prevailing in Nightingale's time must be understood as context. Medical doctors were educated, respectable men when there were very few trained nurses at all, and most were disreputable, ill paid and often drunk. Yet very little was known of the causes of most diseases and treatment was limited accordingly. For cancer there was nothing but surgical removal of a, generally well-advanced, tumour. Chloroform was first used as an anaesthetic only in 1847. Leeches were still used to balance the humours (see early correspondence by Nightingale for

references). Water cures were prescribed; indeed both Nightingale and her father took several. Epidemics of cholera (1831-32, 1848-49, 1854, 1863), typhus and smallpox (1847) killed large numbers and threatened many more. The fact that cholera was spread by water was only published in 1849 by John Snow, whose map in the 1854 cholera epidemic located the infamous pump at Broad Street as a major source. As will be noted later in discussing Nightingale's approach to health care, the great advances in medical science, such as the discovery of specific bacilli, postdate her own writing and practice.

Thematic Organization

Nightingale's writing covers such a range of topics, with likely quite different readers in the different areas, that the decision was made early on to organize the *Collected Works* thematically rather than by the usual classification by type of work (books, essays, letters) in chronological order. Chronological publication of letters would have resulted in unwieldy volumes, for Nightingale kept up work on most of her great range of topics in most years. The result is that some letters have to be split between volumes, but this seemed to be a reasonable price to pay to have coherent volumes with thorough annotations on the people and events pertaining to them. All the letters can be consulted exactly as they were written in the electronic text.

All of Nightingale's theoretical and practical work was informed by a very particular, even singular, religious faith. This is true of her calling to be a nurse, her heading the nursing team in the Crimean War and all her subsequent years of work to reorganize society. Accordingly, it is no coincidence that the first substantive section of this *Collected Works* presents her spirituality and theological views, beginning (in *Spiritual Journey*) with her biblical annotations, sermons and deeply personal reflections. *Theology* presents her more academic analyses, essays, correspondence, her recommendations for a children's edition of the Bible and some excerpts from her reading notes. *Mysticism and Eastern Religions* gives Nightingale's comments on and translations of the medieval mystics, her *Letters from Egypt*, correspondence and notes on Eastern religions and other religious writing.

The only area of Nightingale's work which did not see successful publication, incidentally, was her religious writing, and this was not for lack of trying. As with the rest of her material, Nightingale sought practical influence; her *Suggestions for Thought* was intended to provide

On her sister's marriage Nightingale considered that she had done well, on balance, but her words fall short of being a ringing endorsement. Remarking that her sister was:

Very fond of Sir Harry Verney, which is the next best thing. He is old and rich, which is a disadvantage. He is active, has a will of his own and four children, ready-made, which is an advantage. Unmarried life, at least in our class, takes everything and gives nothing back to this poor earth. It owns no risk—it gives no pledge to life. So, on the whole, I think these reflections tend to approbation.²⁹

First Work in Nursing: Harley Street (1853-54)

Nightingale made a visit to the Daughters (often called Sisters) of Charity of St-Vincent-de-Paul in Paris just prior to her taking up her first, and only civilian, appointment as a nurse in August 1853. The Kaiserswerth and Paris experiences led to this appointment as superintendent of the "Institution for Ill Gentlewomen," as she called it,³⁰ 1 Upper Harley Street.³¹ Nightingale's father made the appointment possible by providing her with an annual income of £500, paid quarterly, in advance, thus permitting her to establish a separate residence. (The amount was raised on her sister's marriage in 1858, when her father undertook to pay all Nightingale's maintenance costs, so that the allowance could go entirely for her causes.) She herself received no salary, nor did she for her later work in Crimea, or anywhere else for that matter (she did make some money on book royalties).

Nightingale's friend Elizabeth Herbert (1822-1911) was on the management committee of the Institution for Ill Gentlewomen and supported her innovations in the only administrative experience Nightingale had before going to the Crimea. Nightingale learned fast and, while in the position only for slightly more than a year, was already looking for a greater challenge. She instituted practical reforms that made the work of the nurses physically easier. At the same time she raised the standards for care. The institution gave her her first experience of sectarian religious strife, the prelude to much worse in the Crimea. Also during this

29 Letter to Lady McNeill 17 July 1858, London Metropolitan Archives H1/ST/NC3/SU104.

30 Printed letterhead gives the name Establishment for Gentlewomen during Illness. Private Collection of Tyndale Bisco.

31 The location is now 73 Harley Street, where a plaque notes that Nightingale left for the Crimean War from it.

period there was a cholera outbreak in London. Nightingale nursed women patients at the Middlesex Hospital, notably "Soho outcasts."

The Crimean War (1854-56)

The Crimean War was fought between Russia and Turkey, with Britain, France and, later, Sardinians from the emerging Italian republic joining Turkey against Russia. British and French troops invaded the Crimea 14 September 1854 and the Battle of Alma was fought on 20 September. Wounded men from the Battle of Balaclava, a great but costly victory for the British, were arriving at the Scutari Barrack Hospital (across the strait from Constantinople) just as the Nightingale group did. The Crimean War was the first war for British troops other than colonial expeditions in forty years and the Army was ill-prepared. Large numbers died, although probably not more proportionately than in the Napoleonic Wars. This war, however, was the first one with specialized "war correspondents," with photographers as well as war artists. The London *Times* correspondent drew the unsavoury comparison of the lack of women nurses aiding British war efforts compared with their French allies and their Russian enemy. The French had fifty Sisters of Charity and the Russians, about whom less was known, also had nursing sisters. The War Office, in its preparations for the war, had considered sending women nurses but rejected this as radical. *Times* coverage asked why Britain had no Sisters of Charity. A wealthy, evangelical philanthropist, Lady Maria Forester (1819-94), asked Nightingale to lead a small group of nurses to the Crimea, and offered to supply funding for them. By coincidence Elizabeth Herbert, from whom Nightingale had to seek release from her appointment at Harley Street, was the wife of the Secretary of State at War, Sidney Herbert (1810-61), also Nightingale's friend from the Rome visit. Nightingale's letter to Mrs Herbert crossed with Sidney Herbert's official letter asking her to take a team of nurses to the war. Nightingale made her arrangements within days, her friends interviewing applicants while she organized supplies.

Although she was assured that the Army was well supplied, Nightingale took the precaution of acquiring food, medical supplies, linen, clothing and other basic items in Marseilles en route to Scutari. She often used her own money, which was sometimes reimbursed by the War Office; the *Times* collected £7000, which it put to her disposal. Nightingale's first appointment was at Scutari, in Turkey, some dis-