from the cholera epidemic that was then terrorising London: 'You [the Church of England, with which Parthe was more aligned than Florence] pray against “plague, pestilence, and famine”, when God has been saying more loudly every day this week that those who live ten feet above a pestilential river will die, and those who live forty feet above will live.'

Her notion that cholera was associated with sewage was not yet widely accepted, even though Dr John Snow proved it just two weeks after she wrote those words by taking the handle off the contaminated Broad Street water pump and stopping the Soho cholera epidemic dead in its tracks. It may seem strange that the woman who held such relatively advanced views could have failed to see three months later that the poisonous gases from the blocked sewers, trapped inside the unventilated Barrack Hospital, were killing her patients by the thousand. But her experience in the London cholera epidemic was of no use to her, because not many of the patients at Scutari died with the unmistakable and dreadful symptoms of cholera.

Destiny also took unfair advantage of her at Scutari by sending her patients with symptoms ghastly enough to distract attention from anything they caught after arriving in her hospital. Many of them were starved and frost-bitten, so that it seemed a miracle that they were alive at all. Their limbs were blackened and mortified; some had lost their hands and feet to frost-bite and their bones protruded from their disintegrating extremities. Long-untended wounds were infested with maggots. It was easy to believe the doctors’ view that they were already beyond recovery.

These sufferers whom she failed to rescue were the ‘common soldier’, an object of veneration to her when she was at Scutari and central to many philanthropists’ ideas of social improvement. She was continually in trouble for spending too much time on this brute and not enough on the officers. One of the most hostile senior officers complained to the Commander-in-Chief that she habitually neglected her ‘equals or superiors’; ‘Whatever philanthropy she may have on a great scale, she does not appear to be amiable in ordinary