

## Who Was Florence Nightingale?

A Lecture in the HBLL Omnibus Series

March 8, 2010

Betsy Hopkins

Co-curator, "Florence Nightingale: Life and Legacy"

Nursing and Physiology Librarian

Harold B. Lee Library

Brigham Young University

[betsy\\_hopkins@byu.edu](mailto:betsy_hopkins@byu.edu)

### Introduction

Welcome and thank you for coming to this Omnibus lecture. The Omnibus lecture series is sponsored by the L. Tom Perry Special Collections and highlights materials held in their collections.

As you all know, I curated the Florence Nightingale exhibit currently on display in the Level Three Gallery, with my colleagues Russ Taylor in the library and Glenda Christiaens in the College of Nursing. I have been fascinated by Florence Nightingale and have greatly enjoyed my study of her life and work over the last year.

Florence Nightingale is known to most people today as the founder of modern nursing and the "lady with a lamp." She also made significant contributions to a number of other fields, including public health and statistics. Nightingale's life is well documented, partly because she was such a prolific writer. There are 14-15,000 letters that exist today, and over 100 books and reports. According to a recent biographer, "writing was Florence Nightingale's lifeblood."<sup>1</sup>

Today I would like to share some things I have learned about the person that Florence Nightingale was, using the items in the Nightingale exhibit as a framework. It is impossible to divide Florence the person from her work, but instead of cataloging her accomplishments, I would like to address some of what her work says about who she was.

One of the questions I have asked throughout my work on the exhibit is: What was it that allowed this woman to make such an impact on the world? I believe it was a combination of her family and her personal characteristics. During this hour, I hope to give you a better understanding of both.

### Photograph

Let's start with what Florence Nightingale looked like. An original 1856 print of this photo is owned by Special Collections. It is light sensitive, so we have a facsimile in the exhibit. In 1856, after Nightingale returned to England from the Crimean War, Queen Victoria requested that she sit for this photograph. This is one of approximately fifteen different photographs of Florence Nightingale that exist today.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bostridge, p. 6.

## Biography

I'd like to present a biographical sketch of Nightingale, to provide context for the discussion of her personality and the items in the exhibit.

Florence Nightingale was born in 1820 in Florence, Italy, while her parents, Frances Smith and William Edward Shore Nightingale, were enjoying an extended honeymoon. The Nightingales were members of England's upper class and raised Florence and her older sister, Parthenope, on their two country estates in Derbyshire and Hampshire. During a time when girls were usually educated only in domestic skills, Nightingale received an extensive classical education from her father. She and Parthenope studied Greek, Latin, Italian, French, mathematics, history, science, philosophy, geography, and a new discipline called social science.

At age 16, Nightingale received the first of three calls to God's service. She recorded in her journal "God spoke to me and called me to His service." The Nightingale family expressed strong objections to Nightingale's pursuit of nursing, which at the time was considered a menial job for lower-class women. They would have preferred that she assume the conventional role of Victorian, upper-class women by marrying well, bearing children, and becoming heavily engaged in social activities. Nightingale persisted, however. She was so convinced of her calling from God that she rejected at least two marriage proposals in her twenties in order to devote herself entirely to His work. The first was from her cousin, Henry Nicholson. The second was from Richard Monckton Milnes, a highly eligible gentleman who did in fact tempt Florence. The decision was not made easily, as Florence obviously enjoyed his company and struggled when she saw him after the final refusal. (He courted her for 8 years.) In the end, though, Florence realized that she could not complete her life's work while also fulfilling the responsibilities of a married Victorian woman.

Her formal training in nursing included three months at the Institution of Deaconesses at Kaiserwerth, Germany, where she learned current treatments and observed nursing administration. In 1853, at age 33, she was appointed superintendent at the Establishment for Gentlewomen during Illness in London. In this, her first position working directly with patients, Nightingale made many improvements to nursing care and practiced her administrative skills.

In 1854, Nightingale was appointed head of a contingent of nurses sent to care for soldiers involved in the Crimean War. She faced many challenges, including lack of food and supplies, resistance from some physicians, bureaucratic barriers, and unsanitary conditions. Nightingale worked long hours as she cared for ill and wounded soldiers, supervised nurses, obtained necessary supplies, wrote reports, and completed other administrative tasks. With help from a Sanitary Commission sent from England, Nightingale effected changes in hospital sanitation that contributed to a significant reduction in soldiers' mortality rates from illness. Reports of her dedicated work reached England, where she became a national hero. Based on these reports, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow immortalized Nightingale as the "lady with a lamp" in his poem "Santa Filomena."

In 1856, Nightingale returned to England and took up permanent residence in London. She spent the rest of her life working to enact reform of army sanitation, hospitals, and a number of other public

health efforts, including sanitation in the British colonies. Nightingale also made significant contributions to nursing education by founding the Nightingale School of Nursing in 1860. After many of her political connections had left office, she lobbied for public health in India. She emphasized clean water and sanitation with the British leaders of India at the time. Most of her work after the Crimea was accomplished through meeting with politicians, gathering and sharing statistics, and writing reports and letters. In-person meetings were limited after 1857, however, when Nightingale declared herself an invalid after suffering continuing effects from a fever she caught in the Crimea in 1855. She suffered chronic illness for the rest of her life. Her international renown, contributions in the Crimea, and subsequent health reform elevated nursing to a respectable profession. Nightingale died in 1910 at the age of 90.

## Family Background and Legacy

There is one additional point I would like to make before we look at specific items from the exhibit. Nightingale was shaped by her family, as we all are. She was born into a family that was familiar with politics and social reform. On both sides, her progenitors were nonconformists. Her own immediate family was well connected, and growing up she became acquainted with many powerful people. This provided her with a context in which to work her own reform, as well as the connections necessary to enact those reforms.

Florence's mother was Frances Smith, and her father was William Edward Shore Nightingale. WEN took the Nightingale name as an inheritance from an uncle, and it was this inheritance that was entailed away from the Nightingale sisters. Both the Smith and the Shore families were Unitarian, dissenting from the Anglican Church. As such, both Fanny Smith and William Edward Shore Nightingale believed that educating girls was just as important as educating boys. Fanny's own girlhood education was unusual for the time.

On the Smith side, Florence's maternal grandfather William Smith worked closely with William Wilberforce (whom you might know from the movie "Amazing Grace") to abolish slavery in Britain. William Smith also espoused animal rights. Florence had two single aunts on the Smith side who were reformers and politically active, particularly on the issue of equal rights for women. Florence's Aunt Patty was a friend of the early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. In addition, Florence's Uncle Adams was involved in animal rights.

Florence's Uncle Benjamin Smith lived a nonconformist life. He had four children with a milliner, who was in effect his common law wife. The Smiths and Nightingales never acknowledged the children, which included feminist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon. Upon his death another family was discovered.

Now, for the Nightingale family itself: The Nightingales owned two country estates, Lea Hurst in Derbyshire and Embley Park in Hampshire. Lea Hurst was smaller, and it was Florence's preferred home. It was a smaller neighborhood and she became involved in the lives of the villagers. Embley was larger, and therefore the Nightingales often entertained visitors there. Embley was just miles away from a home owned by the Palmerstons, and the two families became friends. Lord Palmerston was in

parliament and was Prime Minister for almost 10 years (1855-1865). Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Palmerston's nephew, was also illustrative for Florence, as a social and political reformer.

Another set of family friends useful to Florence were Charles and Selina Bracebridge. Nightingale traveled with them extensively in her twenties, and on one of those trips, the Bracebridges introduced Florence to her great friends Sidney and Elizabeth Herbert. Sidney Herbert was Secretary of War in 1854 and sent Florence to the Crimea. The Bracebridges traveled to the Crimea with Florence and were supportive of her in innumerable ways.

With that background on Florence and her family, let's move on to the exhibit items.

## Scutari Letter

This is the first of three Nightingale letters the library owns. This was written in January of 1856, from Scutari, Nightingale's location in the Crimean War. She had been in the Crimea for a year and two months. This particular letter is written to Major Willis and asks that a package of maps and books from Queen Victoria be sent from Balaklava to Scutari. Here is her signature.

The Crimean War began between Russia and the Ottoman Empire (now Turkey) because of disputes regarding control of religious sites in the Holy Land. France and Britain joined the war as allies of the Ottoman Empire. Most of the battles were fought on the Crimean peninsula, but Nightingale was stationed at the Barrack Hospital at Scutari. Balaklava, mentioned in the letter, is here.

For the first time, war correspondents sent information back to England quickly, so the public was aware of the events and conditions of the war. When the dreadful conditions of the wounded and ill soldiers were reported, Sidney Herbert, Florence's friend and also Secretary of War, approached her about leading a contingent of English nurses to help care for the soldiers. In the end, Florence went to the Crimea with a party of 38 nurses.

While in the Crimea, Nightingale wore a bracelet under her sleeve with hair from her father, mother, Parthenope, and her double cousin Shore. When she left England, Florence carried three letters: one from her mother, one from priest Henry Manning, and one from the suitor she refused, Richard Monckton Milnes.

This is a modern-day photograph of the Barrack Hospital at Scutari, where Nightingale and her nurses were based. Despite Nightingale's sanction from the Queen, medical personnel were hostile to the nursing party. The conditions truly were dreadful, with beds cramped together in long hallways, raw sewage on the floor, vermin running around, and lack of basic supplies. In her first months, Florence established a laundry (and provided linens for shirts and bedclothes, previously unchanged), a kitchen, and had the nurses sew stump pillows for the men. She directly nursed soldiers for 12 hrs per day, treating those most in need first, instead of officers (which went against tradition and culture), and taking the worst cases herself. In addition, she managed the entire nursing party, procured supplies, worked with army administrators, was in constant communication with Sidney Herbert and others at home, wrote letters home for the soldiers, and gathered recreational material for the soldiers. She often worked 20 hours each day.

Florence had ceased most of her direct nursing by summer 1855, except for night rounds, where she earned the moniker “lady with a lamp” because she would carry a Turkish lantern as she walked. She would walk the 4 miles of beds every night, stopping to talk with the men and provide comfort where needed.

While Nightingale was extremely popular with her patients, she was not always popular with her nurses. Divisions grew between the nurses, along religious and class lines. She had strict rules for the nurses: no drunkenness, no fraternization with the patients, direct obedience to medical personnel and discipline. All 38 nurses lived in three tower rooms in the Barrack Hospital, in very cramped quarters. Florence was never alone.

This woodcut was published in the Illustrated London News in February 1855. Nightingale became “lady with a lamp” to British public and government. This aided her subsequent reform efforts.

When she returned to England after the war had ended and all soldiers had returned also, she avoided parades and welcoming parties, choosing instead to walk across the fields to Lea Hurst and enter in a back door unnoticed.

What does this letter and Florence’s work in the Crimea show us about the type of person she was? She was attentive to every last detail. She worked incessantly to improve conditions for the soldiers (some might say to the detriment of her own health). She had considerable administrative skill, to manage so much all at once. She was attentive to each individual she nursed. She implemented organizational and systematic reforms, sometimes going outside of the army bureaucracy to get things done. She was very practical and extremely efficient. She was charismatic and inspiring to her patients but struggled with managing her nursing team.

Some biographers have written about the stress Florence was under at this time. I would like to introduce an aspect of this stress, as described in the Gill biography, that tells us about Florence:

*Forced intimacy with strangers placed Nightingale under stress. At Scutari the women were obliged to live very much on top of one another, and this was very difficult for her to endure since she had an almost obsessive need to be alone. At the same time, she had never in her life been without the company of family or close friends, and being among strangers was also unnerving. Both the need for solitude and the need for sympathy, by which she meant total, empathetic support, were at the core of Florence Nightingale’s being. As a child she never went to school. As an adult she opted out of social events as far as she was allowed, and her experience with group living and teamwork was limited. Accustomed to thinking and acting in isolation, Nightingale was far too passionate, too opinionated, too focused, and at the same time too erratic to be comfortable in a large group of strange women.<sup>2</sup>*

---

<sup>2</sup> Gill, p. 354.

This quote provides interesting insight into Florence's personality. She was used to isolation and solitude, and needed it every day, yet she also needed support from close friends. In the Crimea, she had the Bracebridges and then her Aunt Mai to provide support.

Although a national hero, she wanted to come home quietly and avoid a big to-do. Instead she wanted to get right to work.

When Nightingale returned to England, she took up residence in London and began working on her reform efforts. During this time, she published a number of books and reports.

## Notes on Nursing

The first edition of *Notes on Nursing*, Nightingale's most famous book, was not written for professional nurses. Instead, her audience was both domestic nurses and family members caring for sick relatives. The first edition was available either the last weeks of 1859 or the first weeks of 1860, and she published an expanded and revised edition later in 1860. This view of the table of contents demonstrates the wide-ranging topics Nightingale covered, from the environment of the patient to what observations are important for the nurse to make.

Florence was interested in nursing from a young age. Two stories from her childhood illustrate this interest—one where Florence nursed her dolls, and another where she nursed a local sheepdog with an injured leg. When Nightingale received her call to God's service in 1837, the call was vague and did not specify nursing. By 1845, though, she had settled on nursing as her life's work.

*Notes on Nursing* was published two years after she retired from public life and basically became a recluse. In 1857 Nightingale suffered a severe relapse of her Crimean fever, so severe that she thought she was going to die. She retired from public life and declared herself an invalid. Although partly motivated by her illness, it seems that she also wanted to focus on her work without being interrupted by the social expectations of her family and others.

Nightingale scholars and biographers have been fascinated by her decision to become an invalid, asking if she really was ill or if this became a method for manipulating the people around her. Scholars currently accept that Nightingale suffered from severe chronic brucellosis, a bacterial infection caught from drinking infected milk of goats or sheep. Here is a detailed description of the chronic symptoms:

*Then the bacterium may become an intracellular parasite, occasioning subsequent acute attacks, when the patient suffers agonizing pain in the joints and in the back, delirium, neurological damage, and severe depression. Recovery is slow, with frequent relapses; the patient is unable to eat or sleep and suffers a severe change in personality. An inability to move is common, because of the severe pain, and temporary paralysis is not rare.<sup>3</sup>*

In my opinion, there is no doubt that Florence was in fact seriously ill. However, I also believe that she felt driven to do her work, and that becoming a recluse or invalid allowed her to work uninterrupted by the social expectations of her family. It also demonstrates again her love of solitude. She published,

---

<sup>3</sup> Gill, p. 428.

maintained a large correspondence, and met with collaborators and others one-on-one for over 50 years after her return from the War.

On another note, Florence was able to pursue nursing and continue her work after the War only because of her family's generosity. Her father gave her an annual allowance, and even bought her a home in London when he refused to do so for himself and Fanny. She did not repay this generosity with time, however. For years, Florence would not see her family. I'll talk more in a minute about Florence's relationship with her family.

Nightingale's invalidism is certainly a fascinating and complex aspect of her character.

## Notes on Hospitals

*Notes on Hospitals* was originally published in 1859, and was almost completely rewritten for the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition in 1863. It is a collection of reports and other writings on hospital construction and design, and highlights her beliefs about adequate light, ventilation, spacing, and subdivision of the sick (all things that we take for granted in hospitals of our day).

Florence was interested in health care early. While traveling in Europe as a young woman, she visited hospitals and other similar institutions. This hospital diagram, included in *Notes on Hospitals*, shows a hospital in Paris that Nightingale thought of as a good example of her tenets for hospital design.

What does this tell us about Florence? There is no division between work and pleasure for Nightingale. While traveling for pleasure, she gathered information for her work. Also, *Notes on Nursing*, *Notes on Hospitals*, her religious and philosophical treatise *Suggestions for Thought*, and many reports were all published within a year or two around 1860. She was a dedicated writer and this extensive publishing continues her record of hard work started in the Crimea.

## Statistical Report

This statistical report was published in 1863, during this productive period in Florence's life. In 1839, Florence's cousin Fred Smith died on an exploratory expedition in Australia. The leader of the expedition, George Grey, later served as governor of New Zealand, and became concerned with Maori depopulation. He suggested that Nightingale conduct a study of mortality rates in aboriginal schools. This report is the result of that study. The report is full of statistical tables about hospitals and schools from a number of the British colonies.

This report is evidence of Florence's wide-ranging interests. She was interested in statistics, but also made contributions to the field. She standardized the statistics kept by hospitals in London, so they could be compared. She also made innovations in the visual presentation of statistics. On her return from the war, she presented mortality statistics to Queen Victoria. Florence thought that this subdivided pie chart diagram would help the Queen see what happened better than a list of numbers in a table. This is called the coxcomb diagram. Nightingale was the first woman inducted into the Royal Statistical Society of London, in 1860.

## Athena

And now we come to my favorite item in the exhibit and in my studies. This takes us back in time a little to the Crimean War and also Florence's life before the war. This book and its context tell us so many interesting things about Florence Nightingale and the person she was.

Florence fell critically ill in Balaclava in May 1855, with Crimean fever. Florence was working such long days and getting so little sleep that it's amazing to me that she didn't fall sick before then. It was this illness that she was to suffer from for the rest of her life. When her sister Parthenope learned that Florence was sick, she wrote and illustrated this charming story to cheer Florence up during her recovery. The story is a life history of Florence's pet owl, obtained from urchins at the Acropolis in Greece. Appropriately named Athena, the owl was Florence's companion and beloved pet for four years. Parthenope provides details about how Florence acquired Athena, and then tells a number of stories about the people and places Athena liked. Athena liked to hide in the library, as you see here. Florence carried her in her pocket, or on her shoulder, or on her head as you see in this illustration. Athena was a very courageous owl, and only showed fear once. A friend of the Nightingales had purchased a ceramic owl, with a hollow space for a candle. Athena couldn't bear to see her facsimile. Athena died a day or two before Florence left England for the Crimean War, and the family had the bird stuffed. As you can imagine, this was a busy and stressful time for Florence. Parthenope reports that Florence cried when Athena was placed in her hands and said "poor little beastie, it was odd how much I loved you." Remember, this was a momentous week for Florence—she was preparing to go to the Crimea. She had been calm and in control, until the death of her beloved pet.

Athena was an important part of Florence's life. She dreamed of the owl years later.

There are two copies of Athena the Owlet in the exhibit, one a lithograph printed in 1855 and the other a fine press edition from 1970.

## About the lithograph copy

The 1855 lithograph has mysterious origins. Scholars believe that Parthenope had her manuscript published privately, in a small print run. BYU's copy is one of three copies held in libraries in the US. There is one copy at British Library, one at Claydon House (the archives of the Verney family Parthenope married into), and I believe one at the Florence Nightingale Museum in London. There were five copies sold at auction between 1988 and 2004. It is definitely rare, but we know little else about its printing.

The 1855 lithograph also includes photographs of portraits of Florence, drawn by Parthenope. This is my favorite image of Florence, although it appears that she herself did not care for it. A friend wrote to her about a statuette, remarking that "*There are photographs of the statuette which (though it seems odd to say so) are more characteristic than the actual portraits, none of which but the 'owl' one, which you deprecate, give a real idea of what you were ten years ago.*"<sup>4</sup> This image was printed in a newspaper during the war, and it was then mass produced and hung in shop windows all over England.

---

<sup>4</sup> Cook, Vol 2, p. 469.



### About the fine press copy

In 1970 Grabhorn-Hoyem Press (fine printers in San Francisco) produced a fine press edition of *Athena*. They printed 300 copies, which sell online now for \$100-200. Grabhorn-Hoyem Press used BYU's copy of the 1855 lithograph. In fact, most of the Nightingale materials used in the exhibit came to BYU through a large purchase of Victorian materials in the late 1960s. David Magee was an antiquarian bookseller in San Francisco, who assembled the collection and was going to make the individual items available for sale. BYU ended up purchasing the entire catalog of Victorian materials. David Magee was the connection between BYU and Grabhorn-Hoyem. He also wrote an introduction for this fine press edition of *Athena*.

### What the *Athena* book tells us about Florence

What does this *Athena* book tell us about Florence? First, and perhaps most obviously, Florence was an animal lover. She had a number of pets throughout her life, and in her old age she was particularly attached to cats and birds.

Florence was in a difficult stage of her life when she acquired *Athena*. It was in 1850, on a voyage to Egypt and Greece with the Bracebridges. This was the second such voyage with the Bracebridges. The first was to Italy in 1847-1848. On this first trip, Florence grew to love the Sistine Chapel, and she kept copies of the Sistine frescoes in her room for the rest of her life. Both trips were taken to relieve the tensions in the Nightingale family.

In 1845, when she was 25, Florence had first expressed interest in pursuing nursing, by working with an elderly but energetic physician named Dr. Fowler at an infirmary just miles from Embley. The Nightingales refused to allow Florence this opportunity. The Nightingale family (particularly Fanny and Parthenope) objected to nursing on two counts: one, a career outside of the home ran contrary to the normal Victorian expectation for single women to remain involved with and loyal to the family. Two, nursing was a job for lower-class women, often drunk and prostitutes, or for religious women.

After this incident, Florence did not express her ambitions to her family, but she was still set on nursing as the avenue for answering God's call. She would wake early to read government reports and other information sent to her by her contacts.

And yet Florence felt that nursing was the way to answer God's call to her. Nightingale's struggle between answering her call and her family's disapproval led to years of guilt, stalling and sickness. Her health failed in 1847, as a direct result of her conflict with her family over nursing. At times, she experienced suicidal depression.

So, during these years of struggle, the Nightingales allowed Florence to travel with the Bracebridges. On the second trip, to Egypt and Greece, Florence was still depressed and of an unsettled mind. She acquired *Athena* in Greece, and then on the way home to England, the Bracebridges risked the anger of the Nightingales and took Florence to Kaiserwerth, a protestant institution for training deaconess nurses, where she stayed for two weeks. This visit helped buoy Nightingale's spirits and brought her back to herself. A sidenote about this voyage: Nightingale brought the novel *Shirley* by Charlotte Bronte with her, which shows that she stayed abreast of the literature of the time.

Florence later returned to Kaiserwerth for a longer stay of three months, and the family struggles finally came to an end in 1853 when WEN established Florence with an annual allowance of 500 pounds a year (worth \$46,000 today).

The family became quite enamored of Athena, particularly Parthenope. When Florence returned to Kaiserwerth, Athena stayed with Parthenope. An interesting incident occurred before this stay— Parthenope verbally attacked Florence to the point that Florence, usually so in control and unflappable, fainted. Despite the sisters' conflicts, Florence must have trusted that Parthenope would take good care of Athena. Florence's mother Fanny is often painted one-dimensionally as a roadblock to Florence. However, Fanny reached out to Florence when she was at Kaiserwerth, promising love and faith on behalf of the family.

Parthenope was almost exactly a year older than Florence. From childhood, the two were very different. Parthe was a more typical child, loving fun and irresponsibility, but Florence was more serious and thoughtful, "with a tendency to self-righteousness."<sup>5</sup> As teenagers, the girls were both educated by their father. Some tensions began here. Biographers have traditionally portrayed Parthenope as not being as engaged in studies, and preferring to spend time with her mother in the drawing room, concerned about more domestic matters. One recent biographer, however, disagrees and portrays Parthenope as shut out from the exclusive duo of WEN and Florence. I'm sure that having a sister as brilliant as Florence was not easy for Parthenope. As they grew older, Parthe didn't understand Florence's desire for a vocation and felt shut out of her life. She resented her sister's absences from home and envied her freedom. With nothing else to fill her time, Parthenope became obsessed with Florence. In their early thirties, Parthenope fell ill and called Florence to her side. She improved immediately but still vacillated between improving and worsening health. Her doctor, in the end, prescribed a complete separation from Florence.

Despite these ongoing conflicts, Florence christened the boat that took her and the Bracebridges up and down the Nile "Parthenope," which I believe shows her love for her sister. Parthenope eventually joined Florence's cause. She helped select nurses for the Crimean nursing party, and conducted a large amount of correspondence for her sister. And this book, written and illustrated to cheer up Florence during her recovery from Crimean Fever, is indicative of Parthenope's love for Florence. As the two grew older, they grew closer. Parthenope married Sir Harry Verney at age 39, and embarked on a successful career as a writer. The sisters lived on the same street in London and exchanged notes regularly. Florence visited the Verney country home, Claydon House, regularly, sometimes bringing parties of nursing students with her. Despite a complex relationship, I think that there was love between the sisters.

This family history also tells us that Florence, although deeply affected by her family's disapproval, moved ahead and pursued her vocation anyway. She was devoted to God and completely dedicated her life to Him. She was true to her religious feelings and followed what she thought she should do with her life, despite major familial and societal obstacles.

---

<sup>5</sup> Bostridge, p. 35.

There are a few other points of interest about the Athena book and some things it says about Florence. The novelist Elizabeth Gaskell was staying at Lea Hurst when Athena died. Gaskell wrote some interesting descriptions of Florence. At first they were very positive, almost worshipful, but later she criticized Nightingale for caring more about institutions than individuals. From an earlier visit Gaskell reports Fanny describing Florence as a swan born to ducks, as a parallel of the Hans Christian Andersen tale of the Ugly Duckling story.

*The Life and Death of Athena the Owlet* is dedicated to Selina Bracebridge, nicknamed "Sigma." Selina Bracebridge, along with Florence's Aunt Mai, was a great advocate for Florence with her mother Fanny. She saw what Florence was capable of, and was frustrated by Fanny and WEN's restrictions on their daughter.

### Letters to Dr. Bell

The library owns two additional Nightingale letters. They are both addressed to Dr. Joseph Bell, a physician from Scotland, and they are written later in Nightingale's life, one in 1887 and the other in 1888. She was 67 and 68. By this time, most of Nightingale's direct work with politicians had ceased, and her other work was slowing down some. The first letter is to accept a dedication in a publication of nursing lessons, and the second is a longer letter, answering questions from Dr. Bell about setting up a nursing school.

These letters highlight Florence's role in nursing education. Early in her career, before the Crimea, Nightingale had planned an institution for training nurses. During the War, a Nightingale Fund was created to accept donations for Nightingale's school for nurses. In 1860, using the Nightingale Fund, she founded the Nightingale School of Nursing at St. Thomas's Hospital in London. This school is important because it was the first secular school for nurses. Interestingly, Nightingale had very limited involvement with the school in its early years. Her time was filled with other responsibilities. She had more involvement with the school and its students as she grew older. For a number of years, she wrote annual "addresses" for the nurse probationers.

### Conclusion

So who was Florence Nightingale? She was a person with a family legacy of reform and defying societal norms. She was a visionary who saw the big picture and went outside of the system to enact change; yet she was attentive to details and worked incessantly to get things done. She had no patience for social expectations of her time; instead, she was focused completely on her vocation and fulfilling her call to God's service, despite many obstacles. She loved solitude and was independent, yet she needed support from close friends. She was seriously ill for most of her life, yet remained incredibly productive. In fact her work ethic demonstrates little regard for her own health, despite her concern for the health of others. She was interested in a number of wide-ranging subjects, and pursued information related to her work while vacationing for pleasure. Despite difficult relations with her family, she loved them deeply. There is no description of Nightingale's personality that can be complete without the word "complex."

Florence Nightingale made a huge impact on the world. There are some scholars who believe the lengthening of life expectancy over the last 150 years is attributable in part to Florence Nightingale. She made amazing strides for women, and made nursing a reputable profession. She made significant contributions to public health, hospital design, and statistics. She was perfectly placed in society to complete this work, and her family and personal characteristics were key to her success.

I would like to conclude with a quote from the end of her major work, *Notes on Nursing*. She writes several paragraphs on the topic of the jargons surrounding woman's work and man's work, and begs her readers to "Oh, leave these jargons, and go your way straight to God's work, in simplicity and singleness of heart."<sup>6</sup> It is my hope that we all may emulate Florence Nightingale by striving to do so, in our own spheres, even if they are smaller than Florence's. Thank you.

---

<sup>6</sup> Nightingale, p. 195.

## Works Cited

Bostridge, M. (2008). *Florence Nightingale: The Making of an Icon*. New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux.

Cook, E. T. (1913). *The Life of Florence Nightingale*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Gill, G. (2004). *Nightingales: the Extraordinary Upbringing and Curious Life of Miss Florence Nightingale*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Nightingale, F. (1860). *Notes on Nursing*. London: Harrison.

Template:Pp-semi-indef Template:EngvarB Template:Use dmy dates Template:Other uses Template:Redirect Template:Infobox scientist. Florence Nightingale, Template:Postnominals (Template:IPAc-en; 12 May 1820 – 13 August 1910) was an English social reformer and statistician, and the founder of modern nursing. She came to prominence while serving as a manager of nurses trained by her during the Crimean War, where she organised the tending to wounded soldiers. She gave nursing a highly favourable reputation Florence Nightingale - also known as the 'Lady with the Lamp' - was the founder of modern nursing. She was also a statistician and social reformer who helped care for soldiers during the Crimean War. After the war, she set up the Nightingale School of Nursing, which aimed to formalise the education of nurses. Florence Nightingale Key Facts for Kids. Florence Nightingale was born to a wealthy family on the 12th May 1820 and she was named Florence after the place of her birth: Florence in Italy. She lived in Derbyshire and Hampshire and she died in 1910. Florence Nightingale was a nurs Who Was Florence Nightingale? Part of a wealthy family, Florence Nightingale defied the expectations of the time and pursued what she saw as her God-given calling of nursing. During the Crimean War, she and a team of nurses improved the unsanitary conditions at a British base hospital, greatly reducing the death count.Â Nightingale was born on May 12, 1820, in Florence, Italy, the city which inspired her name. The younger of two daughters, Nightingale was part of an affluent British clan that belonged to elite social circles. Her mother, Frances Nightingale, hailed from a family of merchants and took pride in socializing with people of prominent standing.