

## FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Academy Assembly  
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There are several reasons why I have chosen to speak <sup>Today</sup> (this morning) about Florence Nightingale. The principal one is that she was a very great <sup>English</sup> woman, a pioneer in establishing the profession of hospital nursing for women. If you or I have to go to a hospital and be looked after by a trained nurse, we may thank Florence Nightingale for this, for she revolutionized the care of the sick in the whole of the western hemisphere. Another reason why I have chosen Florence Nightingale as my subject is because her real fame began during the Crimean War 1854-1856 when she occupied the Selimye Barracks at Haydar Paşa and transformed that hospital from a place of horror to a decent refuge for the sick and wounded. There are two other reasons for my talking about Florence Nightingale. Cyrus Hamlin, the first president of Robert College, knew and helped Miss Nightingale during the Crimean War and it was due to his enterprise that Christopher Robert got to know Dr. Hamlin and became interested in establishing a college on the Bosphorus. And lastly, very soon there is to be built in this city a new hospital to be called the Florence Nightingale Hospital. Already several young women are studying abroad to equip themselves to work in this new project.

Florence Nightingale was born in 1820, more than 120 years ago. Her parents were wealthy. They had a large house in the north of England; another in the south and one in London.

They knew many prominent people in the government and were related to other wealthy families. They travelled abroad a great deal, sometimes for several years at a time. In those days it meant taking a large carriage across the Channel by boat and driving along the roads of Europe. There were no trains, few steamers and of course no planes. It was while her parents were travelling in Italy that Florence was born, in the city of Florence and that was the name they gave her. She had one older sister, who had been born in Naples. This daughter was given a very strange name, Parthenope, which is the ancient name for Naples.

You may imagine that Florence Nightingale had a very easy, rich, full life as a child and as a girl. She knew nothing of poverty or want. She had governesses to teach her, beautiful clothes, many holidays, frequent travels abroad and she attended many balls and parties as she grew older. To show you what an atmosphere of luxury she lived in, I will tell you a remark of hers. One day as a young girl, at a dinner party, someone asked her, "Is your father's house in the south a large one?" She answered, "oh, no, it only has fifteen bedrooms."

As Florence grew older she was very different from her sister, different from anyone her family had known. She was rebellious and often miserable. She said she found her life empty. She wanted to do something for mankind but what she didn't know. She was something like Jeanne d'Arc of France. She said she "heard voices". Her parents couldn't understand her. What was the matter with the girl? She had everything that money could buy.

Why didn't she go to balls and dinner parties, marry at the right time and live happily ever after? But no..Florence didn't want any of these things. She visited the poor near her father's home, went to see sick people, read heavy books on philosophy and medicine and wrote long letters.

She had a long and difficult struggle with her parents and her sister. Finally her interest centered on nursing. In those days hospitals were terrible places. The nurses they had were often immoral characters, drunk and incompetent. (Does anyone remember Mrs. Gamp in Dickens' story Martin Chuzzlewit?) No respectable, educated woman ever dreamed of becoming a nurse. When Florence showed an interest in medicine and nursing, her parents were horrified and said she was mad. Her mother had hysterics and her sister wept.

However, she found friends. The German ambassador, whom the Nightingales knew, lent her a book to read about the care of the sick, and told her of a school for nurses in Germany at Kaiserwerth. She was fired with an ambition to go there and in spite of opposition, she got permission to go. And there she learned a great deal from these dedicated German women. Do you not realise already that she was a woman of strong character and of an iron will?

By this time she was 30. She returned from Germany and undertook to run a kind of home or hospital for poor women, many of them old governesses in London at No. 1 Harley Street. (Harley street is still, today, a street of doctors). She worked

under a committee which had liberal ideas, but she ruled them all, wrote letters about changes she wished to bring about, bothered them continually with her insistence on reform. Among her friends at this time were Sidney and Lizzie Herbert, who admired her and helped her greatly. Sidney Herbert was prominent in the government and happened to be made Secretary for War, which proved an enormous advantage to Florence Nightingale later.

In 1854 the Crimean War broke out, when England, France and Turkey declared war on Russia. The news fired Florence Nightingale at once and she wrote to Sidney Herbert, offering her services for the sick and wounded English soldiers. Strangely enough, Sidney Herbert, knowing of the good work she had already done, wrote asking her to go out to Istanbul. The letters crossed. So, at last, a woman of 34 and her own mistress, she left England with 38 nurses (some of whom had to be sent back as they were useless), with £ 7000 from the government and the backing of the War Dept. and set out for Turkey where she arrived on Nov. 4, 1854.

The Turkish Government had given the English doctors the huge Selimye Barracks at Haydar Paşa (sometimes called Üsküdar) as a hospital for the sick and wounded English soldiers as they came down from the battlefields of the Crimea. This hospital had <sup>been</sup> ~~been~~ horribly mismanaged. It was in a terrible state. Listen to Lytton Strachey's description of that hospital:

"Enormous as the building was, it was yet too small. It contained four miles of beds, crushed together so close that there was just room to pass between them...there was no ventilation...There were

not enough bedsteads; the sheets were of canvas, and so coarse that the wounded men recoiled from them, begging to be left in their blankets; there was no bedroom furniture of any kind and empty beer bottles were used as candlesticks. There were no basins, no soap, no towels, no brooms, no mops, no trays, no plates; there were neither slippers nor scissors; there were no knives or forks or spoons. The supply of fuel was constantly deficient, the cooking arrangements were inadequate. As for purely medical materials...the tale was no better. Stretchers, splints, bandages...all were lacking and so were the most ordinary drugs."

This is what confronted Florence Nightingale when she arrived. Was she welcome? Not at all. The doctors said, "What is a woman doing here? It's a joke!" They minded very much when she criticized everything she saw. They were exceedingly jealous of her. But she wasn't daunted. After all she had powerful friends in England, a great deal of money to spend, the friendship of Sidney Herbert and of the British ambassador to Turkey.

She began her reforms at once. There isn't time to tell in detail all she accomplished. She bought clothes for the soldiers, had an adequate laundry installed. She paid out of the funds the government and friends had given her, for utensils, knives, forks spoons..all the daily necessities. And in a very short time she had reduced the death rate by half. She was indefatigable and no small reform was too trivial to get her immediate attention.

One of her interesting reforms has a bearing on the

history of Robert College. She discovered that a clever American Yankee called Cyrus Hamlin had built, in Bebek, a mill and a bakery which was able to supply white bread, better than any to be got in the market. She ordered for her sick soldiers hundreds of loaves of this bread and later Dr. Hamlin helped her build a bakery near the hospital itself. It so happened that one day, while Hamlin was still supplying bread to Miss Nightingale's hospital from Bebek, that a New York traveller, Christopher Robert, was leaning over the railing of his ship in the harbor of Istanbul.

He saw below in the water a large caique full of white bread such as he hadn't seen for some time. He inquired as to who made this bread and was told Dr. Hamlin in Bebek. They met. It was the beginning of a long and fruitful friendship and out of the enthusiasm and idealism of those two men Robert College was founded.

Miss Nightingale did not stay all the time on the Bosphorus. She travelled to the Crimea to see the battlefields for herself. She was not received well. "Why has she come?" asked the officers. She wanted to see the General Hospital there but the doctors thought she was interfering. She contracted a fever there and nearly died. But finally she was brought back to her hospital in Haydar Paşa and continued her good work, though at times she was terribly depressed because of the difficulties material, social, personal that confronted her. But there were compensations. She had the adoration of the sick and wounded. Again Lytton Strachey has described what she did:

"Wherever in those vast wards, suffering was at its worst and the

need for help greatest, there, as if by magic was Miss Nightingale. Her superhuman calm would, at the moment of some ghastly operation, nerve the victim to endure and almost to hope. Her sympathy would help the pangs of the dying and bring back to the still living something of the forgotten charm of life. Over and over again her untiring efforts rescued those whom the surgeons had abandoned as beyond the possibility of cure. Her mere presence brought with it a strange influence. A passionate idolatry spread among the men; they kissed her shadow as it passed."

Florence Nightingale did not leave Turkey until the very last of the soldiers had left her hospital. By this time her name had become famous in England. She had been known for her mercy and kindness, but few people realized how stern an administrator she was, how bitter against incompetence, how demanding of her friends. She was received by Queen Victoria and many famous people wanted to know her. A fund was started in her honor, and she said she would spend it in founding a school for nurses, which she called St. Thomas'. St Thomas' Hospital still stands on the banks of the Thames in London.

After Florence Nightingale returned from the Crimean War her life was far from over and her talents had still much work to do. She was only 36 and she lived to be 90 years old. She lived in semi-retirement after her return home and was an invalid she said. (how many invalids live to a ripe old age!) But even though her personal life seemed quiet and uneventful she worked without ceasing. Her great vitality wore out several of her friends. She

She wrote enormously long letters about hospital reform, and kept up the keenest interest in medicine and in the health of the army. She wrote a book called Notes on Hospitals in 1859 and in 1860 another called Notes on Nursing. She made many government reports and her Royal commission on the Sanitary State of the Army in India in 1863 became a classic for Army medical staffs.

She died in 1910 but she had become a legend long before that. Her family at last, after Crimea, were reconciled to her strange behavior. In 1907 she received the Order of Merit, the first woman to receive such an honor. In England her name is still venerated. If you go to London you will see her statue in Waterloo Place...a gentle lady, holding a lamp, for with this lamp in her hand she would visit the wards each night.

At Haydar Paşa the Turkish Government gave a plot of land not far from the Hospital as a cemetery for the British soldiers who died in the Crimean War and it is still used by the British community. In that cemetery there is a monument to the Crimean War. In 1954 a hundred years after the outbreak of the Crimean War, there was a ceremony at that monument and a young Turkish nurse unveiled a plaque which read:

" To Florence Nightingale whose work near this cemetery a century ago relieved much suffering and laid the foundations for the nursing profession...1854---1954. This tablet cast in the Coronation year of Queen Elizabeth II has been raised by the British Community in Turkey in her memory."



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