

A Pioneer in Nursing Profession

A Nurses' Day Feature

Miss M. BENEDICTA .T

Florence Nightingale, was the founder of modern professional Nursing, the heroine of the Crimean war, the reformer of the administration in military and civil hospitals and public hygiene, the most important writer in the field of Nursing and public health Nursing. She was born on May 12, 1820 in Florence, Italy. She was a progressive leader of the feminist movement whose intelligent mind was far in advance of its time, and whose warm motherly heart enabled her to dedicate herself to her profession with the greatest devotion.

Every Nurse must, therefore, know the life history of Florence Nightingale and take from her biography inspiration to work in her profession in the most dedicated manner.

A Distinguished Background

Florence Nightingale belonged to a renowned British family. She was the second daughter of William Edward Nightingale and Frances Smith. Florence was educated more than an average English girl. Her father taught her Greek, Latin, French, German, Italian, History, Philosophy and Mathematics. She was also interested in political science and languages. Throughout her life she read widely in many languages. Social life meant differently to Miss Nightingale: not for her the pomp and show of formalities and ostentations.

From childhood Florence showed interest in Nursing. She visited the sick of her neighbourhood and helped them. Florence who knew the humanitarian



aspect of service in Nursing, spent a number of years studying the hospitals in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and Belgium before she went for training to the Institute for Deaconesses at Kaiserswerth in Germany. With reference to the value of professional training she wrote: "I should like to advise all young ladies to feel the call to come to the definite profession, train yourselves for it in the way man trains for his work. Do not believe that you can learn to understand it in any other way".

Born with a silver spoon in her mouth Florence Nightingale was known to the wounded soldier-patients as 'Lady with the Lamp' all over the world. Her life was to alleviate pain and give relief to the suffering humanity when the other young women of her age were absorbed in the gaiety of social life. She undertook the task of Nursing and

passed it on to the posterity. Nurses all over the world rightly commemorate her birthday as 'International Nurses Day'.

In the Crimean War

The Crimean War broke out in March 1854. Great Britain, France and Turkey declared war against Russia. Sisters of Charity were nursing the soldiers of France and Sisters of Mercy were nursing those of Russia. "Why we have no Sisters of Charity"? somebody asked in the London Times. The newspaper also published accounts of the miserable condition of soldiers. At that time, it was unthinkable, immodest and revolutionary to have women Nurses with the British Army. In spite of this Florence along with 38 other Nurses set out for Crimea. There was the great Field Hospital at Scutari. The conditions of the hospitals in Crimea were terrible. There was nothing to nurse the patient, no vessels, no utensils, no soap or towel or hospital clothes. Soldiers used clothes soiled with blood for days together. Doctors were unwilling to allow patients to have female Nurses.

"On arrival, Sisters brought pillows, slings, bandages, etc. Florence organised the hospital with her knowledge and skill in administration. She wrote letters to the soldiers' family members. Even during the night she used to visit every patient. Her patients almost worshipped her. Her sympathy and her selfless work showed in a resolute manner so that in the end she was called "the saviour of British soldiers".

By May, 1855, nursing the sick had become her secondary interest and her prime concern now was the welfare of

the British Army. She now transferred herself and some of her Nurses to Crimea and on landing at Balaklava, she was very ill with Crimean fever. Then her opponent, the Inspector General of Hospitals, contended that she had authority only at Scutari and none in Crimea. It was not till March 6, 1856, that her position as General Superintendent of the female Nursing establishment of the military hospitals of the Army was confirmed in general order.

After the end of War she returned to England. She was honoured with a testimonial to which the English soldiers contributed a considerable sum. She used this testimonial for the founding of a Training School for Nurses on modern lines, but her undermined health prevented her from taking over its direction. St. Thomas Hospital was chosen as the training hospital. The new school met with a great deal of opposition at first. "The Nurses", it was asserted, "are very good already even if they do drink a bit". The doctors were also against them at first. Despite all the opposition the Nightingale School in the St. Thomas Hospital, London, with 15 students was opened on June 15, 1860 a day that for many reasons is the most memorable in the history of Nursing. One radical aspect of importance was the recognition of science as the main authority in the training of the nurses. With this Nursing became a secular profession.

Important though Florence Nightingale was as Nursing administrator, she was even more important in her capacity as teacher and without doubt was the most outstanding one in the history of public health Nursing. Her writings are full of enthusiasm for health and the joy of life. For her health institutions were the highest aim of medical science.

She reformed the Army Medical Services, sanitary conditions were improved. Army Hospitals were reconstructed with more facilities. She recommended recreational clubs for soldiers. The government valued her recommendations regarding sanitary work

for the changes suggested by her for the development of military and civil hospitals. Her dedicated work in the profession brought about a revolution in the whole Nursing system. She attracted the most intelligent and scrupulous women to join the profession. She made it a point that healthy Nursing was more important than sick Nursing. Florence had never been to India, but she was acknowledged master of most things in India. Successive Viceroy's consulted her before assuming their offices.

In 1907 the King conferred on her the order of the British Empire. Florence died on August 13, 1910. The offer of

a national funeral and burial in Westminster Abbey was by her wish declined. Her coffin was borne to the country churchyard of East Wellow, Hampshire, by six Sergeants of the British Army.

It was done likewise in deference to her wishes. Her life is a guiding beacon to all the nurses.

Let us have her everlasting spirit and selfless dedication in our Nursing profession.

Reference

1. *Florence Nightingale* by Cecil Woodham Smith.

Nurses Campaign for a Healthier Environment

One million nurses throughout the world are using their power and influence to create a safer, cleaner healthier world.

International Nurses' Day (May 12) this year takes as its theme: "Nurses and the Environment", inviting nurses to campaign for greater awareness of a more effective action on environmental issues within their own countries.

Launching International Nurses' Day, President of the International Council of Nurses, Dr Mo-Im Kim said: "Nurses everywhere are waking up to the importance of environmental factors to people's health. Their environment is ours to enjoy or to destroy, to cope with and to preserve. As individuals we have responsibilities. As nurses we must do more, know more, and teach more".

Kits containing information sheets, suggestions for action and posters have been sent to the 102 nurses' associations throughout the world in membership of ICN. They are being invited to consider their countries' particular

environmental problem and how they relate to the health and sickness of the population.

The campaign focusses on the following issues:

- health and housing;
- the search for clean water;
- over-population and its consequences;
- destruction of natural resources by toxic waste; and
- feeding the world.

Nurses through their national associations will be reaching out to the public to increase awareness of these problems and the ways in which nurses can work to alleviate them. With environmental issues so topical at the moment, President Mo-Im Kim expects a high degree of participation.

The project has been backed with financial assistance from the World Health Organization; UNICEF, the United Nations Environment Programme and the Centre for our Common Future.