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A WOMAN MUST SOAR: FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE AS AN INSPIRATION TO SOUTHERN NURSES

by Katharine Armbrester

Lithograph of Florence Nightingale tending to the wounded.

"The Civil War was fought in the very last years of the medical middle ages."[1]

This statement, written for the *Journal of Southern History* in 1940, may seem at first unnecessarily condemnatory. It is not until one investigates the medical history of the Civil War that one realizes how apt the above statement is. Many surgeons serving in the war were often as dangerous as the enemy. As historian George Washington Adams writes, "They thought a bare finger was the best probe; they operated in dirty uniforms; they used the same marine sponge to swab out the wounds of countless men; they re-used linen dressings; they meddled with wounds and thus made bad matters worse."[2] Death stalked the wounded in dressing stations and hospitals as relentlessly as it stalked the battlefields, and the finest of men on both sides were condemned due to medical incompetence.

Less than fifty years after the end of the Age of Enlightenment, which had emphasized science and reason in medical discovery, the Civil War began. It was fought largely in the remote American countryside, where surgeons and nurses had to deal with cut supply lines, the ever-increasing cost of supplies, and the ever-increasing number of wounded. Medical historian Mary Ellen Snodgrass writes that from the very beginning of the war "The South suffered from its failure to weed out the weak and unfit from the ranks."[3] Similarities to the Middle Ages can be drawn not only in terms of appalling medical ignorance, but also in the case of women and their place in a man's world. Women, particularly in the Southern United States, rarely if ever were given the educational opportunities that men were, had few legal rights, and were usually only given some semblance of autonomy when in the position of chatelaine of a large house or plantation. Women that were used to being relegated to the societal positions of daughter, wife, and widow, women would be given new opportunities with the coming of the Civil War, particularly the occupation of nurse.

Before the advent of the Civil War, a revolution had begun in terms of women entering the field of medicine, although few realized it. On 23 January 1849, British-born Elizabeth Blackwell became the first woman to receive a medical degree in the United States. Blackwell inspired compatriot Florence Nightingale, who after her triumphant managing of the Scutari hospital in Turkey during the Crimean War, founded the first modern school of nursing in 1860. Nightingale was heralded for her courage in the face of war and her persona of cool level-headedness, combined with her aristocratic dignity and "womanly" compassion, all made for an arresting image that would inspire countless young women in both the old world and the new. The "lady with the lamp", as she became known due to her beloved nightly ritual of checking on her wounded soldiers before bed, soon became an international symbol of what a woman with both compassion and drive could do. Only five years passed from the end of the Crimean War to the

beginning of the American Civil War, but Nightingale's influence was undoubted as the nursing profession developed under the duress of war, particularly in the South. Progress came slowly but surely, and Florence Nightingale proved a source of inspiration to Southern nurses during the American Civil War.

Florence Nightingale was not the stuff of which revolutionaries are made. Born on 12 May 1820 into an affluent and intellectual upper-class family, Florence grew up a deeply curious and compassionate child whose intelligence and enquiring mind was nurtured, rather than stifled by her doting family. Difficulties only arose when Florence grew up into a beautiful and eligible young lady and, rather than settling down, began searching for ways to further her education, particularly her hopes of becoming a nurse. Her medical education and independence was hard-won, but in 1850 she finally was able to intern briefly at the Kaiserwerth Institute for Women in Frankfurt, Germany, where she received four months worth of medical study. She then served for a year as a superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in London, gaining experience in hospital management that proved extremely useful in the near future.

When the Crimean War began in October of 1853, Florence could have no way of knowing that her name would soon become synonymous with compassion and resilience, as well as modernity. She felt that women could be of significantly more use in a war than to sit patiently at home and knit and make shirts while their loved ones died on the altar of battle. The Crimean War, like the Civil War less than a decade later, was meant to be over in a matter of months. When it did not end promptly, word soon spread of the general incompetence of British military management overseas, particularly in terms of medical management and provision for its wounded which were dying in droves. When Florence read of the casualties in the Crimea, she developed a plan of gathering a small band of trained women and going with them to Constantinople to offer their services as nurses to the British government.

Despite the fact that Florence and several of her affluent friends were to pay the wages of the volunteer nurse brigade out of their own well-lined pockets, Florence faced tremendous doubt and censure from others within her social circle. Florence and her nurses were not to be part of any religious sisterhood, and as Nightingale biographer Gillian Gill points out, "Any woman who moved with the men and whose dress did not absolutely proclaim her religious vows of chastity and obedience risked falling into the disgraced category of camp follower."[4] Eventually, with the support of powerful Englishmen like Sidney Herbert and Richard Monckton Milnes, she and thirty-eight women left for the Crimea. It was agreed that the nurses would be paid and housed at the military's expense, and the nurses would report to Nightingale, who would in turn report to the principal medical officer Dr. Menzies, just as any military officer would.[5]

"NIGHTINGALE'S INFLUENCE WAS UNDOUBTED AS THE NURSING PROFESSION DEVELOPED UNDER THE DURESS OF WAR, PARTICULARLY IN THE SOUTH."

For Nightingale, the greatest difficulties of Scutari were lack of proper waste disposal and laundries, lack of supplies and trained medical staff, and above all, lack of nurses.[6] Southern nurses would face precisely the same difficulties several years later, to devastating results. Over a period of twenty-one months at Scutari, Nightingale bought supplies for the wounded at Scutari using her own funds, most often a drastic measure she took in order to escape the never-ending red tape of the English supply lines.Supplies from England rotted in the Turkish harbors while the men in charge wrangled over them, a waste which disgusted Nightingale. Southern nurses and the civilian women left behind often took the same measures to make

sure their men in makeshift hospitals were taken care of properly, and often went without to make sure the wounded men got the food and clothing they needed.

Among the horrors that Nightingale had to encounter at Scutari hospital, the worst she recounted later was the filth and rats, the dead dogs lying around the grounds of the hospital and a dead horse that had been in the water aqueduct for several weeks before anyone's noticing.[8] Nightingale stated that the greatest causes of death during her stay at Scutari hospital had been typhus, gangrene and cholera, and many deaths due also to fever and diarrhea.[9] Bullets sent men to hospitals, but were not always the cause of death; far too many English and American men in the Civil War would die due to the ignorance and negligence that were too often present in hospitals.

Illustration of Florence Nightingale's Scutari Hospital

The waste of supplies due to bureaucratic mismanagement which she encountered in Scutari spurred Nightingale to ingeniously develop ways to prevent needless suffering and death in the overcrowded hospital. Among her greatest contributions to modern nursing that was born out of her management of Scutari was according to Mary Ellen Snodgrass: "A pragmatic protocol known as the environmental adaptation theory: [that] for maximum healing, the patient should receive proper dressing and remedies, ventilation, warmth, light, cleanliness of room, bedding, and person, quality diet, cheer and quiet, and suitable observation."[10] Due to her pioneering spirit born from her scientific knowledge and hands-on inspiration Nightingale "Elevated nursing from the level of domestic help to the modern professional concept of competent healing" and influenced military medicine and hospital design.[11]

Upon her triumphant return from the Crimea, Nightingale succumbed to extreme fatigue and took to her bed for a length of time, but idle she was not. She wrote with furious speed and clear-eyed passion of her experiences at Scutari. Her greatest written work according to historian Gillian Gill was her *Notes Affecting the Health, Efficiency, and Hospital Administration of the British Army*. Published in 1858 as her first Royal Commission and approximately 1,014 pages in length, it consisted of statistical tables, analysis, firsthand testimony and observations of hospital life in Scutari.[12] It would have been a remarkable work for any Englishman; it was stupefying to many when they realized it was written by a woman. Despite periods of ill health that often led to a bed-ridden state, Nightingale wrote prolifically for the rest of her life.

When Nightingale founded her school of nursing at St. Thomas's Hospital in 1860, she had a great many obstacles to overcome. The first obstacle she faced was the general distrust and distaste with which most hospitals and nurses were regarded. The upper-class were treated at home, and hospitals were generally viewed as a last resort for lower-class people, a place with a roof where one went to die. Nurses too were generally women dredged up from the lower classes who tended to be illiterate and alcoholic.[13] Nightingale did not mince her words when she gave her opinion of the state of contemporary nursing: "The art of nursing, as now practiced, seems to be expressly constituted to unmake what God had made disease to be, viz, a reparative process."[14]

Nightingale was determined to change the view of nurses as necessary evils, and also desired to find a

way to give hard-working women honest employment and autonomy. As she wrote in the introduction to *Organization of Nursing*, "Sickness is everywhere. Death is everywhere. But hardly anywhere is the training necessary to teach women to relive sickness, to delay death. We consider a long education and discipline absolutely necessary to train our medical man; we consider hardly any training at all necessary for our nurse."[15] The first fifteen probationers of the Nightingale School were literate, sober and carefully chosen, and the first year of their training was tremulously experimental, for "the whole idea of giving nurses a systematic training was so novel", but it paid off enormously.[16] Nightingale was determined that her experiment, the most important of her life, would end triumphantly, and herald a new age for women in nursing. The three iron-clad rules of the "Nightingale system" as it was called consisted of:

1. The Matron, Head Nurse, etc., was to have absolute control over and responsibility for her nurses concerning everything from hiring to training to dismissing,

2. The nurses of the Nightingale School were to be completely sober, honest and truthful, but well-trained in their work, and

3. A nurse's character was as important, if not more important than her technical efficiency.[17]

The latter two of the above principles illustrate how nurses were viewed in that era as morally questionable, and Nightingale was determined to change that view. As she said in an address to her nurses, "To be a good Nurse one must be a good woman...To be a good woman at all, one must be an improving woman."[18]

Whether she realized it or not, Nightingale was a radical in her belief that a woman from a lower stratum of society could, through the benefits of hard work and education and an upright character, make a living for herself and her family. "It will be a great good if you can promote the honest employment of a number of poor women, in a way which shall protect, restrain, and elevate them," wrote Nightingale in the *Organization of Nursing*.[19] She believed that all women, no matter their class background, had an equal capability for leadership and compassion, the latter she prized in her nurses as much as the former. Nightingale gently admonished her nurses: "She who rules best is she who loves best: and shows her love not by foolish indulgence to those of whom she is in charge, but by taking a real interest in them for their own sakes."[20]

Nightingale was also radical in her determination that her nursing school not be part of any particular church or religion, in juxtaposition to Sisters of Charity which were fairly common at the time. "No doubt religious sisterhoods have an advantage in this kind of work, tending, as they do, to merge all personal action and avoid anything like individual prominence. But such sisterhoods are regarded with deep and unreasoning mistrust by the great majority of Protestant Englishmen, and will probably remain subject to such mistrust."[21] According to Mary Louise Marshall, when the Civil War began "The only women in the South who had [any] training as nurses were the Sisters of the Roman Catholic orders who worked in camps and hospitals and on the battlefields."[22] Unfortunately, in the Southern United States, as in England, these compassionate women were often looked upon with suspicion due to their faith, and Protestant women were generally preferred as nurses. Nightingale also preferred the idea of secular nursing institutions due to her hopes for increasing scientific knowledge in the medical profession, which she feared would be stunted through the hierarchy of a religiously based nursing institution. "The obedience of intelligence, not the obedience of slavery, is what we want."[23]

Three qualities that Nightingale thought were essential to a nurse were: deep religious feeling and a maternal interest for each patient, a practical and intellectual interest in the medical case at hand, and an appreciation for hospital administration and management.[24] Management was also of great importance to Nightingale after the horrors of

mismanagement she had dealt with at Scutari, and she was determined that none of her nurses would ever be accused of mismanaging, or having blame put upon them due to their sex. "Hospital Sisters are the only women who may be in charge really of men. Is this not enough to show how essential to them are those qualities which alone constitute real authority?"[25]

Nightingale also wrote that "To be a really efficient Nurse requires quietness, patience, watchfulness, method, accuracy of observation and report, gentleness, firmness, cheerfulness, devotedness, a sense of duty."[26] These were qualities that are expected in nurses even to this day, and these were qualities that Southern women would take upon themselves to emulate when war came to them, and the call went out for women to help alleviate suffering, and found many themselves in positions of management for the first time in their lives.

As a highly educated woman, Nightingale had a low opinion of people with little medical experience who often treated the sick with questionable remedies, often referred to as "physicking", and she was particularly aware of criticism directed by men towards women who did so. "It is often said by men, that it is unwise to teach women anything about these laws of health, because they will take to physicking...There is nothing ever seen in any professional practice like the reckless physicking by amateur females. But this is just what the really experienced and observing nurse does not do; she neither physics herself nor others."[27]

Many women who had managed large households and even plantations had some practical experience when it came to nursing in its most humble, homeopathic form. Pamphlets and home health guides were often more readily available to Southern women in remote areas than professional medical care, and women learned to treat themselves and others in their care from this literature. Historian Mary Louise Marshall writes, "Home medical care was all the more important since almost all physicians eligible for military duty were in the armed services."[28] Some examples of the home medicine guides that Southern women read prior to and during the Civil War are The Family Nurse or the Companion of the American Frugal Housewife published in 1837, A Compendium of Medical Science published in 1847, and The Medical Adviser: A Full and Plain Treatise on the Theory and Practice of Medicine Suited to Planters and Families published in 1860. Some of the practical advice from The Family Nurse includes "Sleep in rooms with a free circulation of air."[29] This predates Nightingale's repeated admonition of the importance of fresh air in hospitals by nearly two decades. "The want of fresh air may be detected in the appearance of patients sooner than any other want. No care or luxury will compensate indeed for its absence."[30] While Nightingale would inspire Southern nurses with her emphasis on organization and discipline within hospitals, Southern women were no strangers to the effect cleanliness and fresh air could have on a patient's morale.

Florence Nightingale and her accomplishments in the Crimean War were internationally recognized and celebrated, and with the advent of the Civil War the North was the first to take nursing seriously, thanks in part to the efforts of Dorothea Dix, Clara Barton, and Louisa May Alcott.[31] The South soon followed suit in the demand for competent women who would be willing to serve as nurses, but tremendous difficulties arose in enlisting women as nurses and training. Southern nurses also had to face a more pressing problem than their Northern sisters due to the problems in shortages caused by the blockade. As the death toll rose and the war dragged on longer than the "few months" that optimistic politicians had predicted it would at its inception, the call went out for nurses, and Southern women and their over-scrupulous relatives had to overcome their well-bred timidities. The young Ella Newsom wrote of her meeting fellow prospective nurse Kate Cumming at the Tishomingo Hotel-turned-hospital in Mississippi, "A bevy of women from Mobile, Alabama...arrived. They styled themselves the 'Florence Nightingale Brigade.' Immediately after their arrival they held a council

of criticism and decided to revolutionize the bad management."[32]

Undoubtedly, this was a tribe of high-energy and highly opinionated women after Nightingale's own heart. Unfortunately, only Cumming and another woman from her original "Nightingale brigade" made it through until the end of the war, it being more usual rather than unusual that young women left wartime nursing to return home to treat family members or marry. Cumming, a spirited Scottish-born young woman who grew up in Mobile, Alabama, never allowed herself to be distracted by anything other than nursing during the war, and while dismayed by the carnage she saw, still persevered with her nursing duties to the war's end.

Despite a lack of medical training, Cumming was inspired by the tales of Nightingale and her nurses and wished to do something in order to help the war effort and being young and unmarried she felt she was well able to do so. However, Cumming remarked in her journal after being told it was not respectable to be a nurse, "It seems strange that the aristocratic women of Great Britain have done with honor what it is a disgrace for their sisters on this side of the Atlantic to do...If the Christian, high-toned, and educated women of our land shirk their duty, why others have to do it for them. It is useless to say the surgeons will not allow us; we have our rights, and if asserted properly will get them. This is our right, and ours alone."[33]

Cumming describes in her journal the horror of seeing boys and grey-haired men, "federals" and confederate soldiers "mutilated in every imaginable way" lying together on the floor of the Tishomingo Hotel.[34] Foes at home and on the battlefield, the men who wore blue and those who wore grey were united in bloody suffering once the fighting was over. "We have men for nurses," wrote Cumming, "And the doctors complain very much at the manner in which they are appointed; they are detailed from the different regiments, like guards. We have a new set every few hours. I can not see how it is possible for them to take proper care of the men, as nursing is a thing that has to be learned."[35]

Cumming also describes how she and her fellow nurses had to kneel in blood and water to tend their patients, a gruesome situation Nightingale would have been familiar with due to her experiences at Scutari, but she would have been appalled nonetheless.[36] Again and again in her writings Nightingale railed at how often military hospitals and their long-suffering staff had to relentlessly fight the horrors of inadequate sewage systems. Another gruesome sight Cumming had to face was the dire state of a hospital she served in. Before a more enlightened surgeon by the name of Dr. Smith took charge of the hospital in which she served as a nurse, amputated limbs had been thrown out into the yard and left there before he put a stop to it.[37] Nothing was deadlier than ignorance and carelessness in Civil War era hospitals.

Cumming asserted that the prevailing ailment among the soldiers that she came up against again and again was diarrhea, which she treated with milk and arrow-root, the former the soldiers "cried out for" and the latter they detested, and which she often had to resort to trickery to get them to take.[38] In the supplementation of a soldier's diet by fresh milk when available, Cumming was following the advice of Nightingale, who highly recommended the nutritious beverage. "Milk and the preparations from milk, are a most important article of food for the sick... Buttermilk, a totally different thing, is often very useful, especially in fevers."[39]

The daily drama within a hospital did not always pertain directly to the war, and it was with these domestic issues that upset Cumming, just as they had Nightingale at Scutari. The democratization of an army hospital often upset Southerners just as much as it upset the class-bound English. Cumming wrote of a family coming to see a dying relative and were horrified to find that "A man of his means should have been kept in a ward like any other soldier!"[40] When it came to nursing in the Confederate Army, other difficulties arose which Nightingale had not had to contend with in the British Army—difficulties that

came from the deeply-bred racism within the region. Whether a woman serving in a Southern hospital was mentally and physically strong and compassionate enough for the task of nurse was a secondary thought after what color her skin was. African-American women were never allowed to nurse white soldiers and were rarely employed for anything more than cooking and cleaning. Cumming reflected the general thinking of her time when she wrote that they were more suited to those duties and did not wish for them to work together with white women.[41]

Another petty domestic difficulty which Cumming also had to deal with was less than desirable nurses. One "very pretty widow" freely admitted to having become a nurse in order to "catch a beau" and when she had accomplished her goal she gleefully left the nurses employ.[42] Daily dealings with the vanity of surgeons were another never-ending war dance. Cumming wrote of how she tried to persuade a doctor of the necessity of a wash house as a separate building from the hospital in order to prevent contamination, but she was given the patronizing and flowery response of "His grandmother and mother never had any but the canopy of heaven for [their wash house] and he did not intend having any other in the hospital."[43]

One of the best hospitals Cumming worked in and wrote of was in Chattanooga, Tennessesse, which was fortunate in having a large kitchen with four stoves and four cooks, and an abundance of supplies. An unusual fact in its administration was that the head matron never visited the wards, which would have stupefied Nightingale,[44] who always did her best to supervise every facet of the hospital. Cumming often commented on the fact that it was very uncommon for a hospital to be regulated according to an agreed set of rules. For the Chattanooga hospital, the washing was done in hospital, which caused Cumming to remark, "I wonder what 'head-quarters' would say if this were known. It seems strange that in one hospital can be done what is unlawful in another."[45]

As the war dragged on and the demand for nurses increased, Cumming grew considerably more irritated with the prevailing reluctance of Southerners to send women out to serve as nurses. Cumming often wrote in her journal of her distress at the seeming reluctance of well-born Southern women to consider nursing; "Are the women of the South going into the hospitals? I am afraid they are not! It is not respectable, and requires too constant attention, and a hospital has none of the comforts of home...a lady's respectability must be at a low ebb when it can be endangered by going into a hospital."[46] Later in the war Cumming wrote in response to a letter addressed to one of her fellow nurses saying that a hospital was no place for a modest young lady,

As far as my judgment goes, a lady who feels that her modesty would be compromised by going into a hospital and ministering to the wants of her suffering countrymen, who have braved all in her defense, could not rightly lay claim to a very large share of that excellent virtue—modesty—which the wise tell us is ever the companion of sense.[47]

As historian Richard Harvell wrote in his introduction to The Journal of Kate Cumming, "When the states of the South seceded in 1860-61 there was too little preparation for the actualities of war. Least of all was there preparation for an adequate hospital service for the army. What need an elaborate hospital corps for a war which would be decided in a few battles and in a few months?"[48] It was unfortunately clear from the early months of the war that the Confederate government could not adequately care for all of its wounded; a situation which only worsened as the war continued and individual groups of citizens had to begin supplementing hospitals with food and supplies for its wounded.[49] When the Confederate government eventually took over administration of all military hospitals, individual groups and towns still raised funds and gave provisions to help keep the soldiers needs met.[50] Whether their menfolk liked it or not, women were the ones who were left remaining at home, and increasingly they had to step into positions of authority and management as the death toll

climbed.

The Confederate Congress also had to take matters into its own hands regarding the situation of women as nurses and the lack thereof, and passed an act concerning women serving in military hospitals on 27 September 1862. Cumming wrote after the event: "Congress has passed a law, making provision for ladies (where they can be had) to take charge of the domestic arrangements in hospitals."[51] As the Civil war historian Bell Irvin Wiley wrote of the situation, "Soon rumors began to circulate that there was something wrong in hospital administration and Congress, desirous of remedying omissions, passed a law by which matrons were appointed. They had no official recognition, ranking even below stewards from a military point of view."[52] Even after the passing of the law, few educated "ladies" applied for these positions, and they usually went to lower class, mostly uneducated women.[53]

Nonetheless, the Southern women who did decide to serve as nurses and matrons during the war would take a page out of Nightingale's book and use their born and bred mild-mannered and soft-voiced gentility to their advantage. Nightingale had admonished her nurses-in-training on how to maintain control as a woman over a group of other women while surrounded by men. "The very first element for having control over others is, of course, to have control over oneself...A person, but more especially a woman, in charge must have a quieter and more impartial mind than those under her, in order to influence them by the best part of them and not by the worst."[54]

Due to the passing of the law by the Confederate Congress, Southern women now had the assurance of a protected place within the hospital hierarchy for the duration of the war. Phoebe Yates Pember was one of the chief matrons at Chimborazo hospital, which was the largest military hospital in the world at that time.[55] Pember wrote of how before Congress passed the law, men were very often the "nurses" in a hospital, though often to detrimental effect, as they were usually patients from among the sick and wounded who were only barely recuperated.[56] Pember also wrote of her arrival at a military hospital that many "expected in horror the advent of female supervision" and they were not looking forward to the enforcing of Congress's newly passed law which would bring about, what they termed, "petticoat government."[57] The passing of the law appointing matrons in hospitals slowly but surely did much to bring order to medical management within army hospitals, resulting in smoother and better-run hospitals.[58] Mary Louise Marshall writes that "Even after the Confederate government assumed control of the medical service and hospitals, women continued to do most of the work and furnish supplies, workings as nurses, matrons, and supervisors; in addition, the sick and wounded were received into private homes."[59]

"NONETHELESS, THE SOUTHERN WOMEN WHO DID DECIDE TO SERVE AS NURSES AND MATRONS DURING THE WAR WOULD TAKE A PAGE OUT OF NIGHTINGALE'S BOOK AND USE THEIR BORN AND BRED MILD-MANNERED AND SOFT-VOICED GENTILITY TO THEIR ADVANTAGE.

When considering the difficulty of creating a district or parish hospital due to the extreme gap between the rich and the poor, the following remedy was suggested by Nightingale: "Perhaps the best way...would be by combining personal responsibility with social organization, an individual undertaking the duties of superintendence and providing a certain proportion of the funds, and an organization, charitable or religious, the rest."[60] The difficulties of military-run hospitals were never successfully resolved for the Confederate side during the war, but the most successful examples were very often those managed by women out of their own homes. Mary Louise Marshall writes:

In High Point, North Carolina, a hotel, a girl's school, as well as Methodist and Presbyterian churches were used as relief centers. As wounded were able to be moved, they were transferred to military hospitals. At this station only 50 died out of some 5,800 who were cared for, all nursing being done by local women.[61]

Private hospitals had become so abundant during the early years of the war that a law was passed by the Confederate government that they be discontinued, and "no hospital was allowed except those under the care of a commissioned officer, with a rank no lower than that of a captain."[62]

A young nurse from Virginia named Sally Louisa Tompkins was appalled by this law, and took the proof of the effectiveness of her privately run hospital directly to President Jefferson Davis.[63] Tompkins was commissioned a Confederate cavalry captain by President Davis and was the only official female officer appointed on both sides during the war and her house in Richmond officially became the Robertson Hospital.[64] She returned the pay she was given due to her rank, but effectively used her official authority to "issue orders and draw supplies to supplement what she could secure by gift," as extremely few women were allowed.[65] She developed a notorious reputation for cleanliness and her medical facility had the lowest death rate in the entire Confederacy, with only seventy-three deaths out of 1,333 patients.[66]

Ella King Newsom, who became the matron of the Academy Hospital in Chattanooga, Teneesee, came from wealth and privilege like Nightingale. Richard J. Fraise, in his editing of the writings of Newsom, dubbed her "the Florence Nightingale of the Southern Army", and he compared her to her British forbear in eight different ways, the most significant among them being "the highly endowed moral nature of each", "each deemed a preliminary hospital training essential to ultimate success in her calling", and "both had the capacity to organize and manage a corps of workers."[67] The majority of women who served as nurses during the Civil War were from the middle to lower classes, and were no less important than their more privileged sisters, but the entry of upper-class women helped to lessen the stigma of nursing as a unseemly occupation for a woman. Marshall writes that "certain women of wealth assumed personal responsibility for supply military units with all necessities", and among this band of honorable women were Mary Ann Buie, Mrs. John T. Johnson, and Mrs. William Hart.[68] Where upper-class women led, women from the lower rungs of society often followed in considerable numbers, and when these gentlewomen gave as generously of their time and resources as Nightingale had of her own wealth, the impact cannot be underestimated. As historian Roberta Tierney writes: "With the entrance into hospital nursing of socially prominent women, possessing strong political and humanitarian beliefs, strong educational backgrounds, and good organizational ability, nursing began to emerge as a respectable occupation for women in the United States."[69]

From its very beginning the Southern army had suffered from a devastating profusion of wounded men and an equally devastating shortage of trained medical staff in its hospitals and capable women to assist. In 1864, Robert E. Lee established a commission to study the shortage of hospital staff, but the tide of the war had already turned.[70] An overwhelming reason for the lack of women in nursing and management roles in hospitals had always been the negative light that their peers viewed their calling, and the difficulty they faced in acquiring and keeping positions in light of this negativity. While she had the approval of her doting Scottish father, Cumming had faced tremendous opposition from her brothers when she expressed her desire to become a nurse at the outset of the war. She was told by one of her brothers that nursing was "no work for a refined lady":

One of them, whose sister and mother went with Miss Nightingale to the Crimea, told me I would be mistaken if I thought our position would be like [English nurses]...All of this made me more determined than ever...As to the plea of its being no place for a

refined lady, I wondered what Miss Nightingale and the hundreds of refined ladies of Great Britain, who went to the Crimea, would say to that![71]

Cumming was doubtless able to sum up all of her Scottish feistiness and remind her brothers that what "Miss Nightingale" had done, Miss Cumming most certainly could do too! It shall unfortunately never be known just how many Southern ladies summoned the name of Florence Nightingale to gain approval to serve as nurses from closed-minded friends and family when the war began. Phoebe Yates Pember also wrote of the thorny subject of women in hospitals and their "modesty":

There is no unpleasant exposure under proper arrangements, and if even there be, the circumstances which surround a wounded man...suffering in a holy cause and dependant upon a woman for help, care and sympathy, hallow and clear the atmosphere in which she labors...In the midst of suffering and death...a woman must soar beyond the conventional modesty considered correct under different circumstances.[72]

Despite the outcome of the war for the Southern women who had served in it, they had claimed a small victory for themselves, their daughters, and their female descendants. These women courageously flouted convention and endeavored to overcome the disease-ridden hospitals in which they served. The nurses of the Confederacy paved the way for women to be viewed as capable and courageous and the equal of a man in terms of medicine and management, just as Florence Nightingale had done for Englishwomen. The independence and sense of self-worth they found in their nursing positions would prove immensely valuable to them in the days and years of hardship ahead of them. Far too many fathers, husbands, and sweethearts would not return to give Southern belles and matrons the stable futures they had been trained to expect from their childhoods, and these women would now need to find and make their own way in the world.

As Florence Nightingale had wrested an independent and pioneering future from a cosseted and complacent upbringing, Southern women had won for themselves a new frontier of opportunities. Due to the inspiration and influence of an indomitable English gentlewoman, they could pave a new future and new careers for themselves. Southern women would continue to face censure in the future, but as Nightingale exhorted her female readers in her pioneering work *Notes on Nursing*: "You want to do the thing that is good, whether it is 'suitable for a woman' or not...Oh, leave these jargons, and go your way straight to God's work, in simplicity and singleness of heart.[73]

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