Biography of Florence Nightingale

Dates of Birth and Death:
(*) 12 May 1820 in Florence, Italy
(i) 13 August 1910 in London, England

Family Data:
Florence Nightingale was born into an upper class wealthy English family. Her father William Edward Nightingale (1794-1875) had inherited a sizeable amount of wealth and was politician, the mother Francis (Fanny) (1789-1880), née Smith, was descendent of a politically liberal family. The parents got married in 1818. During the parents stayed in Italy for several years, Florence and her older sister Parthenope were born.

In Great Britain, the daughters grew up in the family estate Lea Hurst and in Embley Park in Hampshire. During the reconstruction of the country-estate from 1837/1838, the family undertook a new voyage to the continent.

Against her mother’s wish, Florence refused to get married with a wealthy nobleman and never married. She was very religious and felt that she had been instructed by God to help the poor and indigent people. She had a warm relationship with the mathematician Ada Lovelace (1815-1852).

Education:
The father, for not having found an eligible governess, taught himself his daughters. During the voyage to the continent, Florence got to know politicians and scientists. Already at an early age Florence, rebelled against the determined way of life of women of those times, who were supposed to live only as wife and mother.

In 1840, Florence pleaded for permission from her parents to let her study mathematics, only after long arguments she was tutored in the field of mathematics. She had a pronounced talent for mathematics and was interested in statistics, where she was inspired by Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874).

Professional Career:
Nightingale succeeded to become a nurse against her parents’ wishes, an occupation, which was not much respected then. In Kaiserswerth, Germany, under the guidance of deaconesses, and in Paris in a Catholic hospital, she learned the methods of nursing. In 1853, she became superintendent at the
Establishment for Gentlewomen during Illness in London. She became well-known by the technique of fight against Cholera in England and took an active part to reform the Poor Laws in England. Her father had given her an annual income, so that she could work for her vocation.

When reports about the disastrous situation of the wounded soldiers of the Crimean War became known, Nightingale being commissioned by the Ministry of War, travelled together with 38 nurses and an equipment to the military hospital in Üsküdar (Skutari) nearby Istanbul in 1853. Nightingale organized and improved the hospital, but the British militaries considered this as interference of civil persons into military affairs. Nevertheless, she could improve the conditions and the soldiers loved her; because of her nightly controls she got the name “Lady with the Lamp”. When she became seriously ill she had to return to England.

With a considerable amount of contributed monitory fund, she founded the Florence-Nightingale-Fund with a school for nursing at the St. Thomas Hospital in London in 1860. She was especially concerned about a good training of the nurses. In 1861, she founded a school for midwives at King’s College in London. Her system succeeded in the whole of Europe and in many countries. Under her guidance as advisor for the British Public Health, the statistics about population numbers and the mortuary rates were introduced. In 1869, Florence Nightingale and the physician Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910) opened the Women’s Medical College. She succeeded in making nursing a respectable career for women.

Florence Nightingale was important in the English feminism and in liberation theology with rather heterodox ideas. She also became the pioneer of statistics on the field of Epidemiology and in the graphic method of presentation of data.

Her dedication inspired Henri Dunant (1828-1910) to found the Red Cross.

Important Publications:

vol. 6: Florence Nightingale on public health care; vol. 7: Florence Nightingale’s European travels; vol. 8: Florence Nightingale on women, medicine, midwifery and prostitution; vol. 9: Florence Nightingale on health in India; vol. 10: Florence Nightingale on social change in India.


- Eastern hospitals and English nurses: the narrative of 12 month’s experience in the hospitals of Roulalai and Skutari (London 1857).

- Notes on matters affecting the health, efficiency and hospital administration of the British army, founded chiefly on the experience of the late war (London 1858).


- How people may live and not die in India (London 1864).

- Organization of nursing: an account of the Liverpool Nurses’ Training School, its foundation, progress, ... (Liverpool 1865).

- Notes on hospitals (London 1859; 1863), deutsch: Bemerkungen über Hospitäler (Memel 1866; Frankfurt 1975).

- Introductory notes on Lying-in institutions: together with a proposal for organising an institution for training midwives and midwifery nurses (London 1871).

- Life or death in India: a paper read at the Meeting of the National Association for the promotion of Social Science, Norwich, 1873 (London 1874).
• Letters from Miss Florence Nightingale on health visiting in rural districts (London 1911-1914; Bristol 1999).

• Indian Letters (Calcutta 1937).

• Selected writings (New York 1954).

• The institution of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine for the Practical Training of Deaconesses (Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth 1956, 1959).

• The Derbyshire Home of Florence Nightingale (Ripley, Derby 1970).


• The institution of Kaiserswerth on the Rhine, for the practical training of deaconesses, under the direction of Rev. Pastor Fliedner (Düsseldorf-Kaiserswerth 1982).

• “I have done my duty”. Florence Nightingale in the Crimean War 1854-56 (Manchester 1987).


• Suggestions for thought (Philadelphia 1994).

• Letters from Crimea: 1854-1856 (Manchester 1997).

• Michael D. Calabria (ed.), Florence Nightingale in Egypt and Greece: her diary and “visions” (Albany 1997).

• Florence Nightingale and the Crimea, 1854-55 (London 2000).
Scientific Honors:
In 1858 Florence Nightingale was elected as first woman as Fellow into the Royal Statistical Society. Later, she became honorary member of the American Statistical Association. In 1907 as the first woman she received the Order of Merit.

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• Ursula Geppert, *Frauen stehen ihren Mann* (Lahr 1999).
• Gillian Gill, *Nightingales: the story of Florence Nightingale and her re-
markable family (London 2004).
• Judith Godden, *Lucy Osborn, a lady displaced: Florence Nightingale’s envoy to Australia* (Sydney 2006).
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• Max Horndasch, *Die Lady mit der Lampe* (Bonn 1948).
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• Gilbert Morris, *God’s handmaiden* (Grand Rapids 2004).
• Basil Miller, *Florence Nightingale: the lady of the lamp* (Minneapolis 1975).
• Laura Orvieto, *Florence Nightingale* (Zürich 1943).
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Proust, Elisabeth Barrett Browning (London 1974).
• Helen Rappaport, No place for ladies: the untold story of women in the Crimean War (London 2007).
• Lucy Ridgely Seymer, Florence Nightingale (London 1950).
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• Anna Sticker, Florence Nightingale und Kaiserswerth (Düsseldorf 1993).
• Giles Lytton Strachey, Macht und Frömmigkeit: Florence Nightingale, Kardinal Manning: zwei Bildnisse aus der viktorianischen Zeit (Berlin 1937).
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• Beth Tamplet Ulrich, Leadership and management according to Florence Nightingale (Norwalk, Conn. 1992).
• Rob Van der Peet, The Nightingale model of nursing (Edinburgh 1995).
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