MISS NIGHTINGALE AND
THE COLLEGE

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In his admirable "History of the R.A.M. College (1), the late Colonel J. B. Neal quoted a passage from Mrs. Woodham Smith's Florence Nightingale describing the teething troubles endured by the College. Much additional light on these troubles have been shed by a study of the papers of Sir Thomas Longmore, our first Professor of Surgery, who played a leading part in laying the foundations of the RAMC as it exists today: he was a veritable Admirable Crichton whose interests ranged from ophthalmic and general surgery to the fitting of harness to the teams of ambulance wagons.

We have had access to these papers thanks to the great kindness of his son, Mr. H. F. Longmore, who, as a very youthful eighty-nine-year-old, recently visited the College at Millbank and the Historical Museum at Crookham.

The first reference to the proposed new medical school is contained in a letter from Sidney Herbert (2) to Dr. Parkes (3) dated October 10th, 1857. He writes "I am engaged in conjunction with others in preparing a plan for the Medical School to be established at Netley or some great military hospital." He asks Dr. Parkes to obtain for him the regulations of the Faculty of Medicine at the various medical schools, the organisation of their museums and laboratories, programmes of lectures and the nature of their general entrance examinations. He proposes a second examination on military surgery and medicine (including hygiene) to be taken later in the course and suggests three professorial chairs at Netley in hygiene, military medicine and surgery, with a curator for the pathological museum and a chemist or apothecary.

Miss Nightingale makes her entrance with a wholesale condemnation of the new Netley Hospital writing to Sir James Clark (4) on October 8th, 1858 "I also had the misfortune to read the report and appendices of the Netley Committee. I think I never read such a mass of contradictions—of assertions which showed such an utter absence of knowledge of the most ordinary sanitary principles—and, what is worse, such a want of ordinary honesty . . . my own opinion is exactly the same as what I fancy you expressed when we were both on the spot together last year, and which Dr. Grausville expressed in the passage suppressed by the committee, viz. that it is unfit for most of the cases which will be sent there, e.g. the Indian ones and certainly had I written an article on it I would not have written it in such measured terms."

This is the first of a long series of letters to Sir James. Over many periods he received a letter every day and sometimes she wrote twice on the same day. On November 29th, 1858 after trying to curb the impatience of Dr. Aitken (5), she reviews the position of the negotiations: "The Medical School stands thus: General Peel is quite in its favour. Lord Harding, thinking we had asked too much from the Treasury, at once wanted to put it off till the general hospital at Aldershot was
organised. Mr. Herbert convinced him that it was, on the contrary, better to strike when the iron was hot, Sir G. Trevelyan being quite in favour. I saw Mr. Herbert's letter to General Peel last week, urging him to begin it directly at Chatham at once.

General Peel had been appointed Secretary of State in succession to Lord Panmure who had pledged his word that Sir John Hall would never be made Director General so long as he held office. Florence Nightingale had had many passages of arms with Sir John in the Crimea and, as he was next in seniority to Dr. Andrew Smith (who was due for retirement) she was in an agony of apprehension. Sidney Herbert was induced to whisper honeyed words in praise of Dr. Alexander and the unhappy Sir John fades from the scene to die, after a short illness, at Pisa on January 17th, 1866.

General Peel, however, proved something of a disappointment, for she wrote on May 17th, 1859, "As to General Peel, his strength has been as far as we have been concerned, in doing nothing like many other people, his only action is to tell you how much he would like to do something."

A letter of October 18th begins "I understand you wrote some time ago to Dr. Sutherland to know what was going on. You could not have written to a worse person." Dr. Sutherland was her faithful and adoring slave, who devoted his whole life to her service. The letter goes on to report that the Indian Medical Services had been officially accepted for training at the school.

The luckless Dr. Sutherland is again in trouble in a letter of December 19th, "I gave Dr. Sutherland a message for you this morning which I find he has not delivered."

There had been delay in gazetting the new appointment, the culprit this time being the Duke of Cambridge, who advised until parliament met. Nevertheless, Mr. Herbert "meant immediately to call upon the four professors for a syllabus of lectures."

Dr. Alexander died of a cerebral haemorrhage in February 1860. "Poor Alexander's loss is an irreparable one to us—but I think the interregnum a favourable time for launching the school. And I find the Army Medical Council is bidding for popularity with the civilians by encouraging the school. I have asked Mr. Herbert to delay the appointment of a new Director-General till it, the school, be established. But to find a man so useful to us as poor Alexander has been impossible. His loss undoes a great part of the work I have done. I wish I had not lived to see it."

On March 17th, she is writing about the tenure of various appointments and a fortnight later, on April 1st, she triumphantly records one of the most historic events in the history of the Royal Army Medical Corps.

April 1st 1860

My dear Sir James Clark,

You will be glad to hear (if you have not yet heard) that the Senate of the Army Medical School was constituted a Senate yesterday by Mr. Herbert at the War Office—and that "it" is now a School.

I consider this an important step as placing the Army Medical School under the immediate dependence of the Secretary of State for War.

Ever yours sincerely and gratefully,

F. Nightingale
In July 1860, letters came thick and fast. On the 13th she is asking Sir James to cast an eye on a letter from Dr. Aitken, on the 16th she sent him a copy of her "little book" to present to "our beloved Princess, England's eldest daughter. Good angels speed her" and adds "I think there is no doubt that the school will be removed as soon as there is a General Hospital in a suitable locality, probably Aldershot." It is a postscript on the next day's letter which reads: "Gibson (7) the D.G. is coming also to breakfast tomorrow and I always think it worth while to keep him straight."

The following morning, Sir James found yet another letter on his breakfast table, dated July 18th. This contained a document with the remark "Perhaps it will be better not to let the D.G. (or anyone) know that this statement has been seen by us. It might excite jealousy."

On July 20th, the locality of the new school was still very much in the melting pot. It was proposed to move it to the new hospital at Aldershot in due course; but Miss Nightingale points out "your proposal (for the present) is really between a temporary school at Chatham, which already exists, and a temporary school at Aldershot, which would have to be provided."

On July 24th, she reports that Mr. Herbert did not approve of the Aldershot scheme. From the next day's letter it appears that Dr. Aitken had been making excessive demands "Pathologists are apt to get into the way of considering the main end of such a school to be that of making good pathological preparations... Pathology is doubtless essential, but the aim of our Army School is the prevention of disease, not the record of the harm disease has done."

After the death of Sidney Herbert in 1861 she was prostrated by serious bouts of illness and depression but, in spite of this, she was able to collect an enormous amount of data for the Royal Sanitary Commission on the health of the army in India.

In 1863, the Medical Department faced a serious crisis, few candidates were coming forward and it looked as though all Herbert's schemes for army medical reform were likely to collapse like a house of cards. Faced with a desperate situation, Florence Nightingale returned to the attack. On August 3rd 1863, she wrote to Sir James "About the Army Medical Department and the want of candidates—I have long thought it a most serious matter and I have told Lord de Gray (8) so—and that the original warrant must be restored in all its integrity or the Medical Department will be lost—and he always agrees but when it comes to the point I see, though he does not say so, that he cannot carry it with the Horseguards. He is too weak. It is a great pity, Sidney Herbert could have done it well."

The subject is taken up again in a letter of August 21st "Mr. Paget (9) has written me a capital letter, as one of the examiners with permission to show it to Lord de Grey on the subject of the paucity of candidates. When you have produced your case I shall add this and I hope we shall win."

This was the opening salvo in a long campaign which lasted on and off for nearly ten years. One in which, she issued her operation orders in the form of many pages of correspondence.
The proposal was that the War Office should call for another commission on the medical services, a suggestion strenuously opposed by Miss Nightingale, who maintained that the Warrant drawn up under the presidency of Sidney Herbert was incapable of improvement or modification.

The following extracts give some indication of the shifting fortunes of the battle:

September 26th/63 “It is essentially necessary that something be done. You will see that Mr. Paget argues the question of supply and shews that the Government has very formidable rivals in the field ready to snap up every competent man who passes the colleges. You must dwell strongly on this point and shew that additional pay will not meet the case. What is wanted is Military Status and gentlemanly treatment”

October 7th/63 “In their desire to remedy the present state of things, the Army Medical Professors seem to have forgotten that the whole subject (for which they propose to appoint a commission) was carefully enquired into by a far better commission than they are ever likely to get. All that is wanted is that the result of the former enquiry shall be carried into effect.”

The suggestion that Lord Stanley should preside over the Commission met with little enthusiasm, on the same day October 7th/63 she wrote “Catch Lord Stanley soiling the tips of one of his fingers to help out of the mire anybody. If we had put Hamlet’s ghost into the chair of the Indian Commission he would have served us better and Lord Stanley has done nothing for us, neither then nor since. . . . Who is to write the report? General Eyre can’t write, Lord Stanley won’t . . . Dr. Muir (10) is by far the best man in the Department. He is a second Alexander and will be the next D.G. . . . but do you think the government will have him home for this . . . believe me, the Army Medical Department knows little what it is about if it thinks the commission headed by Sidney Herbert, which had the elements of success, could be reproduced.”

By April 4th 1864 it looks as though she may have to acknowledge defeat. “The Army Medical Department is going to rack and ruin as fast as it can . . . they want to get off with merely placing doctors on the staff. Sidney Herbert and the first Royal Commission would have thought any man mad for proposing such a thing, and, as I have played my last card, I now think the only thing to be done is to revert to your proposal of another Royal Commission. But whom to have on it? Lord Stanley won’t serve, that I know, but you might ask him. We must think more about it.”

In the next letter the luckless Dr. Sutherland is again in hot water and, in spite of the fact that she had “played her last card”, she returns to the attack “I have done my best to make Dr. Sutherland go to you from Saturday till Monday. His meeting on Monday is not till one and he could quite well do it; I worked it particularly for my own sake for I think the medical warrant affair so desperate, that unless you strike out at once I don’t know what to do. But Dr. Sutherland always makes any excuse to go nowhere and he generally, most unfairly, makes me that excuse . . . . I have written to the War Office to say I really cannot insult Dr. Longmore by asking him whether he would take the rank without its advantages and that they must go for the original proposal. I have also written threatening letters to Lord de Grey and to
Captain Galton (11) about the Warrant and, after pointing out that both the restora­tion of the warrant and increase of pay are now necessary, I have shewn how, when we are exacting duties from the medical officer, such as sanitary recommendations to his commanding officer which especially require him to have the standing of a gentleman with his commanding officers, we are doing such things as dismounting him on parade, depriving him of presiding at boards etc., which in military life, to a degree we have no idea of in civil life—deprive him of the weight of a gentleman amongst gentlemen.”

The next day the enemy are seen to be wavering and she summons her subordinate commanders for the final assault “the War Office seem to have taken fright and to think it will be less disagreeable to have an assault meeting from you, Doctors Sutherland and Parkes than form a Royal Commission. They have written to me asking me to communicate with you. I don’t exactly know what to communicate.” “If you can make this house a place of meeting for discussion with Doctors Parkes and Sutherland previously to adjourning in a trio to attack Lord de Grey, I need not say there will be room and food for you any day. . . . This Warrant business must come before everything else for the War Office seem now willing to listen to some kind of terms, they are frightened. They sent me your letter. It was very good and very firm. Don’t be conciliatory. . . .”

In her next letter dated April 8th she has little faith in Dr. Gibson (the Director General) “I cannot think Gibson will be of any use now because although he entirely concurs as he must you can never depend on what he will say upon whether he will stand by you, but should it come e.g. to a committee consisting of yourselves being asked to draw up the precise meaning of clause 17 then Gibson must be on it. . . .”

The letter of April 9th which opens “I shall certainly be only fit for a lunatic asylum if I stay in the War Office”, is largely taken up with the question of Longmore’s rank, status and salary.

On April 11th there is some modification of the plans and it is arranged for the triumvirate, Clark, Sutherland and Parkes to foregather at her house in Park St. for briefing prior to attacking Lord de Grey. “The fact is what is wanted is someone to put a muzzle on the Duke of Cambridge and tell him he must not alter a Royal Warrant. Lord de Grey is head of the army and could quite well say this if he pleased to the Duke of Cambridge and he must be made to say it.

When the interview took place Lord de Grey clearly adopted evasive tactics but Florence will have none of this. (June 5th) “My answer to the enclosed was that it was no use Lord de Grey shifting the responsibility of advising the Duke of Cambridge on to Dr. Watson’s (12) or Mr. Paget’s or anyone else’s shoulders. Lord de Grey knows quite enough to tell the Duke of Cambridge what to do. If he won’t no-one else can, and I strongly deprecated the coward’s act of letting anyone rather than the responsible minister—responsible for the army being well doctored and for the Commander-in-Chief knowing the truth”. The rest of the letter is a long diatribe against Lord de Grey and his many misdeeds.
A letter of June 7th deals with promotions of senior officers. Longmore was then in the running for the post of D.G. but could not be spared from the new school.

The last letter in the series is dated from Hampstead on August 13th, 1864 and is full of scorn for her old enemies, Gibson, Lord de Grey, the Duke of Cambridge. "Gibson was born to be our ruin. He is the mere tool of the Commander-in-Chief and the Horse Guards are the real Army Doctors' managers and Lord de Grey has not the ordinary courage or capacity to resist the Duke of Cambridge although he is distinctly by position master of the Commander-in-Chief. . . . I am intriguing now to get Muir back as Gibson's successor."

In the Spring of 1876, the School faced another serious crisis, the exact nature of which is not very clear from the correspondence. It certainly concerned the terms of service of medical officers but Miss Nightingale's letter of 31st March lacks something of her usual coherence "I am concerned beyond measure at what you are so good as to write to me and am at the same time very grateful to you for writing it. . . . I agree with every word you say—would this be possible—there will—if the school is continued, be a great influx of ten year men (as you say all candidates by the new arrangements are to enter on the ten years plan) they will get £250 a year at once if after passing their initial examination they are gazetted and sent for 4 months to Netley—might they not pay for their board (the School itself is a mere trifle in expense to the Country in return for such a good). The short service argument is most extraordinary—that is to say Short Service = Netley training. One would think the argument was just the other way viz: that the 4 months training was too little for a man—who has to gain his experience and do his work all in ten years. 10 years is scarcely too much to gain experience in to take care of the army sickness and to keep camps, Barracks, daily life, food, equipment all in health—is this to be learnt at any civil chair? or at any Station Hospital where soon these newcomers will have to learn of; will know as little of the Special knowledge as their pupils? The "Civil Chairs" come to you for information and all this to save the keep etc. of the short service man."

The whole future of the School seems to have been endangered by a proposal to train the army doctor in civil institutions.

Her letter of 26th April 1876 makes it clear that "though it is better that my name should not come up at all" she is working hard to influence the members of the Committee; "I am too old and worn to be habitually sanguine but I assure you there seems good reason to hope that the school may be developed as it deserves—instead of abolished."

The following day, Professor Longmore received a triumphant pencilled note: A private intimation from Mr. Hardy himself (13) that, having read the report of the Senate "The School is Saved. I presume he takes time to consider about the proposed Committee and the means of adapting to increased numbers.

May God speed you all and us too.

F.N."

For nearly a hundred years the enigma of the dual personality of Florence Nightingale has fascinated writers and historians. At a recent meeting of the London
Osler Club her god-daughter, Miss Verney, gave a delightful account of the kindly old lady whom, as children, they always loved to visit, always without their parents. This was the same Miss Nightingale who had made a personal friend of all the young probationers joining St. Thomas's Hospital, sending them flowers and having special dishes cooked for them when ill, the one, too, who in early life, had brought so much comfort and encouragement to the wounded languishing in the endless corridors at Scutari.

It is difficult to realise that this is the same woman who later in life, ruthless, intolerant and often unreasonable, would summon viceroys and cabinet ministers to her side and keep them awaiting her pleasure on the threshold, who would stop at nothing to attain her ends, ends it must be remembered which were never to her own advantage or aggrandizement, but always directed toward the welfare of the soldier and the improvement of the medical services.

Mr. Longmore had many interesting memories of some of the great figures of the past. His father, Alexander, Aitken, Parkes, Muir and others were all men of high professional attainments, strong personality, and keen intelligence, many with Crimean experience, all were devoted to the cause of forming an efficient medical service. They certainly cannot have been merely the passive tools of a dominating ex-hospital matron holding no official appointment. It is more likely that, in her, they found a finely tempered weapon, willing and eager to use her immense prestige for cutting through the tangle of bureaucratic red tape which threatened to thwart their efforts.

Acknowledgment

In compiling these notes constant recourse has been made to Mrs. Woodham-Smith's classic Florence Nightingale, a help which is most gratefully acknowledged.

REFERENCES

2—SIDNEY HERBERT. Minister at War, later Lord Herbert of Lea.
3—Dr. PARKES. Professor of Military Hygiene, Army Medical School.
4—Sir JAMES CLARK. Physician to Queen Victoria.
5—Sir WILLIAM AITKEN. Professor of Pathology at the school.
6—Dr. ALEXANDER. Director General 1858–1860.
7—Sir JAMES GIBSON. Director General 1860–1867.
8—LORD DE GREY (later the Marquis of Ripon) Parliamentary Under-Secretary for War.
9—Sir JAMES PAGET. Surgeon St. Bartholomew's Hospital and Surgeon extraordinary to the Queen.
10—Sir WILLIAM MUIR. Director General 1874–1882.
11—Captain GALTON. Inspector General of Fortifications, later Assistant Under-Secretary of War.
12—Sir THOMAS WATSON. Physician in Ordinary to Queen Victoria.
13—Mr. GAYTHORNE HARDY, M.P. President of Poor Law Board.