

AN ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

A tribute to Florence Nightingale

Many were the outstanding people who left their imprint on the nineteenth century, devoting their energies to the cause of human dignity. One such person was Florence Nightingale, born in Florence on 12 May 1820, died in London on 13 August 1910.

This year, therefore, the 150th anniversary of her birth is being celebrated. We are particularly grateful to the Chairman of the Standing Commission of the International Red Cross for agreeing to speak in this issue for the Red Cross which has always considered the "Lady with a Lamp" an inspiration. Henry Dunant himself profoundly admired her.

*Florence Nightingale's epic humanitarian achievements awoke in him the sense—which she felt to the highest degree—of personal responsibility towards those who suffer. When speaking of sick and wounded soldiers, both were fired by fraternal indignation at what they had witnessed. To alleviate suffering could become the essential aim of life, a *raison d'être*. In a moment of discouragement, in February 1857, Florence Nightingale wrote: "I have had to see my children dressed in a dirty blanket and an old pair of regimental trousers and to see them fed on raw salt meat, and nine thousand of my children are lying, from causes which might have been prevented, in their forgotten graves".*

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

*In the memoirs which Dunant wrote in exercise books at Heiden¹, he referred to the influence not only of his mother but of three women of English descent : “ M^{me} Beecher-Stowe, l’admirable auteur de Uncle Tom’s Cabin, à laquelle on doit l’abolition de l’esclavage aux Etats-Unis. Puis Florence Nightingale, l’héroïne du dévouement en Crimée, “ the Lady with the Lamp ” comme la nomme Longfellow. Enfin, M^{me} Elizabeth Fry, qui se consacre à l’amélioration du sort des condamnés dans les prisons, soit en Angleterre, soit sur le continent... ”.*²

His veneration was constant. Elsewhere he said of Florence Nightingale: “ A noble woman who inaugurated a new era in universal charity ”.

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The first award of the Florence Nightingale Medal took place fifty years ago, and it is fitting that we celebrate that anniversary too in this issue devoted to her whose memory is commemorated in the distinction awarded every two years by the International Committee of the Red Cross. That is why the following pages give the background to the medal, and an illustrated article on the twenty-second award. The nurses who followed Florence Nightingale in dedication, demonstrate that her spirit and example are still alive. (Ed.)

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¹ Henry Dunant Manuscripts in Geneva University Public Library.

² “ Mrs Beecher-Stowe, the admirable author of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to which the abolition of slavery in the United States was due; Florence Nightingale, the dedicated heroine of the Crimea, the “ Lady with the Lamp ” as Longfellow called her, and Mrs. Elizabeth Fry who devoted herself to the improvement of the plight of convicts in England and on the Continent...”