

M I S C E L L A N E O U S

A WORD ABOUT FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

Throughout her life, Florence Nightingale was a prolific letter writer. It has been estimated that she wrote 12,000 letters to her family and friends and to other people who are now hardly known and whose connection with her is difficult to discern. One such person was Catherine Marsh, to whom Florence Nightingale wrote six letters between 1877 and 1892. Those letters, according to the British *Nursing Times* of 8 November 1973, are now in the Boston University's records on the history of nursing. There is scant information about the connection between the two women and about Miss Marsh, who is not mentioned in any biography of Florence Nightingale.

She was the daughter of a clergyman, the author of several books, very active in philanthropy, and in 1886 worked in a London hospital during a cholera epidemic. She did a great deal of social work, was concerned for sick soldiers and tried to set up convalescent homes for the working class. Florence Nightingale, in one of her letters, mentions a book entitled "The Hero", which might well be one written by Catherine Marsh and published under the title of "A Hero in the Battle of Life". A further interest shared by the two was apparently their religion.

Nursing Times has now published a summary of the six letters which have just come to light. They reveal Florence Nightingale's high opinion of nursing as something more in the nature of missionary work than the mere administering of care. She wanted no truck with young ladies wishing to become nurses because it was the fashion to do so, as was the case towards the end of the 19th century. In 1877 she wrote Catherine Marsh that she was seeking nurses for the London hospital. A few years later she wrote of other matters, problems in India, opium in Siam, preaching the Gospel among the poor. She was continually seeking news on subjects of interest to her, such as the lot of the nurse, social reform, the

situation in India. She insistently demanded assistance for that country, for she learned that Miss Marsh had sent some Cambridge students on a mission to China and in one of her subsequent letters she urged that some students from Cambridge should go to India.

The letters show that Florence Nightingale was aware that nursing was not Miss Marsh's essential concern; she mentioned that subject, but not to the exclusion of others which the two women had taken very much to heart. It is clear that Florence Nightingale was a woman of wide interests ranging far beyond those epitomized by the oft-invoked image of "The lady with the lamp".
