

The Lady with the Lamp

by **Laura E. Richards** from *Florence Nightingale: The Angel of the Crimea*

Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) is considered the founder of modern nursing. Her reforms included promoting sanitary practices, giving care and compassion to patients, and stressing training and education for nurses. She gained fame as "The Lady with the Lamp" during the British Crimean War (1853-1856) because she often went around the patient wards at night carrying a lamp. During the war, she managed nurses and cared for soldiers in the British army. In the passage below, the "Lady-in-Chief" refers to Nightingale. Stamboul is the modern Istanbul, Turkey.

Look with me for a moment into one of these wards, these "miles of sick" through which the agent of the Times passed with his guide. It is night. Outside, the world is wide and wonderful with moon and stars. Beyond the dark-blue waters of the Bosphorus, the lights of Stamboul flash and twinkle; nearer at hand, the moonlight falls on the white city of the dead, and shows its dark cypresses standing like silent guardians beside the marble tombs; nearer yet, it falls full on the bare, gaunt square of building that crowns the hill. The windows are narrow, but still the moonbeams struggle in, and cast a dim light along the corridor. The vaulted roof is lost in blackness; black, too, are the corners, and we cannot see where the orderly nods in his chair, or where the night nurse sits beside a dying patient. All is silent, save for a low moan or murmur from one cot or another. See where the moonbeam glimmers white on that cot under the window! That is where the Highland soldier is lying, he who came so near losing his arm the other day. The surgeons said it must be amputated, but the Lady-in-Chief begged for a little time. She thought that with care and nursing the arm might be saved; would they kindly delay the operation at least for a few days? The surgeons consented, for by this time no one could or would refuse her anything. The arm was saved; now the bones are knitting nicely, and by and by he will be well and strong again, with both arms to work and play and fight with.

But broken bones hurt even when they are knitting nicely, and the Highland lad cannot sleep; he lies tossing about on his narrow cot, gritting his teeth now and then as the pain bites, but still a happy and a thankful man. He stares about him through the gloom, trying to see who is awake and who asleep. But now he starts, for silently the door opens, and a tiny ray of light, like a golden finger, falls across his bed. A figure enters and closes the door softly; the figure of a woman, tall and slender, dressed in black, with white cap and apron. In her hand she carries a small shaded lamp. At sight of her the sick lad's eyes grow bright; he raises his sound arm and straightens the blanket, then waits in eager patience. Slowly the Lady with the Lamp draws near, stopping beside each cot, listening to the breathing and noting the color of the sleepers, whispering a word of cheer and encouragement to those who wake. Now she stands beside his bed, and her radiant smile is brighter, he thinks, than lamplight or moonlight. A few words in the low, musical voice, a pat to the bedclothes, a friendly nod, and she passes on to the next cot. As she goes, her shadow, hardly more noiseless than her footstep, falls across the sick man's pillow; he turns and kisses it, and then falls happily asleep.

So she comes and passes, like a light; and so her very shadow is blessed, and shall be blessed so long as memory endures.

Questions

1. Write one metaphor or simile from the passage.

2. This passage has many references to darkness and light. What do you think the darkness and light might symbolize? Use references from the text to support your answer.

3. Explain the use of "knitting" in the following phrase: "The arm was saved; now the bones are knitting nicely..."

4. What do you think "her very shadow is blessed, and shall be blessed so long as memory endures" means?