



Florence Nightingale: The Making of an Icon

By Mark Bostridge

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The common soldier's savior, the standard-bearer of modern nursing, a pioneering social reformer: Florence Nightingale belongs to that select band of historical characters who are instantly recognizable. Home-schooled, bound for the life of an educated Victorian lady, Nightingale scandalized her family when she found her calling as a nurse, a thoroughly unsuitable profession for a woman of her class.

As the "Lady with the Lamp," ministering to the wounded and dying of the Crimean War, she offers an enduring image of sentimental appeal. Few individuals in their own lifetime have reached the level of fame and adulation attained by Nightingale as a result of her efforts. Fewer still have the power of continuing to inspire controversy in the way she does almost a century after her death.

In this remarkable book, the first major biography of Florence Nightingale in more than fifty years, Mark Bostridge draws on a wealth of unpublished material, including previously unseen family papers, to throw new light on this extraordinary woman's life and character. Disentangling elements of myth from the reality, Bostridge has written a vivid and immensely readable account of one of the most iconic figures in modern history.

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Editorial Review

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Starred Review Among the eminent Victorians, the figure of Florence Nightingale threatens to eclipse the celebrity of all the rest. Daughter of middling privilege and heiress to a tradition of freethinking in political, religious, and social matters, the sickly little girl had a will of steel and an unconventional view of her gender's potential. Determined to offer humanity great service, the cultivated young woman fixated on nursing, which in the mid-nineteenth century was a function strictly for lower-class servant girls. Nightingale applied considerable organizational talent and persuasive rhetoric to conquer institutional inertia and care for the Crimean War's wounded, becoming a heroine to those struggling against an entrenched and incompetent aristocracy. The British press' wildly popular pictorial broadsheets romanticized her as an angel of mercy. Insisting she never sought fame, Nightingale nevertheless became the most recognized woman in the empire save the queen herself. Nightingale applied scientific, statistically based principles to health service in general, extending her impact far beyond her time and bettering all humanity. Bostridge strips through the myth of the Lady with the Lamp, and his detailed but always compelling prose shows a remarkable woman struggling to overcome prejudice and incompetence to bring health back to soldiers' broken bodies. Without diminishing Nightingale's singular achievements, Bostridge documents how much her success relied on others' support. --Mark Knoblauch

Review

'It is hard to imagine how one might improve on Bostridge's masterly understanding' Sunday Times 'A masterly work, sympathetic but even-handed, and enormously enjoyable to read' New Statesman 'Perceptive and engrossing ... a fascinating portrait' History Today 'Compellingly authoritative' Evening Standard 'A biography that triumphs' Daily Mail 'Sympathetic and vivid ... Will not be superseded for generations to come' Telegraph 'A masterly achievement ... immensely readable' Financial Times

About the Author

Mark Bostridge was born in 1961 and was educated at Oxford University. His biography of Vera Brittain, co-authored with Paul Berry, was selected as a book of the year by *The Independent*. He lives in England.

Users Review

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