CARVING OUT AN EMPIRE - THE EFFECT OF THE NIGHTINGALE FUND* ON NURSING

> "The whole reform of Nursing both at home and abroad has consisted of this, to take all power of Nursing out of the hands of men, and to put it into the hands of one female trained head and make her responsible for everything - regarding the internal management and discipline being carried out."(1)

If the Nightingale reforms were about anything they were about accountability. Miss Nightingale may have been hazy about nursing education but she was sure that effective reform would come only if there was a clear chain of command. Adamant about nurses obeying doctors' orders in matters of treatment, she was equally adamant that change could only come if nurses were better women, and they would only be better women if they were disciplined.
Henry Bonham Carter, Secretary to the Nightingale Fund, wrote to the British Medical Journal during the great Registration debate:

> "Nurses must obey the doctor's orders. Where then does the difficulty arise? It arises in this, that in matters of discipline, that is order and obedience, behaviour and conduct generally, it is essential for the proper working of the system that nurses shall be responsible to one female superior, and not to the medical officer or any male officer."(2)

When challenged, he pointed out that doctors had had charge of discipline before 1860 and they had not made a very good job of it.

Between 1855 and 1857 the Nightingale Fund raised some £45,000 so that Miss Nightingale could start "an institution for the training, sustenance and protection of nurses and hospital attendants",(3) and before she took to her bed she claimed to have visited all the hospitals in London. She was attracted to King's College, but she was wary of being involved with a religious order. The London, the Middlesex and University College were also considered but, reading between the lines, it is clear that not all hospitals wanted to house the Nurse Heroine's Fund and have a cuckoo in their nest. Eventually, after much delay, the Fund was attached to St Thomas' Hospital, but not because, as Sir Edward Cook says, "it was the best managed hospital and that Miss Nightingale knew and admired Mrs Wardroper".(4) Actually St Thomas' was in the doldrums with a much reduced medical school(5) and Miss Nightingale hardly knew Mrs Wardroper. Miss Nightingale did, however, know Mr Whitfield, the Resident Medical Officer who in 1858 solicited her aid. The South Eastern railway was about to pass through St Thomas' back garden and Mr Whitfield was anxious that a new St Thomas' be built in the suburbs. To Miss Nightingale, the author of Notes on Hospitals, it was a plan after her own heart and with Whitfield she entered into a Machiavellian intrigue to show in the press that St Thomas' was already taking its catchment from the

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*Abridged version of a paper presented at the joint RCN/Wellcome Meeting, March 1984