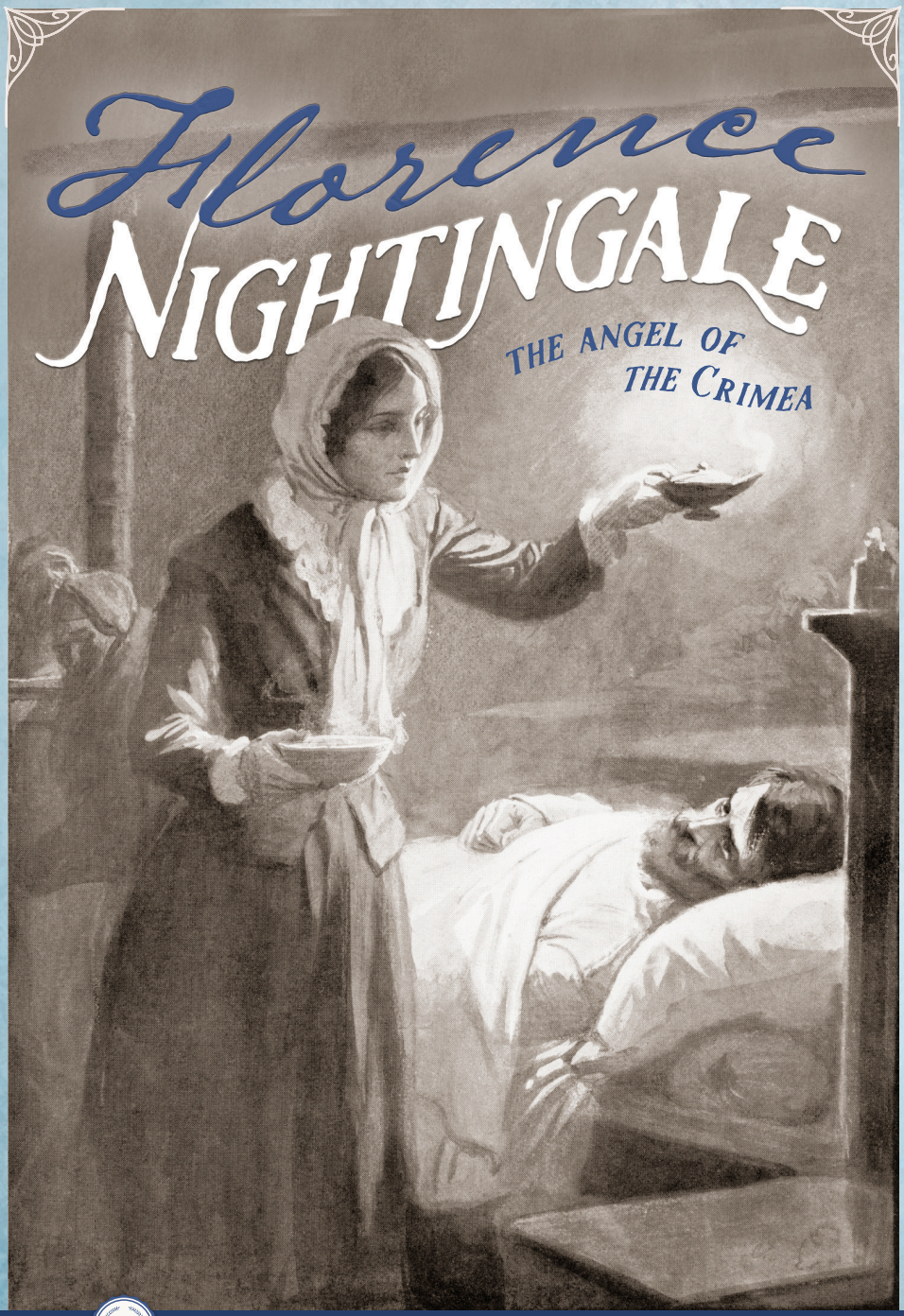

THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

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Chapter 1

How Florence Got Her Name—Her Three Homes

One evening, some time after the great Crimean War of 1854–55, a company of military and naval officers met at dinner in London. They were talking over the war, as soldiers and sailors love to do, and somebody said: "Who of all the workers in the Crimea will be longest remembered?"

Each guest was asked to give his opinion on this point, and each one wrote a name on a slip of paper. There were many slips, but when they came to be examined there was only one name, for every single man had written "Florence Nightingale."

Every English boy and girl knows the beautiful story of Miss Nightingale's life. Indeed, hers is perhaps the best-loved name in England since good Queen Victoria died. It will be a great pleasure to me to tell this story to our own boys and girls in this country, and it shall begin, as all proper stories do, at the beginning.

Her father was named William Nightingale. He was an English gentleman and in the year 1820 was living in Italy with his wife. Their first child was born in Naples, and they named her Parthenope, that being the ancient name of Naples; two years later,

when they were living in Florence, another little girl came to them, and they decided to name her also after the city of her birth.

When Florence was still a very little child, her parents came back to England to live, bringing the two children with them. First they went to a house called Lea Hall, in Derbyshire. It was an old, old house of gray stone, standing on a hill, in meadows full of buttercups and clover. All about were blossoming hedgerows full of wild roses and great elder bushes heavy with white blossoms, and on the hillside below it lies the quaint old village of Lea with its curious little stone houses.

Lea Hall is a farmhouse now, but it still has its old flag-paved hall and its noble staircase of oak with twisted balustrade and broad solid steps where little Florence and her sister "Parthe" used to play and creep and tumble. There was another place nearby where they loved even better to play; that was the ancient house of Dethick. I ought rather to say the ancient kitchen, for little else remained of the once stately mansion. The rest of the house was comparatively new, but the great kitchen was (and no doubt is) much as it was in the days of Queen Elizabeth.

Imagine a great room with heavy-timbered roof, ponderous oaken doors, and huge open fireplace over which hung the ancient roasting jack. In the ceiling was a little trapdoor, which looked as if it might open on the roof, but in truth it was the entrance to a chamber hidden away under the roof, a good-sized room, big enough for several persons to hide in.

Florence and her sister loved to imagine the scenes that had taken place in that old kitchen—strange and thrilling, perhaps terrible scenes. They knew the story of Dethick, and now you shall hear it too.

In that old time which Tennyson calls "the spacious days of great Elizabeth," Dethick belonged to a noble family named Babington. It was a fine house then. The oaken door of the old kitchen opened on long corridors and passages, which in turn led to stately halls and noble galleries. There were turrets and balconies overlooking beautiful gardens; and on the stone terraces, gay

lords and ladies used to walk and laugh and make merry, and little children ran and played and danced, and life went on very much as it does now, with work and play, love and laughter and tears.

One of the gay people who used to walk there was Anthony Babington. He was a gallant young gentleman, an ardent Catholic, and devoted to the cause of the beautiful and unfortunate Mary, Queen of Scots.

Though ardent and devoted, Babington was a weak and foolish young man. He fell under the influence of a certain Ballard, an artful and designing person who had resolved to bring about the death of the great English Queen, and was induced by him to form the plot which is known in history as Babington's Conspiracy; so he was brought to ruin and death.

In the year 1586, Queen Mary was imprisoned at Wingfield Manor, a country house only a few miles distant from Dethick. The conspirators gathered other Catholic noblemen about them and planned to release Queen Mary and set her once more on the throne.

They used to meet at Dethick where, it is said, there is a secret passage underground leading to Wingfield Manor. Perhaps—who knows?—they may have sat in the kitchen, gathering about the great fireplace for warmth; the lights out, for fear of spies, only the firelight gleaming here and there, lighting up the dark corners and the eager, intent faces. And when the plot was discovered, and Queen Elizabeth's soldiers were searching the country round for the young conspirators, riding hither and thither along the pleasant country lanes and thrusting their sabers in among the blossoming hedgerows, it was here at Dethick that they sought for Anthony Babington. They did not find him, for he was in hiding elsewhere, but one of his companions was actually discovered and arrested there.

Perhaps—again, who knows?—this man may have been hiding in the secret chamber above the trapdoor. One can fancy the pursuers rushing in, flinging open cupboards and presses in search for their prey, and finding no one, gathering baffled around the

fireplace. Then one, chancing to glance up, catches sight of the trapdoor in the ceiling. "Ha! Lads, look up! The rascal may be hiding yonder! Up with you, you tall fellow!" Then a piling up of benches, one man mounting on another's shoulders—the door forced open, the young nobleman seized and overpowered and brought down to be carried off to London for trial.

Anthony Babington and his companions were executed for high treason, and Queen Mary, who was convicted of approving the plot, was put to death soon after.

All this Florence Nightingale and her sister knew, and they never tired of "playing suppose" in old Dethick kitchen and living over again in fancy the romantic time long past. And on Sundays the two children went with their parents to the old Dethick church and sat where Anthony Babington used to sit, for in his days it was the private chapel of Dethick. It is a tiny church; fifty people would fill it to overflowing, but Florence and her sister might easily feel that the four bare walls held all the wild history of Elizabeth's reign.

Anthony Babington in doublet and hose, with velvet mantle, feathered cap, and sword by his side; little Florence Nightingale in round leghorn hat and short petticoats. It is a long step between these two, yet they are the two most famous people who ever said their prayers in the old Dethick church. The lad's brief and tragic story contrasts strangely with the long and beautiful story of Florence Nightingale, a story that has no end.

When Florence was between five and six years old, she left Lea Hall for a new home, Lea Hurst, about a mile distant. Here her father had built a beautiful house in the Elizabethan style, of stone, with pointed gables, mullioned windows, and latticed panes. There was a tiny chapel on the site he chose, hundreds of years old, and this he built into the house, so that Lea Hurst, as well as Lea Hall and Dethick, joined hands with the old historic times. In this little chapel, by and by, we shall see Florence holding her Bible class. But I like still to think of her as a little rosy girl, running about the beautiful gardens of Lea Hurst, or playing house in the quaint old

summerhouse with its pointed roof of thatch. Perhaps she brought her dolls here, but the dolls must wait for another chapter.

Soon after moving to Lea Hurst, the Nightingales bought still another country seat, Embley Park, in Hampshire, a fine old mansion built in Queen Elizabeth's time and at some distance from Lea Hurst.

After this the family used to spend the summer at Lea Hurst and the winter at Embley. There were no railroads then in that neighborhood; the journey was sometimes made by stagecoach, sometimes in the Nightingales' own carriage.

Embley Park is one of the stately homes of England, with its lofty gables, terraces, and shadowing trees, and all around it are sunny lawns and gardens filled with every sweet and lovely flower.

Now you know a little of the three homes of Florence Nightingale: Lea Hall, Lea Hurst, and Embley Park; next you shall hear what kind of child she herself was.