Today [March 11, 1945], the Red Cross is appealing to the American people for continued support for its magnificent work of alleviating human pain and suffering the World over. We perhaps can better appreciate just what this means in time of War, by a brief review of the career of a woman who nearly 100 years ago opened the eyes of the World to the new science of nursing. We know her as Florence Nightingale, but to the soldiers she was better known as the Angel of Crimea or simply as the Lady of the Lamp.

Florence Nightingale was born 125 years ago in Florence, Italy. Unlike so many of our other pioneers, she was the daughter of wealthy English parents and reared more or less in luxury. As a young woman, she became somewhat of a problem to her parents. They saw she was not happy in being just a young lady of fashion. She had, what was to them, an unhealthy and unnatural interest in Nursing. Nursing in those days was far from what we know today. A hundred years ago the majority of hospitals were centers of misery, suffering and in too many cases, dirt.

But, despite all this, Florence still wanted to be a nurse, and finally persuaded her parents to let her attend the Deaconess Training School at Kaiserwerth in Germany. For two years she studied and worked under rigorous conditions but in stead of being discouraged, she wrote her mother, "This is Life! I wish for no other world but this."

About this time, the Crimean War between England and Russia broke out and a vicious battle was fought on the little Black Sea peninsula. The British were victorious but the joy at home was short-lived. Reports began to filter back to London of the terrific loss of life - not so much on the battlefield but in the military hospitals. In fact, over 400 out of every thousand in the hospitals were dying. Sidney Herbert, British Secretary at War and friend of the Nightingales, was at a loss as to just what to do until he thought of Florence. And she, in turn, saw this as just the chance for which she had been waiting. So, after carefully collecting a large store of supplies, she arrived at the battlefront in November 1854 with her 38 nurses just after the Battle of Balaklava.

The conditions on her arrival were much blacker than they had been painted in England. As she herself said, "The sanitary conditions of the hospital were inferior to the poorest homes in the worst section of any large city. Often the wounded men were left lying in their fighting clothes." And there was also the red tape that delayed and often prevented getting the simplest of medical supplies. Probably no one woman was ever faced with
such a huge and disheartening task. In one hospital alone, the line of wounded stretched almost four miles.

By working at times for 20 hours at a stretch, Florence Nightingale and her nurses brought order out of chaos. First came cleanliness, a novel thing in those days before Lister's antiseptics and Pasteur's germ theory.

One of her first orders was for 200 scrub brushes to clean the floors. Then came a laundry and a hospital kitchen - a kitchen that could supply the right kind of food for the patients. And when her supplies began to run low, she proceeded to cut the red tape to get more.

In less than six months, she had set up an entirely new system and established a storehouse to receive and distribute supplies. The death rate fell in less than six months after her coming from 420 in a thousand to less than twenty-two, a reduction of almost 95%.

But her greatest contribution was in the role of ministering angel. Long after the hospital had settled down for the night, the Lady of the Lamp could be seen making her solitary rounds through the endless rows of wounded - a smile here, a word of comfort there, or a cool hand on a fevered brow. To the soldiers she was an angel, she called them "her children" and would spend hours writing messages back home to their relatives and loved ones. This was the beginning of the spirit of the Red Cross.

Today, we have with us a War which completely dwarfs that Crimean conflict, but because of our great military hospitals, thousands of the best doctors and tens of thousands of nurses, the toll of human life is but a fraction of one per cent of those wounded in battle. But there is another important factor that cannot be so readily evaluated - the factor of human compassion. Yesterday its symbol was Florence Nightingale - today it is the Red Cross. We cannot all serve in the same manner as the Lady of the Lamp - but since it is impossible to be with our loved ones overseas, we can do for them the next best thing - our American Red Cross.