

# **AGNES JONES – Florence Nightingale of Ireland**

By Mrs. Ajji Alan

## **Childhood and youth**

Agnes was born into a wealthy family in England in 1832. Her father was a God-fearing man who inspired his children to love and serve God. When she was 17, her father passed away and the family had to move to the city. Agnes was very much attached to the little town of Fahan where she had grown up. She loved the poor people and wished to serve them. When she was 19, she started to teach poor children.

## **Visiting Kaiserwerth Institution for Protestant Deaconesses**

In 1853, when she was 21, she attended an annual meeting organized by the branch of Kaiserwerth Institution of Protestant Deaconesses (the nursing profession was called so then) in Paris. She was attracted by the simplicity, loving nature and dedication of the deaconesses and wished to stay and become a deaconess. But her mother refused saying that such a big decision should be taken with more thought. She obeyed her mother and said a painful goodbye. She was inspired by the life of Florence Nightingale, who chose to remain single in order to serve God.

## **Returning to home town to serve as a Nurse**

Agnes saw that she had the gift of nursing and she wanted to serve poor people. During that time a great famine struck Ireland. She started a small clinic in her home and went out of her way to attend to sick people in spite of long distances and icy weather. Wherever she went, she carried with her a medical kit, a Bible and a few tracts. After finishing her treatment, she read some portions from the Bible and gave tracts to them.

## **Going to Kaiserwerth Institution, 1860**

In 1860, her uncle visited from Germany and she got the opportunity to return with him to Kaiserwerth for further training in nursing. Fliedner, who was in charge, was greatly impressed by her level of dedication and capability and urged her to stay longer until she was fully qualified. She was also trained and qualified as a Bible teacher. But Agnes felt her primary call was to nursing and labouring in hospitals – something few people were willing to do in those days. She was entrusted with the charge of the Nursing school in Liverpool.

## **Training in the Nightingale Institute of Nursing**

Agnes felt before joining there, that it would be better for her to get trained in the Florence Nightingale Institute of nursing. She wrote to Miss. Florence Nightingale stating that she wished to join as a full time student. Florence found lots of similarities between her and Agnes. Both were from very wealthy families in England, both were trained in the Kaiserwerth Institution and both forsook wealth, luxury, high society and marriage and chose the noble profession of nursing in order to serve Christ. After Agnes finished her one year course, she got a call to serve in the Free hospitals for the poor – a place where trained nurses generally dared not go for most people there were violent and arrogant.

## **Reformation of the Free hospitals or Work House**

She took charge of a free hospital on 16<sup>th</sup> May 1865. She stayed in the free hospital, where even the poorest dreaded to stay. The patients were happy to see trained nurses for the first time in the hospital. She also arranged for tasty bread for the patients. A few hours in the hospital would give an exact image of hell. The patients were very difficult to handle, many of the women were prostitutes and they were addicted to liquor. One of them even killed a trained nurse with her hands. Agnes had a tough time in the place, but she did not lose

hope. She and her team brought order in this hell. She was on her knees for 16 hours a day asking God for guidance. Agnes started training the people and very soon many repented of their immoral living. In three years of hard work, Agnes and her team made a great reformation in the free hospitals.

## **Death**

One day a nurse who was suffering from bronchitis suddenly started showing symptoms of the deadly disease Typhus. Agnes took her to her room to care for her, and the next day, Agnes was down with the same symptoms and was diagnosed with the same deadly disease. Her intense exertions all those years had weakened her constitution. She became gravely ill and passed away on 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1868; she was just 35 years old. When news of her death spread, there were tears in the eyes of all the nurses and patients and everyone who knew of her selflessness, intense hard work and deep dedication. Miss. Florence Nightingale led the funeral service. The pioneering work by Agnes in the free hospitals had already led the foundation for reforms in all the free hospitals of England. The memory of her outstanding contribution to nursing in Liverpool and to the poor is still commemorated in Liverpool. Florence Nightingale said of Agnes Elizabeth Jones, “She overworked as others underworked. I looked upon hers as one of the most valuable lives in England.”

It is of lives such as this that the Bible says in Revelation 12:11 – They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; **they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.**