

About the Author

With the publication of *Florence Nightingale* in 1951 Mrs. Woodham-Smith jumped almost overnight into the front rank of biographers specializing in the nineteenth century. Universally praised in England and the United States, the book received many such comments as this one by Orville Prescott of *The New York Times*: “. . . a distinguished biography. This is a first book; but it seems like the finished product of a practiced writer and a scrupulous scholar.” The origin of her consuming interest in nineteenth-century biography goes back to her early childhood. Mrs. Woodham-Smith belongs to an old Irish family—the FitzGeralds of Leinster. Her father, Colonel James FitzGerald, served for many years in India, and it was from stories he told her that, as a child, she first derived her interest in Miss Nightingale and military history.

Mrs. Woodham-Smith read English Literature at Oxford and, after her marriage to Mr. G. I. Woodham-Smith, a London solicitor, was able to devote to history that portion of her time not occupied with the upbringing of her two children and the care of her Regency house in London. She read steadily from memoirs, letters, biographies, and newspapers of the nineteenth century, though there seemed at the moment no conceivable use to which such knowledge could be put.

The biography of Florence Nightingale was first conceived in 1942 during a dinner-conversation with her friend Mr. Michael Sadleir, critic, novelist, and director of Constables publishing firm in England. And with her two children then old enough to go to boarding school, Mrs. Woodham-Smith was able to begin work.

The task on *Florence Nightingale* was pursued amidst almost overwhelming difficulties—the crushing amount of material (113 packages of letters and documents in the British Museum Manuscript Department alone), the difficulties of wartime London (one mass of papers had to be brought out of a disused mine where they had been stored for safety), the interruptions of air attacks (both the London Library and British Museum received direct hits, one flying bomb falling within a few yards of where Mrs. Woodham-Smith was working in the North Library). It took six years of persistent labor to complete this carefully documented book.

The research into the Crimean War and its origins, which was so basic a part of her study of the life of Florence Nightingale, led naturally to her newest book, *The Reason Why*, a study of that most famous and disastrous engagement of the Crimean War, the Charge of the Light Brigade, and the two men most closely concerned with the Charge, Lord Lucan and Lord Cardigan. *The Reason Why* is already a Book Society Choice in England, as was *Florence Nightingale*, and the English reviews have equaled if not surpassed in praise those of her earlier book. *The Times Literary Supplement* has stated that *The Reason Why*, “with her *Florence Nightingale*, must establish the author as a leading authority for the middle reaches of the ever-receding nineteenth century.”