Lady amateurs and gentleman professionals: emergency nursing in the Indian Mutiny

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The events that took place in central India during the summer of 1857 have gone by many names over the last 150 years. Historians of colonial India have variously referred to the disorder of that year as the Sepoy Rebellion, the First War of Independence and, perhaps more familiarly, the Indian Mutiny, often reflecting the partisan positions of the original participants.¹ Despite the discrepancy over what to call it, most historians agree that the initial uprising at Meerut in May 1857 took the British civil and military administration in India almost entirely by surprise, and, as the disorder spread, scant resources left cities and garrisons not only woefully under-defended but also unprepared for the protracted nature of the violence that followed. However, against the odds, British fortunes prevailed and over the course of the following year, the East India Company army, reinforced by British troops, gradually reconsolidated their control over central India.² The events that transpired at Delhi, Meerut, Lucknow and most infamously at Cawnpore, would be retained in the British national consciousness for decades to follow. This remembrance, however, was not just because of shock at the violence perpetrated by both British and Indian participants, but because the dual narrative of triumph in the face of adversity and national solidarity satisfied the British disposition towards mythologising their Imperial presence in India. Like other events in Anglo-Indian history, such as Robert Clive's victory at the Battle of Plassey or the so-called 'Black Hole' of Calcutta, the Indian Mutiny became part of the central narrative of British India and remained so until the end of the Raj in 1947, and, in many cases, beyond it.³

Examining how and why the Indian Mutiny remained in the British consciousness in this fashion involves the consideration of a medium perennially associated with the British experience in India, as well as the wider Empire, namely that of the diary or journal. Originating in its recognisable modern form in the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century, a period contemporaneous with the consolidation of British rule in India, the colonial diary was a popular, and often lucrative, activity for those generals or notable soldiers engaged in overseas service. However, unlike accounts from other conflicts of the period, the journals generated by the Indian Mutiny were not only those of soldiers, politicians and religious figures as was the case with earlier, and arguably more destructive, wars in India such as the Anglo-Sikh War of 1845–46. Rather, the prolonged and localised nature of various sieges, in particular that of Lucknow which this chapter will focus on, meant that its chief chroniclers represented a cross-section of gender, class and professional status in colonial society, including a range of medical practitioners but also, and perhaps most significantly, women of various social ranks who by necessity and compulsion had been drawn into medical service.

This chapter examines the narrative accounts of various participants of the Indian Mutiny, as expressed in diaries and journals largely written and published during 1857–58. Given that these texts are a hybrid form of writing, comprising eyewitness accounts of battle, narratives of privation and medical testimony, this chapter subjects them to literary and historical analysis, and explores both the narrative form of the diaries as well as what they reveal about accounts of nursing and medical service that their female authors engage in over the course of their experiences. Indeed, the two are, as this analysis will demonstrate, intrinsically linked, with the diary format having direct influence on the choice of events recorded and the manner in which they are presented in these texts. This chapter is composed therefore of two sections; it begins by briefly considering the culture of textual production that surrounds both the period in question and also Anglo-Indian society of nineteenth-century Britain, outlining the significance of the diary format itself to female authors and medical practitioners in colonial India and the wider British Empire at this time.

The chapter then considers specific printed accounts of female participants from the Siege of Lucknow, particularly those of Colina

Brydon, Emily Polehampton, Georgina Harris and Lady Julia Inglis, analysing how these women were engaged in or experienced the provision of care throughout the siege, and the manner in which they chose to record their experiences. It will be shown that these accounts function as both a vital record of early colonial nursing and as examples of nineteenth-century practitioner narratives told from a female perspective. These diaries illustrate how the women present at Lucknow were able to engage in activities and actions, such as the nursing of the sick and wounded, that they typically considered beyond the remit of their usual role in colonial society. The opportunity to engage in the care of the sick and wounded, as well as the ability to then record such service in print, offered practical and ideological channels through which women were able to contribute to the project of British imperialism in India. However, rather than suggest that nursing is wholly a way in which gender and class roles were contested in the pages of the colonial medical diary, this chapter will consider how nursing and diary writing are presented as natural extensions of typical female activity, conducted through and enabled by the extraordinary circumstances of the Mutiny. Women were able to keep diaries and contribute to the garrison's defence through nursing because these acts of writing or caregiving were in keeping with prevailing Victorian ideals of womanhood. Similarly, the emphasis placed on the amateur status of these women (by the women themselves), both in their medical and literary endeavours, in comparison to their male counterparts is a significant factor, and means that these narratives become once again about triumph over the odds; women, in their actions as nurses and writers, are yet again placed back into a subservient position despite their active, and in many cases vital, participation in the defence of British interests. Whilst the activity of nursing is in most cases considered laudable by participants and chroniclers of the siege, it is nonetheless subject to a range of unspoken, seemingly understood yet entirely unsystematic, social codes of behaviour.

Writing a chapter of history

Unlike so many other conflicts in British history, the Indian Mutiny possesses a distinctly, if not uniquely, female presence at nearly all of

its major engagements. The Mutiny itself began on 10 May 1857 in Meerut, central India and, whilst beginning as a localised disturbance there, rebellion soon spread to Delhi, Agra, Cawnpore, Gwalior and, of course, Lucknow. The cause of the Mutiny has traditionally been attributed to rumours that the cartridge fired by the new Lee Enfield rifle issued to native Indian Sepoys was greased with either pork or beef tallow and thus offensive to both Muslim and Hindu alike; as the loading and firing drill necessitated biting the top off the paper cartridge before inserting it into the gun, the sepoys viewed this as a surreptitious means of either forcing them to break their caste or defile their religion.⁴ However, there were a number of additional contributing factors, and the situation was more complex than traditional narratives have asserted, with the annexation of Oudh in 1856 and the general increase in Christian missionary activity in India also causing localised and more general native discontentment respectively. Jane Robinson provides evidence that at Lucknow the cause of rebellion had also been medical in origin; Robinson asserts that 'one of the European doctors had been seen sipping medicine from a bottle in the hospital stores, thereby contaminating it for all his Hindu patients' and offending their caste.⁵ Lucknow was besieged between late May and November 1857, and the defence force consisted of Company troops, loyal native regiments and civilian (or Irregular) volunteers. Though the city was first 'relieved' in September by troops under the command of General Henry Havelock and Sir James Outram, Outram's force did not have enough men or supplies to break the siege and instead provided reinforcement (and exacerbated supply problems) rather than salvation. A second relief force finally lifted the siege in November, under General Colin Campbell. Elsewhere in India, it took Company and Crown troops (freshly shipped from Britain) until June 1858 to finally suppress all resistance. East India Company control and governance of India was subsequently transferred to the Crown, beginning the British Raj that would last until Indian Independence in 1947.

Very different in character to the Anglo-Sikh war of the previous decade, the nature of the Mutiny meant that rather than traditional battles between standing armies, in its initial stages the conflict took the form of civil disturbances in which a great number of British casualties were women, either unable to escape their cantonments or

garrisons in time or who were killed along with their husbands and families as rioting spread. Similarly, in those cities that were able to mobilise a defence in time and which were placed under siege conditions, women and children accounted for a considerable proportion of the European presence; the diary of Lady Julia Inglis, considered the 'burra-mem' or first lady of Lucknow as she was married to the garrison commander, records that there were 220 women present on 16 August. That figure was recorded after two long months of siege and disease, and does not take into account the large number of Eurasian women present.⁶ In fact, at the beginning of the siege there were close to 3,000 non-military residents within the Lucknow perimeter (European, native Indian or Eurasian in origin) and 600 of these were women.⁷ Claudia Klaver has explored the explanation for such a strong female presence in British India at this time in relation to the 'civilising mission' of British colonialism in India, and indeed the presence of British women and children in India stemmed from a shift in colonial policy in the early part of the nineteenth century that emphasised the presence of soldiers' and administrators' families for various socially performative and practical reasons. Klaver explains that the rationale behind this shift in practice was that the soldiers themselves would be comforted by the presence of their wives and children during long postings away from England, and that Anglo-Indian society would in turn provide an example of matrimonial and familial harmony for native Indians to aspire to.⁸ However, the civilian presence in many of the key engagements of the Mutiny is another reason why the conflict took on such a potent afterlife in the British cultural imaginary; the symbolic signification of the vulnerable female body, along with the frailty and helplessness of their malnourished children, gave events a more lurid and shocking quality to the British public at home. Thus British actions in putting down the revolt were not merely servicing the re-imposition of control over querulous natives, but rather became a defence of British values and virtues.

Along with the high female presence at Lucknow, there was an unusual concentration of medical officers and civilian doctors present during the siege. As a consequence of various locally based units retreating to Lucknow, the medical presence there consisted of Company doctors, civilian practitioners and Army surgeons and

medical officers, as well as three loyal native Indian doctors (though their names were not recorded by the diarists).⁹ These incumbent and incoming personnel would later be put to work in the garrison's two improvised medical facilities, the European hospital in the residency banquet hall and the Native hospital; both hospitals were in use throughout the siege, though they would each be subject to intense artillery fire and a number of wounded or sick men would be further injured or sometimes killed by shelling, whilst many of the doctors were themselves hurt when performing their duties.¹⁰ N. A. Chick's *Annals of the Indian Rebellion* (1859) lists eleven medical men apparently worthy of note in Lucknow, ranging from the rank of surgeon through to apothecary.¹¹ Most notable among them were Surgeon William Brydon, the sole survivor of the ill-fated Afghan expedition of 1838–42, Henry Martineau Greenhow, who compiled a statistical list of those military personnel killed at Lucknow and was recommend for the Victoria Cross for actions during the siege, and Assistant Surgeon Joseph Fayrer, who would go on to be a respected authority on the transmission and treatment of cholera, as well as the venomous snakes of India. Not all the medical officers wrote up their experiences in the form of diaries, but many did; six published memoirs, written by medical practitioners, appeared in the year after the Mutiny, alongside Greenhow's more practical *Notes Medical and Surgical Taken during the Late Siege of Lucknow* (1858).¹² Along with recording key aspects of the struggle (the common events that Klaver terms the 'public narrative' of the siege) these texts provide considerable detail of individual actions both in the native and European hospitals and in the defence of the garrison.¹³ From this range of sources, it is reasonable to conclude that alongside the public interest in the events that transpired at Lucknow, there was equal interest in both female and medical experiences of the siege.¹⁴

The number of published perspectives available on the Siege of Lucknow, as well as the Indian Mutiny itself, is both notable in its own right and indicative of the place of the diary within mid-century Victorian publishing culture.¹⁵ With very few exceptions, and although recollections of the Mutiny would be published at various points up until the beginning of the First World War, the majority of these accounts were published within six to twelve months of

the relief in November 1857. Such expediency in terms of publication is indicative of the temporal concerns that surround these texts. Differing from memoirs or historical accounts, which are often produced long after the events they describe, diaries possess a greater sense of immediacy to the perspective they represent; diaries are a cumulative format, written daily and thus with less distance in which the elision of memory can obscure recall, suggesting a more reliable account. In the case of the Mutiny, diaries were written and published not only to satisfy a British public hungry for news of the conflict, but also as a means of piecing together an accurate timeline of events, at this point still unclear, especially when it came to what had transpired at Cawnpore.¹⁶

Whilst few historians would now consider the use of these diaries as unproblematic, they are nonetheless useful in reconstructing the historical conditions of mid-nineteenth-century colonial Britain and the culture of textual production that existed around colonial India at this time, as well as in understanding the diary, in Rebecca Steinitz's terms, 'as a cultural and discursive practice' appealing to a readership in Britain as well as within Anglo-Indian Society.¹⁷ Felicity Nussbaum argues that the traditionally understood format of the private diary is a production of the late eighteenth century, a time when autobiography developed a set of practices 'distinct from other kinds of writing'.¹⁸ However, whilst many of the Indian Mutiny diaries conform to the daily entry format that Nussbaum refers to, they are influenced by an older form of diary first published over a century earlier. George Walker's *A True Account of the Siege of Londonderry* from 1689 combined both eyewitness testimony and the personal perspective of a diary or journal, and as Steinitz argues 'signalled the diary's use-value in the service of current events'.¹⁹ When later coupled with colonialism and the 'ever popular' travel diary, the result was a succession of peaks in diary production which corresponded with 'the course of nineteenth-century military history', from Eliza Fay's account of captivity at the hands of Hyder Ali, published 1817, through to Lady Sale's account of the retreat from Afghanistan in the 1840s, those of the Crimea in 1856 and then the diaries produced by the ladies of Lucknow in 1857–58.²⁰

An explanation in part for this popularity is provided by Robert Fothergill, who argues that 'diary-writing, as a conventional habit

among persons of culture' reached its apogee in the mid-Victorian era; a time at which the values of Empire and society were repeatedly scrutinised and questioned.²¹ Benedict Anderson's formulation of national identity developed in *Imagined Communities* is particularly useful in exploring Fothergill's observation further, and in framing the wider significance of the diary format that the chroniclers of the Lucknow garrison employ.²² In an era in which Anderson argues that the bonds of horizontal comradeship are consistently being secured by the global reach of print capitalism, the colonial diary represents a way in which women were able to engage with and join the imperial endeavour in print culture. The diary becomes the textual space which reflects, reinforces and expresses anxieties over the British presence in the physical space of the Indian subcontinent. The regular cataloguing of disease, illness and medical procedures, not to mention instances of violent death that abound throughout each of these accounts from Lucknow, is a reflection of the contemporary commonly held belief in the inhospitable nature of India to the European physique, what Mark Harrison has called the 'pathogenic space' of India, and an understanding that the civilising work of British colonialism was deadly, yet necessary.²³ In the case of the Siege of Lucknow this spatial dimension is of course further compounded by the army of hostile mutineers beyond the perimeter walls of the compound, drawing a clear physical as well as moral line between Anglo-Indian society and that of the native population. Such choices of content by these authors influence their stylistic mode of expression, reflecting Nussbaum's assertion that the diary and other serial narratives 'imitate traditional and emergent generic codes' including romance, epic, drama, comedy and tragedy; indeed, in *Angels of Albion*, Jane Robinson describes the Mutiny as 'the ultimate Victorian melodrama'.²⁴ However, through the intimation that they are written in private, diaries 'affect to escape pre-existing categories' and suggest an ability to tell the truth of existence.²⁵ Consequently, the diary exists in a state of generic and narrative haze or contradiction, supposedly truthful, yet composed in the same terms and by the same means as fiction. What these diaries purport to give us is an ordinary view of extraordinary events; the truth of Lucknow, as written by an eyewitness and participant, alongside the dramatic tales of British heroism expected by their readers.

Administering angels

The chief female chroniclers of Lucknow are drawn from a fairly broad middle- to upper-class spectrum, as might be expected, given the period. The class ranking of these diarists corresponds entirely to their husbands' military rank, and can broadly be seen as beginning with Julia Inglis, wife of Brigadier Inglis. She is one of the few diarists who did not compose her account until much later, finally publishing it in 1894. Adelaide Case, wife of Colonel Case, is just below her in the Lucknow hierarchy; Maria Germon, wife of Lieutenant Charles Germon, is next, roughly equivalent to Emily Polehampton, wife of the Reverend Henry Polehampton, and Georgina Harris, wife of the Chaplain, James Harris. Finally on the lowest rung of this particular ladder comes Colina Brydon, married to surgeon William Brydon, and Katherine Bartrum, whose husband, though a captain, was a medical officer with a native regiment, and thus considered less prestigious than a regular corps officer.²⁶ It is unlikely that these were the only women to record their experiences, and these diarists represent a particular class perspective; there are no diaries from Lucknow written by lower-class or native eyewitnesses, even though history records that these figures were present.²⁷ There are instances of private soldiers compiling memoirs, such as Joseph Lee's *The Indian Mutiny & in Particular a Narrative of Events at Cawnpore, June and July 1857* (1890), but these are written much later, and when their writers had gained a modicum of respectability.²⁸

Despite their positions within Lucknow society, none of these diarists claims to be endowed with any literary skill. In the paratextual material that precedes each of their diaries or journals, the women all emphasise their amateur status as historians and writers, mirroring that of their tentative endeavours in matters medical and domestic that comprise the contents of their diaries. Kathryn Carter argues that 'during a period when writing was becoming an increasingly commodified activity' it became important to 'maintain the idea of the diary as a literary product exempt from the marketplace'.²⁹ Carter's analysis suggests that the admission by each of these authors that their recollections are not those of professional writers was intended to lend a degree of authenticity to their respective accounts. The claims imply that the text has not been subject to any literary or editorial

manipulation, or aesthetic adornment, although passing through an established publishing house as most of these texts did, the reverse is almost certainly the case.³⁰ The declarations thus become again illustrative of the tension between the form of these texts and their supposedly 'truthful' content. It is important to note, too, that such declarations of amateurship are entirely absent from their male equivalents, suggesting a particularly gendered divide in the way in which the siege is represented in print. Whereas for the ladies of Lucknow a declaration of inexperience gives their recollections a ring of further truth, for soldiers or medical men the admission of such amateur status would undermine the authority of their position and by extension their account of events.

The majority of these texts largely corroborate their authors' assertions, and many of these accounts are written in a simple, informative style. However, there are exceptions, and indeed notable tonal shifts within individual accounts. For instance, Adelaide Case published her siege diary *Day by Day at Lucknow* in 1858. Her diary opens with a preface in which she states that her work is merely a stopgap measure until some 'more practised person' writes a complete and detailed history, immediately identifying herself and her writerly identity with the amateur. However, Case's denial of literary intention is somewhat disingenuous. The main body of her diary is tellingly entitled 'Narrative' and begins with a striking vignette from her pre-siege life, where she describes the view over Lucknow in notably descriptive terms: 'when the sun begins to shine on the gilded mosques and minarets, and towers, it is like a fairy scene.'³¹ Case's 'Narrative' bears many hallmarks of a literary composition; indeed, as well as in her emphasis on the markers of exotic otherness such as the mosques and minarets, Case reflects a long tradition of British writing on India in her focus on light and the sun, a well-established trope of Anglo-Indian fiction at her time of writing and for many decades afterwards.³² Her account connects the diary with the travelogues of empire, as well as in its artifice creating a dramatic contrast in terms of the state of Lucknow under British rule and how it would later appear after the destructive actions of the mutineers.

Similarly, though much less marked by the literary artifice of Case's writing, the accounts of Germon and Inglis both demonstrate over the course of their own narratives the way in which the authors began

to warm to their theme as well as develop their literary voices and authorial personae; the tension in Inglis's writing increased in parallel with the duration of the siege, with a gradual yet noticeable increase in emotive language as her account progresses. For example, the initial stages of Inglis's diary are composed largely of short and mostly informative statements. However, late in the siege she is given to far more emotional reflections on their situation, either using more evocative imagery, or increased use of exclamation marks. In one representative example, she writes: '[O]ne of our saddest thoughts during the siege was the reflection of how those we loved must be suffering. How one used to long to hear something of them!'³³ Inglis, in particular, is returning to these events after considerable time has passed, and her stylistic decisions may thus be read as another example of how these texts imitate other narratives, here building to an emotional climax at the same time that the siege reached its most desperate stages.

The manner in which these accounts are composed influences their content and intended message. Claudia Klaver's work on diaries from the Siege of Lucknow suggests that women's service throughout the Mutiny is defined in terms of its domesticity, and that its concomitant relationship to Victorian social codes is not only how the diaries should be understood, but also how the diarists will have understood and chosen to represent their own roles: as wives and mothers of Empire.³⁴ Indeed, given the anomalous situation of the rebellion in that so many women were present on what was the front line, denying the army, it was alleged, full freedom to fight the enemy in an open theatre of war, women would have to be seen to be useful in other ways, often far outside of their usual positions. These diaries suggest a range of ways in which they were able to do so; these women cook, perform childcare or act as store-mistresses of their own supplies; all roles that they were entirely unused to in their pre-siege lives, and would not ordinarily be performing were it not for the fact that their servants had either fled or were charging greatly inflated prices for their services. Such duties were met initially with amusement at the novelty of the work, and a sense of pride found in a sudden usefulness, rather than the reluctance that might be expected from women unused to activities of this kind. Georgina Harris remarks on the camaraderie and cohesion of the garrison, attributes that would become synonymous with British representation of the Mutiny in subsequent fictional and

historical portrayals: 'we are all obliged to put our shoulders to the wheel and divide the work between us'.³⁵ Maria Germon, too, remarks on how having to perform menial labour is 'perhaps ... a good thing', as it kept their minds from more troubling thoughts, such as the risks experienced by their husbands or the threat of being overrun.³⁶

Klaver's focus in her article, however, is largely limited to those instances in the diaries that included domestic service, or those aspects of the diary that were related to domestic environs; she does not examine cases where the women undertook tasks which exceeded the demands of their own survival or their children's. Whilst the Lucknow diaries do not, like those of Edith Sharpley at Agra, record women loading or handling weapons, itself a celebrated myth of the Mutiny in later years, many of these women volunteered for a range of duties and not just those confined to the home.³⁷ For instance, Colina Brydon's diary repeatedly mentions her work 'at the bastion', presumably Grant's Bastion, a strongpoint in the residency defences, and how she took her turn on watch between midnight and 3 a.m.³⁸ Though her account provides little further information on what she does at the bastion, the fact that she was employed there and not at the hospital with her husband suggests that the women of Lucknow possessed a degree of agency in terms of how they volunteered their services. It is noteworthy that there was seemingly no effort on the part of the military to form any organised means of enabling women to work or contribute to the garrison's defence, though. Those women who did engage in activities beyond their domestic labours chose to do so seemingly as a result of their own initiative and on an *ad hoc* basis, especially in relation to the nursing of the sick and wounded.

'Nursing', as it appears in these texts, straddles the boundary of the domestic and the professional sphere. In many of these accounts the term is used to refer interchangeably to the care of children, an activity that the majority of these authors were obliged to perform in the absence of an *ayah* or native wet nurse after many of the servants deserted the garrison in July, as well as the tending of the sick or injured. This slippage is indicative of how nursing can be viewed as an extension of the role of women as caregivers, and as such can be seen as an extension of the values Klaver identifies into the male, and professional, environment outside the home.³⁹ Nursing likewise involves many of the same qualities of idealised Victorian womanhood as are

evident in the domestic milieu, including compassion, tenderness, empathy and selflessness; however, when applied in a hospital setting they are not merely implicit in the defence of English society in India but appear to become an active part of that defence. Women are no longer the inert signifiers of Britishness designed to spur on the fighting men, but rather shape and support that fight in various ways. Such an analysis affirms how colonial nursing was always implicated in the preservation of colonialism, albeit initially in emergency situations such as the Mutiny but also in the later nineteenth century and beyond once the presence of the colonial nurse had been formalised and established professionally.

Of the female diarists of Lucknow, Emily Polehampton and Georgina Harris are those who engage most readily in medical service. In the same fashion that none of the Lucknow diarists lay claim to any literary talent, none of the women who volunteered for service in the hospitals were trained nurses, and Harris's engagement as both nurse and maid is seemingly entirely new to her. In a conflation of her domestic and official duties, Harris writes that 'my share is to act as housemaid and keep the rooms we inhabit tidy and clean: I am also to nurse Mr Lawrence [George Lawrence, who was shot through the shoulder on 4 July] and any sick or wounded brought to this house'. Harris's account indicates that those women who did engage in nursing were under the supervision and direction of medical officers; her statement that she is to nurse any wounded brought to her house indicates that they will first have been seen by the doctors or trained medical personnel at the makeshift hospital before being transferred to her residence. There are various instances throughout these texts where women change dressings or administer medication to those already treated by the surgeons, or where they seek advice from one of the medical staff. Later in Harris's account she writes that when one of the children, Herbert Dashwood (who had been ill for some time), began once more to decline she 'called up Dr Partridge, who ordered a warm bath', indicating how these volunteer nurses would defer to their professional counterparts for guidance and remain under their direction.⁴⁰

The texts also provide insight into the medical methods of the garrison's many doctors, which produce varying degrees of success. Harris's diary provides an account of her care for Sir Henry Lawrence,

the garrison's original commander until grievously wounded by cannon-fire, in his dying hours: 'Once we thought he was going, but he rallied, and has taken an immense quantity of arrowroot and champagne during the day. Once when I was feeding him he looked at me so hard, as he was trying to remember who I was'.⁴¹

There is every chance that Lawrence was struggling with the delirium of his evident agony. But it is well documented that British physicians actively prescribed champagne in particular as a measure against the Indian climate and there is just as much chance, having suffered blood loss through traumatic injury, an immediate amputation in unsanitary conditions and chronic dehydration as a result of the heat and lack of clean water, that he was also insensibly and dangerously drunk.⁴² As much as Harris's efforts indicate her contribution to easing Lawrence's last hours, the tone in which they are conveyed casts doubt on her abilities and instead plays up her naivety, affirming her amateur position and unworldly nature, and the divide between trained personnel and volunteers. It is further well documented that the doctors at Lucknow made extensive use of alcohol as part of their treatment of cholera, and in place of pain relief for amputations; Robinson states that the usual dose for the amputation of a limb was 'a single bottle, taken at one draught immediately before the operation began'.⁴³ In the context of Harris's diary, whilst her efforts are applauded, they also rearticulate her secondary status.

In contrast, Emily Polehampton's reputation as a medical nurse differs greatly from Harris's, influenced predominantly by the fact that she left the confines of her home in order to devote herself more readily to nursing the sick and wounded, and because she apparently treated a greater number and much more varied selection of patients. Polehampton's role as nurse begins early on in the siege, after she and her husband move into a small room at the back of the hospital in order to offer assistance to the wounded and the medical personnel there. She continued in this role throughout the siege, and after her husband died of cholera in late July 1857, roomed with two other widows, Mrs Gall and Mrs Barbor. For much of the siege, Polehampton is too busy at the hospital to keep a diary, and her own testimony is recorded after the second relief of Lucknow in November, when she returns to England. It was published as part of a compendium of her husband's sermons and own short diary. However, we know

from the diaries of other women, including Colina Brydon, Katherine Bartrum and Georgina Harris, that Gall, Barbor and Polehampton were working every day in the hospital by 3 July 1857, and from these accounts we are able to reconstruct the duties the women performed.⁴⁴ Polehampton herself remarks in a letter that her daily routine involved attending the hospital after breakfast and 'spend[ing] as many hours there as I saw necessary', leaving for dinner, before then attending for a further hour in the evening.⁴⁵

In the later stages of the siege, after the garrison's commanders decided that the hospital was too dangerous for her to reside in because of increasing attacks, Polehampton appears to have expanded her efforts beyond the hospital and performed nursing duties where needed throughout the garrison. On 1 August, Katherine Bartrum records that Dr Wells had informed her that her child was dying of cholera, and that Polehampton came to assist Bartrum in nursing him through his final hours: 'she was ever ready in the midst of her own sorrow to comfort those who were in trouble. We administered the strongest remedies which could be given to a child.'⁴⁶ It is evident that Polehampton was afforded a good deal of responsibility in terms of her ministrations, and was not continually overseen by Wells or other medical personnel. This lack of observation may have been the result of competing demands on the trained doctors to tend to more severe wounds, however, it may also be seen as indicative of the trust placed in Polehampton's abilities; as a result of her efforts on 1 August, and unlike a great number of the Lucknow garrison, Bartrum's child made a full recovery.

Despite the evident talents of women such as Barbor, Gall and Polehampton, there appears to have been no systematic process for mobilising the female members of the garrison, nor even any direct pressure from those in command of the garrison's defence for women to contribute. However, those diarists who engaged in medical service all shared certain characteristics, which provide insight into why they volunteered and others did not. Differing from the diarists (who were typically married), those female members of the garrison who engaged in nursing the sick and wounded in the hospitals were unmarried or widowed in the case of Polehampton, Barbor and Gall, and none had children or other dependants. Those with children, such as Kate Bartrum, did not volunteer and received

no censure for doing so, despite the possibility that as a medical officer's wife she may have possessed knowledge, however rudimentary, of the treatment of wounds. Further, medical volunteers were all drawn from the middle classes present at Lucknow as opposed to the upper-middle class. As head of the class hierarchy, Julia Inglis's role appears to exceed little beyond the care of her own son and efforts to raise morale, though she writes on 8 July that she 'quite envied' Gall, Barbor and Polehampton 'for being able to do some good'.⁴⁷ It is perhaps easy to be cynical at this juncture, and it is likewise tempting to criticise Inglis's desire to help, professed long after the events of Lucknow and once the position of the formidable memsahib had been secured in the popular imagination. However, Inglis may have been motivated by a genuine desire to help others but was prevented from doing so by Anglo-Indian society's rigid class hierarchy, which would not condone the garrison commander's wife coming into close proximity with the battered bodies of wounded ordinary soldiers. This apparent exemption from service was not reserved, however, only for those at the top of the social ladder, as Kate Bartrum's similar lack of engagement proves. Instead, these women were able to contribute by tending to their own families, an action that though exceptional, given that it would typically be performed by a lower class of society, did not deviate from class-based Victorian understandings of gendered identity.

Alongside class as a determinant of involvement, of equal note is the observation that the most prominent of those women who volunteered for medical service, Polehampton and Harris, were connected to the Church. The alacrity with which both women engaged in medical work may well have been a reflection of traditional religious nursing, and the perception of such ministrations as an extension of Christian charity.⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, as the wife of a minister, Polehampton's account refers regularly to her religious beliefs. For example, with apparently characteristic modesty she remarks that, 'It has certainly been through the most wonderful interposition of providence that the remnant of our garrison has been brought out safely, and more marvellous still that we were enabled to hold out as we did with our limited supply of provisions and medicines'.⁴⁹ For Polehampton and Harris, medical service appears to have been a Christian duty, as well as a social one. The diary of Henry S. Polehampton adds further insight

into his wife's role in medical care during the siege. In it he reveals that he (and presumably his wife) had cared for cholera patients during the outbreak at Shrewsbury in 1849, and Emily may have acquired her medical knowledge and experience at this time.⁵⁰ However, despite the historical and Church-related nature of the Polehamptons' experience of nursing, there is no suggestion that Barbor or Gall were anything other than soldiers' wives and not involved in any charitable or missionary work of any kind. The involvement of Barbor and Gall therefore conforms to the emergent myth of the Mutiny, namely that women with no prior experience of caregiving were able to pitch in alongside more knowledgeable and capable women of their own class, and contribute to the preservation of colonial rule.

Another explanation of why these women volunteered so readily may be provided by the historical context of the late 1850s. The Indian Rebellion came not long after the war in the Crimea and a period of intense public interest in nursing as a result of Florence Nightingale's efforts in Scutari, as reported by William Russell in *The Times*.⁵¹ That the Crimea and Nightingale's work had traction in the contemporary imaginary is evident from these texts. For example, in a letter to her father, Katherine Bartrum referred to Polehampton as 'the "Florence Nightingale of Lucknow"'.⁵² Similarly, in Brigadier Inglis's after-action report on the siege, included as part of Chick's *Annals of the Indian Mutiny*, he wrote 'I cannot refrain from bringing to the prominent notice of his Lordship ... the patient endurance and Christian resignation which have been evinced by the women of this garrison ... many, among whom may be mentioned the honoured names of Birch, of Polehampton, of Barbor and of Gall, have, after the example of Miss Nightingale, constituted themselves the tender and solicitous nurses of the wounded and dying soldiers in the hospital'.⁵³ Brigadier Inglis may be guilty of hindsight here. Earlier attitudes of the garrison's doctors were not so effusive, as revealed in Polehampton's diary. In a letter she writes that 'A day or two after General Havelock relieved us ... I went to the hospital and asked the doctors to let me return there to help to nurse. They at once gave me leave to do so'.⁵⁴ Though she was welcomed back, she does not record whether any effort was made to compel her to stay in the first instance or why she left, and Polehampton's continued service at the hospital is done of her own volition.

Ingliš's report was written long after the relief of Lucknow, by which time the character of the siege and the Mutiny had taken root via the press and the commercial publication of many diaries. As control over India was gradually reasserted by British troops, the prevailing mood became one of celebration. Elsewhere throughout India, spontaneous contributions to nursing were noted; at Agra, volunteer nurses were honoured with both a 'grand fete' in their honour and also with red and white satin rosettes in recognition of their service.⁵⁵ The doctors' seeming indifference to Polehampton's help during the siege itself might simply be an indication of the more pressing matters to which they no doubt had to attend, or that once the extreme danger of the summer months had passed, the existing medical provision at Lucknow was once again able to cope. Again, some further insight is suggested by Henry Polehampton's diary, in which he records an unnamed doctor's anger at him for preaching in the hospital and doing 'harm', despite having acted with the best intentions.⁵⁶ It is possible that the doctors felt similarly about Mrs Polehampton's presence, and once the siege had concluded were able to discreetly reduce her involvement in medical care, avoiding public airing of their views, given the prevailing feeling towards female volunteers.

On a national and international level, in a similar way to the rewriting of the Crimea, the embarrassment over the origins of the Mutiny was rewritten as a testament to the fortitude of the British character in times of adversity. Moreover, though women had been seen to capably exceed their typical social roles, the praise heaped on them by Ingliš and others largely returned them to the prevailing definitions of Victorian womanhood, as maternal, patient and enduring. It seems, too, that not everyone held nursing in such high regard once the immediate danger of the Indian Mutiny had passed; in November 1857 Florence Nightingale herself wrote to Charlotte Canning, the then-Viceroy's wife, to offer any assistance necessary; she was rebuffed immediately, Canning replying that there was nothing for her to do 'in her line of business'.⁵⁷ With the relief of the sieges and the arrival of reinforcements in the form of Regular Army troops from England, it appears that Anglo-Indian society was determined to return to some semblance of normality, one in which women's roles would once again be of the sedentary, domestic kind whilst their husbands went about their business of pacifying India.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to illustrate how the Indian Mutiny diary represents a unique genre of women's writing on colonialism, and a valuable addition to the history of colonial nursing. The diaries from the Siege of Lucknow illustrate the ways in which female participants were able to assume vital roles as caregivers and medical assistants in a time of localised emergency and how their efforts were later recognised, propagated and, ultimately, mythologised. The chapter has also sought to highlight the contradictory and sometimes paradoxical status of these diaries as texts, especially the manner in which notions of truth and representation, public and private, objective and subjective are continually confused by the medium of the diary itself, and its ability to hybridise genres and forms of writing. Despite their assertions to the contrary, these texts are stylised literary productions, telling individual narratives against those larger background narratives of the British presence in India and British colonialism in general. Whilst it is apparent that their authors believed they were presenting objective record of events as they saw them, these diaries must be treated with appreciation for their artifice and composition, and approached from a critical position.

In terms of the accounts of nursing that they provide, the diaries are evidently responsive to their context; they are reflective of the post-Crimea perception and popularity of nursing, as a result of Nightingale's role in the Crimea, but also suggest again that the British provision of medical care in either battle or civil emergency was still sorely lacking. They illustrate that although women were encouraged to effectively 'pull their weight' throughout the siege as a result of the supposed burden they placed on the army, there was no systematic means to enable them to do so. The lack of central organisation of the medical service during the Siege of Lucknow meant that whilst the talents of women such as Emily Polehampton and Georgina Harris were put to effective use, others present, such as Adelaide Case, did comparatively little beyond protecting their own interests or taking on those roles that threatened far more the rigid colonial boundaries of class than those of gender. In this sense, as much as these diaries indicate that female eyewitnesses in the Indian Mutiny can be read as participants in the maintenance of Empire in both action and voice,

they may also continue to be read as maternal, domestic and restricted in their roles. The nurses of the Mutiny are placed into a contradictory position where they are celebrated as vital to the defence of the garrison and eventual British triumph, yet retain a subaltern status as subordinate, temporary and accepted out of necessity. The memsahibs of India thus become an inert embodiment of what the Army and East India Company were fighting for throughout the remainder of the rebellion: the idealised mothers, dutiful wives and ladies of colonial India, and of the wider Empire. As much as these diaries are a testament to the efforts of lady amateurs, they remain also a consolidation of the position of the gentleman professional.

Notes

- 1 Throughout the chapter, the events of 1857 are largely referred to as the Indian Mutiny, not for any political or ideological reason, but rather as a reflection of the language and terms used in the source material.
- 2 Indian affairs would be transferred from the East India Company to the crown once the rebellion had been suppressed in 1858, beginning the Raj period of Anglo-Indian colonialism.
- 3 In addition to British fears of another potential 'mutiny' during the First and Second World Wars, Lawrence James records how 'Remember Cawnpore' was still a popular tattoo among British servicemen in India during the early 1940s. See L. James, *Raj: The Making and Unmaking of British India* (London: Abacus, 1997), p. 253. Further, a range of novelists, from John Masters through to J. G. Farrell and G. M. Fraser, would return to the events of the Mutiny either for the purposes of parody or earnest remembrance.
- 4 See Lawrence James's *Raj* for a comprehensive account of the beginnings of the Indian Rebellion.
- 5 J. Robinson, *Angels of Albion: The Women of the Indian Mutiny* (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 156.
- 6 J. Inglis, *The Siege of Lucknow, a Diary* (London: James R. Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1892), p. 120.
- 7 C. Klaver, 'Domesticity under siege: British women and Imperial Crisis at the Siege of Lucknow, 1857', *Women's Writing*, 8:1 (2001), 26.
- 8 Klaver, 'Domesticity under siege', 24–5.
- 9 J. C. Cunningham, *The Last Man: The Life and Times of Surgeon Major William Brydon CB* (Oxford: New Cherwell Press, 2003), p. 213.
- 10 Cunningham notes that 'hardly a doctor went through the siege without being confined to bed', either through wounds sustained in the course of their duties in the case of Surgeon William Brydon, or cholera in the case of Surgeon

- John MacDonald, who later died of the disease. Cunningham, *The Last Man*, p. 212.
- 11 N. A. Chick. *Annals of the Indian Rebellion* (Calcutta: Sanders Cones & Co., 1859), p. 872.
- 12 See H. M. Greenhow, *Notes Medical and Surgical Taken during the Late Siege of Lucknow* (Alum Bagh: Military Orphan Press, 1858) and R. Wilberforce Bird, *The Indian Mutiny. Two Lectures Delivered at the Southampton Athenæum, Feb. 16, and March 30 1858* (London: Bosworth & Harrison, 1858) as representative examples of these publications. Joseph Fayrer's Mutiny experiences were recounted in *Recollections of My Life* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1900).
- 13 Klaver, 'Domesticity under siege', 24.
- 14 In the course of my research to date, I have examined six memoirs of the Siege of Lucknow written by medical officers, from a total of seventeen published works (excluding manuscript diaries), including the six written by women.
- 15 For an overview of the extent to which the diary had consolidated its place within Victorian letters see Cynthia Huff's *British Women's Diaries: A Descriptive Bibliography of Selected Nineteenth Century Women's Manuscript Diaries* (New York: AMS, 1985).
- 16 It is unclear to what extent the diarists of Lucknow considered publication when they commenced writing their accounts of the siege. Some, such as Georgina Harris, explicitly mention their intended audience, in this case sub-titling her work 'for the perusal of friends at home'. However, stylistic decisions such as these may be criticised as part of a desire to further add to the air of authenticity these works trade on; as Jane Robinson points out, the long voyage back to Britain would have provided ample time for the writing and editing of their experiences, and at least one diarist, Kate Bartrum, stated that her status as a widow compelled her to publish. See Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, pp. 249–51.
- 17 R. Steinitz, *Time, Space, and Gender in the Nineteenth-Century British Diary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 4.
- 18 F. Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. xi.
- 19 Steinitz, *Time, Space and Gender*, p. 110.
- 20 Steinitz, *Time, Space and Gender*, p. 111.
- 21 R. Fothergill, *Private Chronicles: A Study of English Diaries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. xx.
- 22 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 5.
- 23 M. Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 19.

- 24 Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p. 252.
- 25 Nussbaum, *The Autobiographical Subject*, p. 28.
- 26 Klaver, 'Domesticity under siege', 27. As well as delineating their standing in the social hierarchy, Klaver also notes that the diarists were nearly all married, or were widowed in the course of the siege.
- 27 Emily Polehampton mentions the presence of another woman, Mrs MacDonough, who volunteered at the hospital after her child died. Spelling of names varies between diarists, and MacDonough may be a corruption of MacDonald; it is possible that this woman is Surgeon John MacDonald's widow. See H. S. Polehampton, *A Memoir, Letters and Diary of the Rev. Henry S. Polehampton*, M. A. (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), p. 347.
- 28 In later life Joseph Lee became a hotelier, and whilst perhaps not quite a member of high society, had increased his social standing to the point where his recollections were considered valid, or he could afford to publish them himself.
- 29 K. Carter, 'The cultural work of diaries in mid-century Victorian Britain', *Victorian Review*, 23.2 (1997), 81–2.
- 30 It is interesting to note the frequency with which the same publishing houses print accounts of the Mutiny, with Richard Bentley and John Murray publishing the majority of the testimonies from Lucknow.
- 31 A. Case, *Day by Day at Lucknow* (London: Richard Bentley, 1858), p. 20.
- 32 Fascination with the elements of India can be found earlier in the letters of Eliza Fay, and much later in E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) or Salman Rushdie's *Shame* (1983).
- 33 Inglis, *The Siege of Lucknow*, p. 182.
- 34 Klaver, 'Domesticity under siege', 28.
- 35 G. Harris, *A Lady's Diary of the Siege of Lucknow (Written for the Perusal of Friends at Home)* (London: John Murray, 1858), p. 80.
- 36 M. Germon, *Journal of the Siege of Lucknow* (London: Constable and Co., 1958), pp. 58–9.
- 37 Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, pp. 74–5. Instances of women using or servicing weapons at Lucknow appear in sources as diverse as J. G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973), which drew on the diaries produced at Lucknow in its creation of the fictional cantonment of Krishnapur, and episode 1 of series 2 of *Downton Abbey*, in which the Dowager Countess of Grantham, played by Dame Maggie Smith, mentions a relative who 'loaded the guns at Lucknow'.
- 38 G. Moore (ed.), *Diary of the Doctor's Lady* (Bedford: Jaycopy Ltd, 1979), p. 20.
- 39 Much has been written about the development of nursing as an extension of the idealised role of women in Victorian society; see for instance, A. Bashford, *Purity and Pollution: Gender, Embodiment and Victorian Medicine* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998), esp. chs 2 and 3; or M. Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (London: Virago, 1985).

- 40 Harris, *A Lady's Diary*, p. 101. Despite their efforts, Herbert Dashwood died that evening.
- 41 Harris, *A Lady's Diary*, pp. 78–9.
- 42 An overview of the changing role of alcohol in contemporary Indian medicine can be found in Ethel Landon's *Alcohol: A Menace to India* (Madras: Christian Literature Society for India, 1918). Though there are religious links evident in this publication as well as connotations of the temperance movement, the debate over alcohol and medicine in India was largely secular in nature. For a wider discussion of the use of alcohol in medicine in nineteenth-century Europe see H. Paul, *Bacchic Medicine: Wine and Alcohol Therapies from Napoleon to the French Paradox* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001).
- 43 Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p. 171.
- 44 Moore, *Diary of the Doctor's Lady*, p. 20.
- 45 Polehampton, *A Memoir*, p. 347.
- 46 K. M. Bartrum, *A Widow's Reminiscences of the Siege of Lucknow* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1858), part 6.
- 47 Inglis, *The Siege of Lucknow*, p. 73.
- 48 For a discussion of the links between religion and nursing see A. Summers, 'The costs and benefits of caring: nursing charities c. 1830–1860', in J. Barry and C. Jones (eds), *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 133–48.
- 49 Polehampton, *A Memoir*, p. 345.
- 50 Polehampton, *A Memoir*, p. 107.
- 51 See W. Russell, *The Crimea: As Seen by Those who Reported It* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009, first published 1856).
- 52 Bartrum, *A Widow's Reminiscences*, chs 4 and 6.
- 53 Chick, *Annals of the Indian Mutiny*, p. 870.
- 54 Polehampton, *A Memoir*, p. 345.
- 55 Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, pp. 224–5.
- 56 Polehampton, *A Memoir*, p. 291.
- 57 Robinson, *Angels of Albion*, p. 236.