



Florence NIGHTINGALE

(1820 - 1910)

Florence Nightingale was the founder of modern nursing, and showed that trained nurses and clean hospitals helped sick people get better. She was known as the 'Lady with the Lamp'.

Florence's Childhood

Florence was born to a wealthy family on May 12, 1820 in the Italian city of Florence.

Her parents owned a winter house in Hampshire and a summer house in Derbyshire. Florence ('Flo') and her older sister Parthenope ('Pop') could travel and wear expensive clothes.

Their father was William Nightingale, a rich banker. He taught his daughters subjects girls did not normally study, such as mathematics, philosophy, Italian and history.

Florence was very clever and gifted at maths.



Florence and her sister as young children

Training as a nurse

When Florence was 24, she told her family she wanted to become a nurse. She felt inspired by God to help others. Her parents were horrified. Hospitals in Victorian Britain were not nice places, and nurses were poor. Wealthy ladies did not get their hands dirty!

Florence disliked how rich women had leisurely lives like her mother, Frances Nightingale.

Determined to work hard, Florence went to Egypt in 1850 to study nursing. In 1851 she trained to be a nurse in Germany.

She refused to get married, thinking it would interfere with her work. In 1853, Florence had her first job in a hospital in London, when she took the post of superintendent at the Institute for the Care of Sick Gentlewomen in Upper Harley Street.



Florence Nightingale as the Lady with the Lamp by J. Butterworth

A special request

The Crimean War began in 1854 while Florence was working at in London. England, France and Turkey were fighting together against Russia.

The British public was angry that soldiers were dying in an overcrowded Army hospital that was built on top of a cesspit and full of rats.

The Minister for War, Sidney Herbert, was Florence's friend. He thought she could help in the hospital and arranged for her to go there with a group of nurses.

Soldiers were dying in huge numbers from diseases like cholera and typhoid. Florence set to work improving hygiene conditions, cleaning soldiers' wounds and bed sheets. Like most people at the time, she knew little about how infectious diseases spread.

A sanitary commission visited the hospital in 1855. It flushed out the sewers and improved the hospital's ventilation system. This helped get rid of germs and bacteria.

Florence the statistician

Newspaper reports about the 'angel' at Scutari made Florence a celebrity. But when she returned from the war in 1857 she did not care about being famous.

She was concentrating on writing a report. The data she had collected at Scutari showed that out of 18000 soldiers, 16000 had died from infectious diseases, and they had caught these diseases inside the hospital!

The data also showed that more soldiers survived when the sanitary commission improved sanitation in the hospital. Putting her mathematical mind into action, Florence created a diagram to show her statistics about the soldiers clearly on paper.

Now known as the Rose Diagram, it shocked the government and British Army into making important changes in hospitals. From then on, fewer people would die, and the US Army successfully used Florence’s ideas during the American Civil War.

Florence the pioneer

In 1860, Florence opened a nursing school at St Thomas’s Hospital in London.

Nurses trained there were known as Nightingale Nurses. They took the ‘Nightingale Pledge’ and spread Florence’s caring methods at home and in other countries.

Florence’s book, ‘Notes on Nursing,’ advised people how to care for the sick. It was written in simple language so that everybody could understand it.

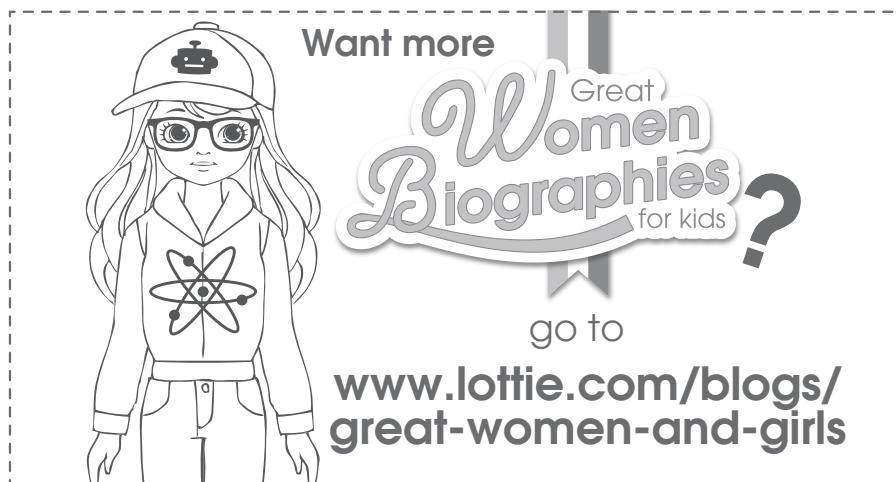
Florence even investigated how to improve living conditions for starving people in India.

In 1883, she was awarded the Royal Red Cross by Queen Victoria for her work. She then became the first woman to receive the Order of Merit, from King Edward VII in 1907.

On August 13, 1910, Florence died; bedridden because of an infection caught in the Crimea.

Florence Nightingale improved medical care for everybody and inspired others to become nurses like her. This is how she turned nursing into a respectable profession.

Because Florence did not discriminate between different social classes or religions, her ideas and kindness united people all over the world.



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