

Extract

Notes on Nursing (London, 1959)

By: Florence Nightingale

"How much more extraordinary is it that, whereas what we might call the coxcombries of education – e.g., the elements of astronomy – are now taught to every school-girl, neither mothers of families of any class, nor school-mistresses of any class, nor nurses of children, nor nurses of hospitals, are taught anything about those laws which God has assigned to the relations of our bodies with the world in which He has put them. In other words, the laws which make these bodies, into which He has put our minds, healthy or unhealthy organs of those minds, are all but unlearned. Not but that these laws – the laws of life – are in a certain measure understood, but not even mothers think it worth their while to study them – to study how to give their children healthy existences. They call it medical or physiological knowledge, fit only for doctors ... Pathology teaches the harm that disease has done. But it teaches nothing more. We know nothing of the principle of health, the positive of which pathology is the negative, except from observation and experience. and nothing but observation and experience will teach us the ways to maintain or to bring back the state of health. It is often thought that medicine is the curative process. It is no such thing; medicine is the surgery of functions, as surgery proper is that of limbs and organs. Neither can do anything but remove obstructions; neither can cure; nature alone cures."