What would Florence Nightingale make of big data? | BBC Ideas

It might sound like a random pairing, like Marie Curie on Wikileaks, or Charles Dickens on twerking. But it isn't.

We know her as a nurse, [_____] gliding through blood-soaked army hospitals. But maybe we should call her the lady with the [_____], because she was at least as illuminating in the world of [_____].

So, what would she think of big data? Florence loved statistics. She said she found them "more enlivening than a novel". And a [_____] said, "However exhausted Florence might be, the sight of long columns of [_____] was perfectly reviving to her."

For Florence, statistics were God's work. She said, "To understand God's thoughts we must study statistics, for these are the [_____] of his purpose."

So, although she's famous now as a nurse, she actually trained first as a [_____].

It wasn't until the beginning of the 1840s - when she was in her early [_____] and saw hunger and unemployment all around her - that she became a nurse.

She'd combined her nursing and statistics to become an experienced hospital manager, just in time for the Crimean War. At the [____], nurses were seen as ignorant and [____]. But Florence changed that.

Florence [____] to lead a team of nurses in the war. Before she arrived, the military hospitals didn't even bother to [____] many of the deaths.

Florence [____] data about everything, so she could show that changes in diet and sanitation had brought the hospital's death [____] down from 42% to just 2%.

It's only when you gather data methodically that [____] emerge. Things that were hidden suddenly become clear. That might sound obvious now, but it wasn't [____] then.

Florence's work made a huge impact and laid the groundwork for things we now take for granted - like being able to [____] hospitals' performance, or just the fact that hospitals are clean.

[____] showed what could be achieved by following the [____], instead of gut instinct, prejudice or tradition.

Another little-known side of Florence is her talent for [____] She turned data into [____] making it impossible for MPs and civil servants to ignore. So, she would love the data journalism we have today.

She would love the way [____] makes all this possible. But she'd

hate some of the ways that data are [____]

She knew that people can [____] the system to make their

performance indicators look better. So, when you hear of hospitals

fiddling operation waiting times, think of Florence. And I think she'd

be appalled at using data to [____] adverts and [____] people

on social media.

This would not be God's work. Although largely confined to her room

for over half a century, she worked tirelessly behind the scenes in

[____] campaigns, and she always had a careful [____]

strategy.

So, I think she might like other aspects of social media. She'd enjoy

the opportunity to communicate on a grand [____] with ideas going

[____] and so many people being able to take part in the debate.

Her compassion brought her [____] And she used that fame

ruthlessly, along with her incredible [____] to save lives on an

unprecedented scale.

If she were alive now, she'd challenge us to do the [____] To look at

how we can use the vast amount of data now available to [____] lives.

To make the world a [____]

To [____] a little more light on us all.