

The Care of the Dead.

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"What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost."—I. Cor. 6, 19.

Who can describe the feeling of awe and wonderment accompanied often by dread that seizes upon one on the first close contact with death? To every nurse comes this near acquaintance with the dread Majesty of Death, and sometimes with that, as with other things, familiarity breeds if not contempt then callousness. The casket may be roughened by many years of ceaseless toil, and even the well-cared for body of the rich becomes to the eyes of many only an inanimate lump of clay with neither sense nor feeling; and yet only a few short minutes since that same body contained an immortal soul, a soul which one day animating an incorruptible body will meet us face to face and we shall be called to account for our treatment of it, aye! and even after death.

Yet, in the hurry scurry of busy hospital wards, how little time there is to do even what one would. With the ceaseless pressure of many needs outpacing swift-winged Time, these last sad offices are frequently scurried through so that the ward work may not be too greatly interfered with; and the natural result is that these last earthly needs are performed with more or less machine-like rapidity, without thought being given to the great mystery which yet one more suffering soul has taken its lonely journey to penetrate.

Most text-books on nursing tell us of the necessary duties of a nurse in this regard, and also of the need to remember to approach them with reverence and awe, but few tell us how these duties should be carried out in private practice.

In hospital there is the regular routine method of washing, etc.; in some, the body is enveloped in a sheet, acting as a shroud; in others, the simpler nightdress and stockings; but whatever method, let it be commenced prayerfully and carried out gently, quietly, and, above all, modestly.

It is in private cases, however, where all the sympathy and gentleness of the nurse can be exercised to the full and where she can show that respect which true religion ever accords to the poor frail body before it is carried to its last home.

When the last breath has been drawn, and so far as the nurse can judge, the spirit has departed, and the grieving friends have taken

still another long look hoping against hope even yet before leaving the room, then quietly, reverently and tenderly remove the bolster and all except one pillow, straighten the limbs, place beneath the lower part of the body a thick pad of absorbent wool or tow, straighten the night clothes. Compose the face by closing the mouth and keep it closed by placing beneath the chin a roller bandage or a firmly-rolled towel; close the eyes and if necessary place small pads of wet lint over them. Cover the face with the top sheet, straighten the bed removing all unnecessary clothes.

Tidy the room by removing any food, feeders, glasses, etc., that may have been in use, leaving all neat.

Two hours after death the final washing should be performed, and the friends should be consulted as to the clothes to be used, usually a nightdress or nightshirt and stockings are all that will be needed. But, besides these, it is as well to ask for two strong roller towels and a small chamber towel, and, if necessary, two clean sheets, a pillow case, and a pocket handkerchief.

When all needful things are ready to hand, including warm water, soap, and towels, commence by washing the face and drying it, then remove the nightdress, covering the body with the top-sheet, and wash it piece by piece until all is washed. Keep the body covered as much as possible, doing all as though the patient were still living.

In some cases a relative may wish to assist, if so do not try to dissuade them, for it is to some a melancholy pleasure to help perform these sad duties, and in knowing they were done reverently and tenderly there will be future comfort.

It may be necessary to plug the lower orifices of the body with absorbent wool, and to replace the pad beneath the buttocks and between the legs after the nightdress has been put on and before the body is placed finally upon the back.

Whilst the body is being supported on its side, roll up the soiled under sheets and put in the clean one with a mackintosh beneath it; place against the lower part of the back, on the rolled sheet, the rolled-up half of one of the roller towels, place the other roller towel in the same manner against the shoulders. Fold the nightdress down the back in neat folds, place the body upon its back and then, turning it gently to the other side, remove all soiled clothes and dressings, draw the clean sheet and mackintosh through, straighten them, draw through the rolled part of the towels, then roll them up against the body so that they are not too noticeable.

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