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Editorial.

THE CARE OF THE DEAD.

The care of the dead in our hospitals after their removal from the wards is an office which, so far, has fallen but little to the province of nurses. We doubt, indeed, whether most nurses in training have any idea of what is the system observed after the bodies of those they have nursed so tenderly, and in connection with which they have performed the last offices with every care and reverence, have been removed from the wards. The average Englishwoman, like the average Englishman, is not endowed with a superabundance of imagination, and as nurses in training rarely penetrate to the mortuary, it occurs to few to project themselves there in imagination or to consider at all that the mortuary and its arrangements has any claim on them.

Yet it was by insistence on the right of the sick to the care of educated women that nursing has been raised to the level which it has at present attained, and hospitals popularised in the estimation of those who formerly dreaded them. In every detail of ward management, side by side with professional efficiency, we see evidence of woman's domination, making the wards attractive and homely—for in this art of making homes woman has no rival. The neatness and orderliness, the nicety of arrangement, the dainty touches—a plant here, a vase of flowers there, an impression of general harmony of colouring, producing immediately a sense of restfulness and pleasure in those affected by such details, are matters in which she excels.

And what she has done for the wards she should claim to do for the mortuaries—to veil the purely practical and necessary, to beautify them, so far as they may be beautified; to care for the bodies of the dead

until they leave the hospital, and to minister to and console the bereaved relatives who come to take a last farewell of their dead, so far as this lies in her power.

Can we imagine that if any one dear to us died in a hospital and was removed to its mortuary that we should like to be conducted there to see the remains by a hospital porter, even if he were the best specimen of his class? Should we not crave for the sympathy and consideration which were such a help and consolation to us during the last sad hours in the wards? It is not every nurse, no doubt, to whom mortuary work would appeal, but to those who have a vocation in this direction we believe there is much useful work to be done; and, further, that it is the duty of heads of training schools to develop vocation by teaching that the work of the nurse for the patient is not finished in the case of the dead when the body leaves the ward, but only when it passes through the hospital gateway.

The mortuary arrangements in every hospital should be in charge of a Sister or nurse—whether one exclusively devoted to this work or who combines it with other duties, must depend upon the size of the institution. She, or a nurse working under her, should go with the porters to the ward to take over the charge of the body from the Ward-Sister, and should be responsible for its care until it leaves the hospital. Her duties should include the superintendence of the work in the post-mortem room, after examinations have been performed, and the due and reverent care of bodies subsequently, she should inspect all bodies before friends are admitted to the mortuary, and should personally accompany them.

We plead that this last department of our hospitals to pass into the hands of their nursing staffs should be claimed by them as their natural right.

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