

Sanitarian.

Visiting the Sick.



PHYSICIAN once told a patient, who he suspected was receiving too many calls from over-solicitous friends, to make a stroke with a pencil on a piece of paper every time he was asked "How are you today?" The following day the physician was presented with the paper, and on counting the strokes found there were just twenty-four of them. From that moment no more visitors were allowed to enter the sick man's chamber; the physician grimly remarking to the attendants that if his patient must be killed, it should be done humanely and scientifically.

Unless a person has actually been ill and been bored by friends, he has little appreciation of the effect it has on an invalid to be obliged to answer even a single question a couple of dozen times or so, daily, asked by as many different individuals. But if only the visitors would be content with this formal salutation it could perhaps be tolerated; but they never are, and when the minute details of one's particular ailment have been patiently gone over and over again, daily, it naturally becomes depressing, and even irritating, to the most forbearing disposition.

Many persons while visiting the sick become animated with an irrepressible desire to "do something" for the invalid. They frequently forget, or do not know, that rest and quiet are often two invaluable agents in securing a restoration to health.

It is a good rule to remember that when one is really ill he desires, above all things else, to be let alone. To be constantly forcing one's presence upon the sick and repeatedly assuring them that you desire to do something for them, when all is being done by nurses and regular attendants that is required and proper, may display a truly sympathetic and unselfish nature, but it likewise displays poor judgment.

It is an easy matter to be over-zealous in one's attention to the sick. A sympathetic woman while visiting a hospital became overwhelmed with a desire to aid with her own hands in making the occupants comfortable. She accordingly bustled up to a sick man's bed and asked, in gentle tones: "Can't I do something for you, sir?"

The man shook his head.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I do so want to do something. Can't I bathe your face?"

The man nodded, and in a few moments she was happy in the thought that she was doing something for the poor sick man. When she had completed this task to her satisfaction she again asked, "Now, mayn't I bathe your feet?"

"Madam," replied the man, "thirteen other ladies have bathed my feet today, and really there is no reason why you should not, too."

The next day after the disastrous cyclone that visited Pomeroy, Iowa, last summer, I was in one of the tents where a number of the injured were receiving care. While there a young lady came in, and hurrying to a cot on which was stretched a young man with the covers pulled up tightly about his shoulders, looking helpless and miserable, asked,

"What can I do for you?"

"Nuthin'," replied the man.

"Oh, well, I can fan you, anyway;" and she picked up a huge palm-leaf fan and commenced fanning him vigorously. The poor fellow submitted patiently for some time, but finally said:

"Say, miss, I guess you'd better fan that other feller for a while," nodding his head toward the next cot; "I'm havin' a chill just now."

Only today I visited a sick woman who, when questioned about her calls from friends, said to me: "Oh, if they would only not keep asking me if I don't want this or that, and would keep the doors shut, and would leave their squeaking shoes outside, I wouldn't mind their coming in so much; but I do so need rest;" and she wearily closed her tired eyes.

And so it sometimes happens that over-zealous people, instead of calming and soothing the pillow of pain and unrest, actually render, by their importunities, the misfortune of illness, with all its attendant discomforts, more grievous than it otherwise would be. Their well-meant but misdirected efforts prove an annoyance to the attending physician, a bane to the nurses, and a source of misery to the helpless, indefensible patient; yet everyone shuns the task of informing them that their attentions are superfluous and harmful, since they are actuated by kindly motives. Nevertheless, it is sometimes incumbent upon some person in authority to gently but firmly repress excessive attention to the sick. Unfortunately there are persons who regard it as a piece of effrontery to be told that the doctor has forbidden visitors entering the sick-room. They somehow feel that all their efforts have been unappreciated, and that some other reason besides the real one has prompted the mandate. I have known the friendship of years to be broken in this way.

Intimate friends and acquaintances who do not wish to resort to the formality of sending their cards to the invalid's house may make a brief call and leave them, but should never for a moment think of entering the sick chamber unless especially requested to do so. Usually one's good sense and judgment, when so admitted, will determine from the surroundings and the condition and desires of the sick one whether such a call should be soon repeated.

Always when visiting a sick person endeavor to sit where the invalid may see you without making an effort to do so. Under any circumstances it is always more satisfactory to see the person to whom one is talking; and nothing is more fatiguing to an invalid than to be obliged to twist into an uncomfortable position in order to see the visitor. The good effect of the most cheery talk will be nullified by the fatigue of the effort. And don't speak of depressing subjects; above all, refrain from talking of similar cases that you have known or heard of, unless by doing so you can make the sufferer more hopeful. Tell all the bright, cheery things you can, retail pleasant bits of news; but don't stay too long, even though urged to remain.

Sending choice flowers to a sick friend is usually considered a delicate way of remembering them, and is a custom usually devoid of harmful results. I say "usually," as I have now and then encountered a huge pitcher in the sick-room, stuffed with a motley array of blossoms that exhaled their mixed odors with a suffocating prodigality, and tired the eye and wearied the brain with their anomalous association of colors. Flowers in the sick-room should be used as sparingly as perfume on a lady's handkerchief.

The habit of sending fruit and tempting dishes to an invalid should only be indulged in after a conference with the attending physician or nurse, who usually regulates the diet with nearly as much precision as the doses of medicine are regulated. It is, therefore, as presumptuous to offer your favorite invalid-dish to a sick friend as it is to urge a trial of the particular remedy that once cured you of an illness.

Persons suffering from a chronic disease or who are only partially indisposed may receive an almost unlimited amount of attention without harm. Indeed, to such, a pleasant call from a friend often means an interval of self-forgetfulness, a buoying up of spirits and mental exhilaration that is not only enjoyable but health-giving. It is toward those who are acutely ill that people should be guarded in their attentions.

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