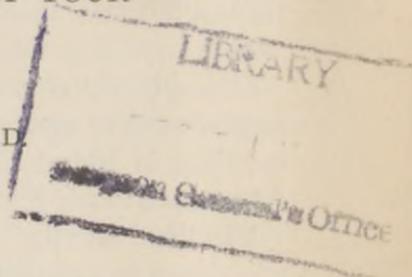


DEATH AND CREMATION: SOME PERSONAL  
EXPERIENCES OF ONE OF YOUR  
COLLEAGUES

By W. W. KEEN, M.D., LL.D.  
PHILADELPHIA



I.—Soon after December 31, 1871, when we moved into 1729 Chestnut Street, my present residence, a neighboring undertaker (evidently appreciating my abilities more highly than the general public seemed to do, as shown by my visiting book) called upon me, and, with some embarrassment, requested the "privilege of leaving some of his professional cards on the table in my waiting room." Doubtless it was his desire to cheer up my infrequent and desponding patients by the assurance of appropriate care in preparing for and conducting the expected, or the at-least possible, obsequies, if I were the attending surgeon. I felt compelled, however, in the interest of my reputation, to say a gentle "No!"

II.—A few days after the celebration of my eighty-fourth birthday, I received a beautiful circular, with fine half-tone illustrations and an enticing invitation, which, in view of my age, seemed most appropriate. It was a folder headed, "The \_\_\_\_\_ Burial Company." The half-tone cuts were initiated by a lovely auto-hearse. The rear double doors were wide open, disclosing a cool, clean and inviting interior, while on each side stood a suitably garbed attendant, politely suggesting that I be carried in, for, *ex natura rei*, as my old professor of mathematics

at Brown used to say, it would be quite impossible for me to enter by my own motion.

I could not refrain from replying to such a kind proposition. I thanked the company for their gentle hint that if I was not already dead, very surely I soon ought to be, "but," I added, "as I have other plans in view at present, I must decline with thanks."

III.—Shortly afterward, Act III of this drama was sent me, and, strange to say, as an "Ad" in the *Weekly Roster* of medical meetings in Philadelphia. The *Roster* was pleading for "Our Advertisers: their Products and Services."

The first "service" was a commendation of cremation. They mentioned in alphabetical order (not, be it observed, in chronological order) of cremation the names of "some of those in the profession who expressed their request and *whose desires to be cremated have been fulfilled* at the Crematory," etc. In the list of those who had been declared officially dead and cremated I found my own name.

By the way, in view of such undue celerity, who can now call Philadelphia "slow"?

I pinched myself to find out whether I consisted wholly of ambulant ashes. I seemed to be real flesh and blood—but there it stood, my "desire to be cremated had been fulfilled." However, I concluded to eat and drink and tomorrow—or at some later date—I would be cremated again.

IV.—But the report of my death would not down. As if "to make assurance double sure," two or three days later still, I received the annual report of a religious charity, and, among the annual donors of a modest sum for its support, there was my name, preceded by a "star," which a foot-note explained meant "deceased."

Being a religious charity, of course no false statement could find a place in its reports. I *must*, therefore, be at least theoretically *dead*. At least there is one incidental advantage of theo-

retical decease, viz., that the said religious charity could hardly expect any further annual "checks" from a disembodied spirit.

To reassure you—for I am unable to be present in the flesh at this session of the Association—I refer you to my antivivisection friends. They will be compelled, reluctantly of course, to confess that I was certainly alive a month ago, for at that time I had stirred them up a bit by a letter published in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* of May 5, and in the *Philadelphia North American* of May 8, 1921, which I hope you will not fail to read.

If you insist on a certificate, sworn to before a notary public by my family physician, that I am still alive, I will gladly furnish one.

Late in Jan. 1922 I rec'd a letter  
from British Columbia addressed to  
"Son of the late Dr. W. M. Keen" I  
gave the information desired and  
added "I beg to inform you that  
all my sons are daughters & a

Yours truly  
The late W. M. Keen