PERTAINING TO THE TRANSPORTATION OF THE DEAD.

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In many instances there seems to be an impression among physicians that when their patients are dead they have no further responsibility. This may be true judged from a professional point of view, but there are responsibilities, resting upon medical men whose patients die, outside of professional duties. If a patient has died away from home, the medical attendant should take some interest in seeing that the remains can be returned decently and in order from the place from which the patient came alive, for final burial. This does not require personal supervision on the part of the medical attendant, but it does demand an interest on his part in the effort that has been made during the past few years by sanitarians, embalmers, and transportation companies to secure proper preparation for the remains of the dead in order to permit of their being transported to their final resting place without being a nuisance or a source of danger while in transit, or at the point of destination.

Prior to 1895 there were no general rules governing the preparation of the dead or the transportation of same. In some instances there were regulations that almost, if not quite, prohibited the shipment of a corpse into or out of the district. In other cases the question of transportation of the dead was left largely in the hands of the railroads. These corporations, for the protection of their own employes, and also because of the restrictions upon delivery of remains at points of destination, refused to carry the body of one who had died of any contagious disease. The bodies that were received by the railroads for transportation bore no evidence that they had been properly prepared for shipment and in many instances decomposition was so far advanced before they reached their destination that they were in every sense a nuisance in transit and at the place where received for burial. In the past it was no uncommon thing to find a coffin with its contents fastened on the platform of a baggage or express car because the stench coming from it was too great to be borne by those inside the car.

This condition has been changed to a great extent, but many physicians seem still ignorant of the fact, while others are even antagonistic to those in their community who are endeavoring to bring about this improved condition of affairs.

In 1895 a committee representing the American Association of General Baggage Agents, the National Funeral Directors' Association, and
the Conference of State and Provincial Boards of Health was created to devise some plan by which safety and decency might be secured in the transportation of the dead. As the result of this committee's work certain rules were formulated governing the preparation and shipment of dead bodies. These rules were adopted by the Conference of State and Provincial Boards of Health in August, 1897. To put them in force it was necessary for each state to give them legal standing either as sanitary regulations through the State Board of Health, or by legislative act. These rules permitted the shipment of the remains of the dead under certain restrictions, except when death had been due to smallpox, Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, typhus fever or bubonic plague. They were first put into effect in Iowa and Minnesota in 1898 by act of their respective State Boards of Health. To carry out these regulations three things were necessary: First, a system of licensing for embalmers in order that provision might be made for the proper preparation of the body for shipment; second, a uniform shipping system; third, sanitary supervision.

There are now three methods under which a license may be issued:
1. Under the sanitary regulations of the State Board of Health.
2. Under special state laws granting certain privileges to licensed embalmers.
3. Under state laws compelling all embalmers within the state to secure a license.

The first two methods are good, for the license in either case is granted after an examination.

In states under one or the other of these systems, there are two classes of embalmers or undertakers — the licensed and the unlicensed. The unlicensed undertaker soon finds himself at a commercial disadvantage, and if he has any pride in his business he will promptly take steps to secure a license or to employ licensed embalmers.

The third system has one remarkably weak point, for in compelling all embalmers in the state to secure a license it has to take into consideration those who were in business before the passage of the law. There are, therefore, three classes of embalmers or undertakers in these states, viz., those who have passed an examination and are licensed on their demonstrated ability, those who are licensed without examination and are commonly termed "exempts," and the unlicensed or illegal embalmer. An exempt may or may not be a good man. The people of his state or even of his own neighborhood are not able to judge as to his ability. He cannot or should not be recognized by other states than the one in which he resides as a suitable person to make shipments of the dead. In other words, only the embalmers who have demonstrated before an examining board their ability to properly pre-
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prepare a body for shipment should be recognized by sanitary bodies. For shipping purposes, the “exempt” and the unlicensed should be placed in the same category.

At the present time all of the states have provided for shipment of the dead under one or the other of these three rules except the following:

1. Massachusetts and New Jersey, where an attempt was made to secure legislation, but without success.
2. Arkansas, where the State Board of Health promised to put in force a licensing system, but has failed to do so up to the present time.
3. Maryland, where the license system is nominally in force, but where, in fact, it applies only to the city of Baltimore.
4. California, Nevada, Oregon, Rhode Island, Mississippi, and the District of Columbia, where no shipping regulations are in force, nor so far as I can learn, has any legislative effort been made to secure such.

In one of the states that has not yet adopted rules by legislative act or sanitary regulation bearing upon the general shipment of the dead it appears that during a recent legislative session a bill, introduced to provide for a licensing system among embalmers, and regulations to govern the transportation of the dead, was killed by medical men and the same medical men, it is said, went before medical societies and boasted of the fact. It is quite possible the bill was faulty. If so it should have been corrected, not killed.

The above was the course pursued in a state that is under excellent sanitary supervision and one which should have made provision in some way or other long before this for the proper shipment of the remains of those whose residence, while living, was in some other state, but who were so unfortunate as to die in the state under consideration.

The second point necessary for the proper carrying out of the shipping regulations, viz., a uniform shipping system, has been brought about in all states licensing embalmers.

Formerly each railroad system had its own form of shipping blank. Now, in the licensing states, the railroads no longer issue shipping permits for the transportation of the dead. The shipping blanks are of the form prescribed by the Conference of State and Provincial Boards of Health in 1897, and are printed by the licensing body of the state. They are furnished to health officers and licensed embalmers. They are in duplicate. One of the copies is turned over to the railroad officials and by them is finally returned to the licensing body of the state from which the remains were shipped.

These two points provide for the third, viz., proper sanitary supervision. The sanitary authorities of a state know that certain shipments
of the dead have been made. Sanitary authorities are dependent upon the railroads and the receiving embalmers for returns bearing upon the fulfillment of the regulations. Duplicate shipping blanks returned by the railroad to the licensing shipping body show whether a shipment has been properly made. Speaking for Minnesota I can state that railroads are aiding us in every way. They seem to appreciate the great advantage of the present methods over those which prevailed prior to 1898. As to whether remains have been prepared for shipment according to regulations, sanitary authorities are dependent upon first, the honesty of the licensed embalmers; second, upon reports from the receiving point as to the condition of the remains when they reached their destination. This latter is a very important point. Some embalmers, it is needless to say, are careless and this applies as well to licensed as unlicensed embalmers. Such careless individuals need a stimulus to do good work and they have it in the fact that their work is under scrutiny. If a report is returned to a licensing body that a licensed embalmer has shipped a body without proper preparation or precautions, it is very easy, with the first offense, for the proper official to give a reprimand and a warning that the license will be withdrawn if the offense is repeated. Speaking from experience I can assure you the offense is not likely to occur a second time.

That the rules and regulations adopted by the Conference of State and Provincial Boards of Health in 1897, and amended slightly in 1901, have simplified shipments, thus greatly benefiting those whose friends have died away from home, is evidenced in a recent address given by Mr. S. A. Smart, General Baggage Agent of the Great Northern Railway, where he states that the shipments of the dead over the above road have steadily increased since 1898 and that for the fiscal year ending June last (1903) the increase over the year just preceding the adoption of the shipping rules in Minnesota (June, 1898) was 124 per cent. It is impossible to estimate the great satisfaction that such increase in the shipment of the dead must have been to afflicted friends. Incidentally it may be said that the success in the administration of the shipping rules that brought about such a phenomenal increase in the number of bodies shipped was largely due to Mr. Smart's personal interest in the work. He has not only been of great assistance to the Minnesota sanitary authorities, but he has urged and encouraged other states throughout the northwest to fall in line in this good work.

Mr. Smart draws attention to the fact that to "boards of health is delegated the protection of the public and in the discharge of that important function such boards are given almost unlimited authority to promulgate arbitrary rules and regulations tending to suppress the spread of infectious diseases," and he argues that every one should
supplement the individual efforts of the sanitary officials in order to bring about such protection. In this he is correct, and his argument applies particularly to medical men.

Certain states have argued that our rules of 1897 were not liberal enough and that no restriction should be placed upon the shipment of those who had died of smallpox, yellow fever, cholera, typhus fever or bubonic plague. It is true that an embalmer should be able to make the remains of a smallpox patient as safe for shipment as those of a scarlet fever patient. It is also true that the remains of a yellow fever, cholera, typhus fever or plague patient should be so prepared as to be safely shipped. I feel, however, that the Conference did quite right in 1897 in prohibiting the shipment of such remains, for public sentiment if no other argument was sufficient to justify such action. Still further, it is an undeniable fact that all licensed embalmers were not, and still are not, capable of preparing such bodies for shipment. The protection given may be sufficient so long as no accident occurs to the remains while in transit, but a railroad wreck might leave a corpse with no protection, so far as the spread of an infectious disease is concerned, except that of the embalming fluid and the cotton cover. It is a mistake to attempt to protect the public by the use of specially constructed coffins or boxes for the shipment of highly infectious disease cases. The boxes and coffins may be broken off. In the enforcement of regulations drawn up for the protection of the whole people the point should be insisted upon that states and provinces adopt a common system. It is better to make haste slowly than for states or provinces to formulate rules not in conformity with the national rules, for such state rules apply only to the locality in which they are adopted. At the same time they may cause great confusion. For example: If a state has rules that are more lax than the national rules, that fact may be overlooked by the local (state) officials and a body may be shipped into another state contrary to the regulations of the latter. In such a case there would be a delay of the corpse at the state boundary or a breach of trust in the event that the shipment was continued into the receiving state contrary to the shipping regulations.

The shipping rules were thoroughly discussed at the Conference of State and Provincial Boards of Health of North America held last week at Baltimore and were amended to read as follows:

RULES ADOPTED BY THE CONFERENCE OF STATE AND PROVINCIAL BOARDS OF HEALTH OF NORTH AMERICA, AT ITS REGULAR MEETING, OCTOBER 23D AND 24TH, BALTIMORE, MD.

Rule 1. The transportation of bodies dead of smallpox or bubonic plague from one state, territory, district or province to another, is absolutely prohibited.
Rule 2. The transportation of bodies dead of Asiatic cholera, yellow fever, typhus fever, diphtheria (membranous croup), scarlet fever (scarlatina, scarlet rash), erysipelas, glanders, anthrax or leprosy, shall not be accepted for transportation unless prepared for shipment by being thoroughly disinfected by (a) arterial and cavity injection with an approved disinfecting fluid; (b) disinfection and stopping of all orifices with absorbent cotton, and (c) washing the body with the disinfectant, all of which must be done by an embalmer holding a certificate as such, issued by the state or provincial board of health or other state or provincial authority provided for by law.

After being disinfected as above, such body shall be enveloped in a layer of dry cotton, not less than one inch thick, completely wrapped in a sheet securely fastened, and encased in an air-tight zinc, tin, copper, or lead-lined coffin or iron casket, all joints and seams hermetically sealed, and all enclosed in a strong tight wooden box. Or the body being prepared for shipment by disinfecting and wrapping as above, may be placed in a strong coffin or casket and said coffin or casket encased in an air-tight zinc, copper, or tin-lined box, all joints and seams hermetically soldered.

For interstate transportation under this rule only embalmers holding a license issued or approved by the state or provincial board of health or other state or provincial authority provided for by law, after examination, shall be recognized as competent to prepare such bodies for shipment.

Rule 3. The bodies of those dead of typhoid fever, puerperal fever, tuberculosis, or measles, may be received for transportation when prepared for shipment by arterial and cavity injection with an approved disinfecting fluid, washing the exterior of the body with the same, and enveloping the entire body with a layer of cotton not less than one inch thick, and all wrapped in a sheet securely fastened, and encased in an air-tight metallic coffin or casket, or air-tight metal-lined box, provided that this shall apply only to bodies which can reach their destination within thirty hours from the time of death. In all other cases such bodies shall be prepared by a licensed embalmer holding a certificate as provided for in Rule 2. When prepared by a licensed embalmer as defined and directed in Rule 2, the air-tight sealing and bandaging with cotton may be dispensed with.

Rule 4. The bodies of those dead from any cause not stated in rules 2 and 3 may be received for transportation when encased in a sound coffin or casket and enclosed in a strong outside wooden box, provided they can reach their destination within thirty hours from the time of death. If the body cannot reach its destination within thirty hours from the time of death, it must be prepared for shipment by arterial and cavity injection with an approved disinfecting fluid, washing the exterior of the body with the same and enveloping the entire body with a layer of dry cotton not less than one inch thick and all wrapped in a sheet securely fastened, and encased in an air-tight metallic coffin or casket or an air-tight metal-lined box. But when the body has been prepared for shipment by being thoroughly disinfected by a licensed embalmer, as defined and directed in Rule 2, the air-tight sealing and bandaging with cotton may be dispensed with.
Rule 5. In the shipment of bodies dead from any disease named in Rule 2, such body must not be accompanied by persons or articles which have been exposed to the infection of the disease, unless certified by the health officer as having been properly disinfected.

Before selling tickets, agents should carefully examine the transit permit and note the name of the passenger in charge, and of any others proposing to accompany the body, and see that all necessary precautions have been taken to prevent the spread of the disease. The transit permit in such cases shall specifically state who is authorized by the health authorities to accompany the remains. In all cases where bodies are forwarded under Rule 2, notices must be sent by telegraph by the shipping embalmer to the health officer, or when there is no health officer, to other competent authority at destination, advising the date and train on which the body may be expected.

Rule 6. Every dead body must be accompanied by a person in charge, who must be provided with a passage ticket and also present a full first-class ticket marked "Corpse" for the transportation of the body, and a transit permit showing physician's or coroner's certificate, name of deceased, date and hour of death, age, place of death, cause of death, and all other items of the standard certificate of death recommended by the American Public Health Association and adopted by the U. S. Census Bureau, as far as obtainable, including health officer's or Registrar's permit for removal, whether communicable or non-communicable, the point to which the body is to be shipped, and when death is caused by any of the diseases specified in Rule 2 the names of those authorized by the health authorities to accompany the body. Also the undertaker's certificate as to how the body has been prepared for shipment. The transit permit must be made in duplicate, and the signature of physician or coroner, health officer and undertaker must be on both the original and duplicate copies. The undertaker's or registrars' certificate and paster of the original shall be detached from the transit permit and securely fastened on the end of the coffin box. All coffin boxes must be provided with at least four handles. The physician's certificate and transit permit shall be handed to the passenger in charge of the corpse. The whole duplicate copy shall be sent to the official in charge of the baggage department of the initial line, and by him to the secretary of the state or provincial board of health of the state or province from which said shipment is made.

Rule 7. When bodies are shipped by express, a transit permit, as described in Rule 6, must be made out in duplicate. The undertaker's certificate and paster of the original shall be detached from the transit permit and securely fastened on the coffin box. The physician's certificate and transit permit shall be attached to and accompany the express way-bill covering the remains and be delivered with the body at the point of destination to the person to whom it is consigned. The whole duplicate copy shall be sent by the forwarding express agent to the secretary of the state or provincial board of health of the state or province from which said shipment was made.

Rule 8. Every disinterred body, dead from any disease or cause, shall be treated as infectious or dangerous to the public health, and shall not be accepted for transportation unless said removal has been
approved by the state or provincial health authorities having juris-
diction where such body is disinterred, and the consent of the health
authorities of the locality to which the corpse is consigned has been
first obtained; and all such disinterred remains, or the coffin or casket
containing the same, must be wrapped in a woolen blanket thoroughly
saturated with a 1:1000 solution of corrosive sublimate, and enclosed
in a hermetically soldered zinc, tin, or copper-lined box. But bodies
deposited in receiving vaults shall not be treated and considered the
same as buried bodies, when originally prepared by a licensed em-
balmer as defined in Rule 2, and as directed in Rule 2 or 3 (according
to the nature of the disease causing death), provided shipment takes
place within thirty days from the time of death. The shipment of
bodies prepared in the manner above directed by licensed embalmers
from receiving vaults may be made within thirty days from the time
of death without having to obtain permission from the health author-
ities of the locality to which the body is consigned. After thirty days
the casket or coffin box containing said body must be enclosed in a
hermetically soldered box.

Rule 9. All rules and parts of rules conflicting with these rules are
hereby repealed.

It is to be hoped that all states now having a license system for em-
balmers will so modify their present shipping regulations as to con-
form to these national rules. It is further to be hoped that the present
states without any licensing system may quickly fall into line either
through state board of health regulations or legislation, for those of
us who reside in licensing states do not wish to continue the risk of
dying in an unlicensing state and in consequence, burial in an uncon-
genial soil.

Summarized, the licensing system has brought about the following
conditions:

1. Shipment has been simplified and the annoyances which in many
instances were prohibitive prior to 1898, have disappeared.

2. Uniform regulations have been established so that it is now only
necessary for sanitary officials to know that the remains were prepared
by a licensed embalmer of the first class, in order that they may safely
permit their shipment, or the receipt of a shipment at destination.

3. A uniform shipping blank is prepared by the various state sanitary
authorities and is in general use.

4. The remains of those who have died of a communicable disease
may be safely shipped for any distance.

5. A shipped body need no longer be a nuisance while in transit or
at point of destination.

6. A class of men and women thoroughly conversant with the proper
methods for the disinfection of premises and of individuals has been
created; a class of sanitarians, in fact, that can be very helpful in any
community.