

MOVING THE DEAD.

Scenes at the Old Jewish Cemeteries.

Strange Procession on San Mateo Road.

A Thousand Disinterments Made Within the Last Few Weeks.

Travelers and dwellers along the Mission road leading into San Mateo county must have noticed nearly every morning during the past few weeks big express wagons loaded with coffin boxes slowly winding their way southward. If any one had cared to watch these wagons they would have been seen to turn into the new Jewish cemetery beyond the San Mateo line, and if one had still further investigated the matter it would have been ascertained that the wagons came from the old Jewish cemeteries in the Mission. The story of this transfer is simply another chapter in the growth of San Francisco. Since the year 1860 the great bulk of Jewish burials have taken place either in the "Home of Peace" or the "Hills of Eternity," from Eighteenth to Twentieth streets, on Dolores, but the law having now declared that the burial places for San Francisco's dead shall hereafter be beyond the boundaries of the city and county, those who have control of these old cemeteries have begun the removal of the bodies therein to the new cemeteries of the same names down along the Mission road.

The Congregation Emanu-El owns the cemetery "Home of Peace," and this congregation, in conjunction with the Eureka Benevolent Society, is having the bodies removed from the old to the new resting-place of that name, while the Congregation Sherith Israel is doing the same in connection with the old and new "Hills of Eternity."

The work of removal began on July 5th, and nearly a thousand bodies, or all that is left of them, have thus far been removed from the two cemeteries. The work will be resumed again after the Jewish holidays. There are still about a thousand to move. The Congregation Emanu-El and the benevolent society have been removing the contents of all graves as the workmen came to them. Lot owners in the new cemetery of course have the remains of friends reinterred in their own lots, and all others are deposited at the expense of the congregation and society. In the case of the Congregation Sherith Israel only the remains of friends or new lot owners have thus far been removed, but an arrangement is to be made for the transfer of all the dead buried in the old cemetery at an early date.

The work of disinterment has proceeded daily until now, and has been performed under the personal supervision of Dr. Arthur Regensberger, the city superintendent of vaults and disinterments. A force of about twenty-five men has been constantly employed. The majority of these have been employed digging open the graves. Two or three men have been specially detailed to remove the coffins and their contents after the upper earth has been removed, and several carpenters have been kept busy putting the remains in new zinc-lined boxes. In most cases there was very little found to be removed, though some bodies were in a fair state of preservation. Where the latter was the case the new boxes were all of full size, and even where nothing but ashes remained large boxes were used if enough of the original caskets had remained to warrant them. In many instances, however, the new boxes conformed to the remains, and the result was that some of the truck loads were made up of boxes of many different sizes. In one instance there were seventy boxes of remains piled up on a single truck, though the average load was between twenty and thirty. The diggers would open a lot of graves each day down to within a single layer of the coffin. Next morning, while the diggers worked on other graves, the special men removed the coffins, or what was left of them, and the boxing was done at once so that the truck could start before noon. In this way from twenty to seventy were removed each day until nearly a thousand had been taken away. Some of the coffins were found soaked with water, and in places where the coffins had rotted away the bottoms of the graves were full of mud. The scene when the diggers were working knee deep in mud was not an inspiring one.

The site of the old cemeteries is to be filled in and turned into building lots.