

A DISCUSSION ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

BY A MISSIONARY TO THE CHINESE.

(Reprinted from "The Sunday at Home.")

One day we went out and bluntly asked the crowd of upturned faces—"Where will you go after you die?" They stared in blank amazement, and some smiled.

One said, "If you had asked where we shall be carried to, we could have more readily told you."

"Or what we will become," cried another.

A titer of laughter followed these witticisms, in which all joined. "Well, it is a very humiliating thing to think that these bodies of ours will be food for worms; but do you know," I said, addressing the audience, "that your bodies are no part of yourselves, but merely the case in which your soul dwells, and that your soul, or rather you yourselves, will live in the perfect possession of all your faculties after your bodies have been laid in the grave."

"We do not believe any such doctrine," affirmed one, evidently inclined to be disputations; "we believe that man is one whole; that his soul and his body form one thing,—that they are indissolubly united together, and that when he dies his spirit is dissolved and scattered to its original elements for ever." And continuing, he said, "Man is just like a tree or a beast. Destroy the root of a tree, and its functions gradually cease; its leaves wither, its health droops; its freshness and beauty—that is, the spirit of the tree—vanishes, and it dies and falls to the ground. So it is with man. His strength decays, the vigour of his mind and the force of his passions decay gradually with it; and at last everything comes to end, and the man and every power of his being is gone for ever."

Seeing that I had a man before me who had a mind of his own and could argue, I resolved to take full advantage of it, and enter thoroughly into the subject; for the Chinese are sadly at fault regarding the nature and immortality of the soul. Accordingly, I asked him "if he ever knew a man who had lost a leg or an arm?"

Rather astonished at this question, he

replied, "Yes, I do; but what has that to do with the subject?"

"Did you know him well before he lost his limb?" I again asked.

"Intimately."

This was fortunate; for there are few mutilated. They in general prefer to die rather than permit amputation.

"Well, did you observe any marked difference in his understanding or capacities after he had met with his misfortune?"

"No," he replied.

"Could he understand a question as clearly as ever? Conduct his business as well, and write as good a letter?" I persisted in inquiring.

"Yes, there was no difference at all, after he got quite better."

"Now," I said, "do you not see that this entirely disproves your assertions? For if the soul and the body were indissolubly interwoven one with another and formed one whole,—is it not evident that when a man lost part of his body he would lose part of his soul also?"

Acting on the principle of a "man convinced against his will," he replied that "he did not understand me."

"Why, don't you understand this? that if the soul permeates the body, and is one with it,—when a man loses, for instance, the fourth part of his body, he must lose also the fourth part of his soul?" And appealing to his knowledge of Chinese history, I further said, "You are a scholar, and you must recollect the great general of the old dynasty who lost a leg and an arm, and had his head also sadly bruised, but who recovered and continued as able a man as ever he was." And then addressing the crowd, I said, "These things clearly prove that the soul and the body are distinct; and that the loss of a part of the one in no way injures the other. But there are many other proofs. You have all seen some one wasting away with disease, and the flesh disappearing from the bones, and the man