

### STRANGE BURIAL CUSTOMS.

**R**EV. R. A. MITCHELL, one of our missionaries in Honan, in a letter just received, tells of some curious customs among the people.

One is that they keep the bodies for a long time after death, without burying them. To bury them within a few days after death is considered a mark of the deepest poverty, or that the dead has no relatives who take an interest in the honor of the family. As a term of reproach, they call it "blood burial," because they say the blood has not had time to dry out of the body.

In this teacher's family the grandmother had died fifty years ago, and had been buried once, but in what was afterwards considered an unlucky place, and the body was taken up again, and kept in the guest-room in the house.

Then at different times, between fifty years and eighteen years ago, there had passed away, the grandfather, father, uncle, aunt, three cousins, and a cousin's wife—nine in all—and as it would have been the worst of ill-luck to bury any of those dying later, before the grandmother was buried, these bodies, nine in all, were kept in the guest-room in the house, for periods of from eighteen to fifty years.

In a family that can do so the coffins are tightly sealed up, but many poor families are unable to do this, and you can imagine how awful, in some cases, it must be.

Another custom sometimes seen, is, that when a young person dies and the body is taken out of the house for burial, the father takes a hatchet or axe, and, with a blow, sticks it into the door sill, to cut off all communication and prevent the spirit of the departed one coming back to trouble the house.

Another custom, that makes one shudder to think of, is, that when a young child dies, say of a year old or under, they crush the little head before burial, to prevent the spirit finding its way back to trouble the home.

When little Gertrude Goforth, the dear little daughter of one of our own mission families, died, the natives asked the sorrowing

parents, as they were about to bury her, if they had crushed her head.

What a contrast to the hopes with which we lay a little brother or sister to rest, with flowers around the beautiful white face, so still and peaceful, and our assurance that the spirits of the dear little ones are with Jesus, happy forever.

The work that we do in sending missionaries is to give them the knowledge and hope that makes glad our lives.

Very loud are their professions of grief on the way to the grave. If a father is being buried, the sons make a great outcry as they follow. The eldest son pretends to be specially overcome, staggering as if overcome with grief, and requiring to be helped along.

Sometimes they have tear bottles and put their tears carefully into them, and display these to show how great their grief has been. No doubt they sometimes add a little water to make the grief greater.

The women of the family go to the funeral in a cart, and keep up a loud wailing all the way.

In addition to all this, a band is hired, and with horns, fiddles, and bagpipes, make a hideous noise and din, to frighten away the evil spirits, that they may not molest the spirit of the departed.

For the same purpose they scatter mock paper money along in front of the funeral procession, to buy up the road from the spirits along the road and get a free passage.

They also burn mock paper money to appease evil spirits that might annoy the dead on its journey to another world.

Let us hasten to these poor, dark, hopeless, hearts, the knowledge of Him who has taken all the sting out of death and robbed the grave of its gloom.

In our three mission stations in Honan, there are now upwards of one hundred regular inquirers and candidates for baptism. Old men seventy years of age, and their grandchildren, are in the same classes, eagerly learning the story of Christ and the way of Salvation. What has been already done is great encouragement for us to go on, with new earnestness, in the work of sending the Gospel to the heathen.