

STRANGE CUSTOMS IN CHINA.

In China every man is believed to have three souls. In life he may lose one or more, and is then told that he should dig or hunt in some given place for his lost possessions. Any one else's soul, too, may trouble him; and he must be sure to attend to those of his ancestors or of any relative dying before him.

When a man is thought to be dying he is washed, and dressed in his best clothes, put in his coffin, and taken into the hall of his house. Usually this treatment kills him. Then a priest comes, who exhorts the soul to leave the body. Thus departs the soul which afterward dwells in an ancestral tablet, such as you see in the picture.

On the twenty-first day of mourning, huge paper birds, raised on long poles are supposed to carry the second soul to heaven.

Fifty days of mourning are observed, the body being kept in the house in a closely-sealed coffin.

During this period, on each day, the family go out into the street, and, kneeling down in front of the house, wail bitterly.

All the relatives send food and spirit-money offerings to be placed in front of the coffin for the use of the soul which remains in the body and is buried with it. Rats or aught else may eat the food, but still it is said that the soul has eaten it.

When the professors of fung-swei or good luck (who must always be consulted on such occasions as on every other), decide on the day and place best securing good luck the body is at last buried; and if the place is right the soul will not return to torment the living, and the family will have good luck.

The wood of the coffin is very thick, the nails are imbedded in cement, and packages of quick-lime are placed under and around the body, so that, as Dr. Martin says in his "Cycle of Cathay," there is never any odor, though it remain unburied two years, as not unfrequently happens.

Many are the stories told about fung-swei.

A Strange Story.

The one I best remember is of an emperor. A man's father had died, and the professors, duly consulted, decided that the body must be burned, the ashes put in a

bag, and the bag taken to the bottom of a certain deep lake and placed in the mouth of a stone dragon there. To have the body



burned was easily accomplished, and the ashes were placed in a bag, but the man to dive to the bottom of the lake was not obtainable. It required the most expert to stay under the water so long.