

## SESAME AND FLAX

6. In A. DE CANDOLLE'S book<sup>1</sup> we read, "Chinese works seem to show that sesame was not introduced into China before the Christian era. The first certain mention of it occurs in a book of the fifth or sixth century, entitled *Ts'i min yao šu*. Before this there is confusion between the name of this plant and that of flax, of which the seed also yields an oil, and which is not very ancient in China." Bretschneider is cited as the source for this information. It was first stated by the latter that, according to the *Pen ts'ao*, *hu ma* 胡麻 (*Sesamum orientale*) was brought by Čan K'ien from Ta-yüan.<sup>2</sup> In his "Botanicon Sinicum"<sup>3</sup> he asserts positively that *hu ma*, or foreign hemp, is a plant introduced from western Asia in the second century B.C.<sup>4</sup> The same dogma is propounded by STUART.<sup>5</sup>

All that there is to this theory amounts to this. T'ao Huñ-kiñ (A.D. 451-536) is credited in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*<sup>6</sup> with the statement that "*hu ma* 胡麻 ('hemp of the Hu') originally grew in Ta-yüan (Fergana) 本生大宛,<sup>7</sup> and that it hence received the name *hu ma* ('Iranian hemp')." He makes no reference to Čan K'ien or to the time when the introduction must have taken place; and to every one familiar with Chinese records the passage must evoke suspicion through its lack of precision and chronological and other circumstantial evidence. The records regarding Ta-yüan do not mention *hu ma*, nor does this term ever occur in the Annals. Now, T'ao Huñ-kiñ was a Taoist adept, a drug-hunter and alchemist, an immortality fiend; he never crossed the boundaries of his country, and certainly had no special information concerning Ta-yüan. He simply drew on his imagination by arguing, that, because *mu-su* (alfalfa) and grape sprang

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<sup>1</sup> Origin of Cultivated Plants, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> *Chinese Recorder*, 1871, p. 222; adopted by HIRTH, *T'oung Pao*, Vol. VI, 1895, p. 439, and maintained again in *Journal Am. Or. Soc.*, 1917, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> Pt. II, p. 206.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204, he says, however, that the *Pen ts'ao* does not speak of flax, and that its introduction must be of more recent date. This conflicts with his statement above.

<sup>5</sup> Chinese Materia Medica, p. 404.

<sup>6</sup> Ch. 22, p. 1. Likewise in the earlier *Čen lei pen ts'ao*, Ch. 24, p. 1 b.

<sup>7</sup> This tradition is reproduced without any reference in the *Pen ts'ao yen i* of 1116 (Ch. 20, p. 1, ed. of Lu Sin-yüan).