

## SAFFLOWER

17. A. DE CANDOLLE,<sup>1</sup> while maintaining that the cultivation of safflower<sup>2</sup> (*Carthamus tinctorius*) is of ancient date both in Egypt and India, asserts on Bretschneider's authority that the Chinese received it only in the second century B.C., when Čan K'ien brought it back from Bactriana. The same myth is repeated by STUART.<sup>3</sup> The biography of the general and the Han Annals contain nothing to this effect. Only the *Po wu či* enumerates *hwan lan* 黃藍 in its series of Čan-K'ien plants, adding that it can be used as a cosmetic (*yen-č'i* 燕支).<sup>4</sup> The *Ku kin ču*, while admitting the introduction of the plant from the West, makes no reference to the General. The *Ts'i min yao šu* discusses the method of cultivating the flower, but is silent as to its introduction. The fact of this introduction cannot be doubted, but it is hardly older than the third or fourth century A.D. under the Tsin dynasty. The introduction of safflower drew the attention of the Chinese to an indigenous wild plant (*Basella rubra*) which yielded a similar dye and cosmetic, and both plants and their products were combined or confounded under the common name *yen-č'i*.

*Basella rubra*, a climbing plant of the family *Basellaceae*, is largely cultivated in China (as well as in India) on account of its berries, which contain a red juice used as a rouge by women and as a purple dye for making seal-impressions. This dye was the prerogative of the highest

<sup>1</sup> Origin of Cultivated Plants, p. 164.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding the history of this word, see YULE, Hobson-Jobson, p. 779.

<sup>3</sup> Chinese Materia Medica, p. 94. It is likewise an erroneous statement of Stuart that Tibet was regarded by the Chinese as the natural habitat of this plant. This is due to a confusion with the term *Si-ts'an huñ hwa* ("red flower of Tibet"), which refers to the saffron, and is so called because in modern times saffron is imported into China from Kashmir by way of Tibet (see p. 312). Neither *Carthamus* nor saffron is grown in the latter country.

<sup>4</sup> Some editions of the *Po wu či* add, "At present it has also been planted in the land of Wei 魏 (China)," which might convey the impression that it had only been introduced during the third century A.D., the lifetime of Čan Hwa, author of that work. In the commentary to the *Pei hu lu* (Ch. 3, p. 12), the *Po wu či* is quoted as saying, "The safflower (*huñ hwa* 紅花, 'red flower') has its habitat in Persia, Su-le (Kashgar), and Ho-lu 河祿. Now that of Liañ-han 梁漢 is of prime quality, a tribute of twenty thousand catties being annually sent to the Bureau of Weaving and Dyeing." The term *huñ hwa* in the written language does not refer to "saffron," but to "safflower." Java produced the latter (Javanese *kasumba*), not saffron, as translated by HIRTH (Chau Ju-kua, p. 78). The Čan-K'ien story is repeated in the *Hwa kin* of 1688 (Ch. 5, p. 24 b).