

JASMINE

18. The *Nan fan ts'ao mu čwan* 南方草木狀, the oldest Chinese work devoted to the botany of southern China, attributed to Ki Han 稽含, a minister of the Emperor Hwei 惠 (A.D. 290-309), contains the following notice:¹—

“The *ye-si-miñ* 耶悉茗 flower and the *mo-li* 末利 flower (*Jasminum officinale*, family *Oleaceae*) were brought over from western countries by Hu people 胡人, and have been planted in Kwan-tuñ (Nan hai 南海). The southerners are fond of their fragrant odor, and therefore cultivate them . . . The *mo-li* flower resembles the white variety of *ts'ian-mi* 薔藤 (*Cnidium monnieri*), and its odor exceeds that of the *ye-si-miñ*.”

In another passage of the same work² it is stated that the *či-kia* 指甲 flower (*Lawsonia alba*),³ *ye-si-miñ*, and *mo-li* were introduced by Hu people from the country Ta Ts'in; that is, the Hellenistic Orient.

The plant *ye-si-miñ* has been identified with *Jasminum officinale*; the plant *mo-li*, with *Jasminum sambac*. Both species are now cultivated in China on account of the fragrancy of the flowers and the oil that they yield.⁴

The passage of the *Nan fan ts'ao mu čwan*, first disclosed by BRETSCHEIDER,⁵ has given rise to various misunderstandings. HIRTH⁶ remarked, “This foreign name, which is now common to all European languages, is said to be derived from Arabic-Persian *jāsamīn* [read *yāsmīn*], and the occurrence of the word in a Chinese record written about A.D. 300 shows that it must have been in early use.” WATTERS⁷ regarded *yāsmīn* as “one of the earliest Arabian words to be found in Chinese literature.” It seems never to have occurred to these authors

¹ Ch. A, p. 2 (ed. of *Han Wei ts'un šu*).

² Ch. B, p. 3.

³ See below, p. 334.

⁴ The sambac is a favored flower of the Chinese. In Peking there are special gardeners who cultivate it exclusively. Every day in summer, the flower-buds are gathered before sunrise (without branches or leaves) and sold for the purpose of perfuming tea and snuff, and to adorn the head-dress of Chinese ladies. *Jasminum officinale* is not cultivated in Peking (BRETSCHEIDER, *Chinese Recorder*, Vol. III, 1871, p. 225).

⁵ *Chinese Recorder*, Vol. III, p. 225.

⁶ *China and the Roman Orient*, p. 270.

⁷ *Essays on the Chinese Language*, p. 354.