

THE BALSAM-POPLAR

20. Under the term *hu t'un* (Japanese *kotō*) 胡桐 ("t'ung tree of the Hu, Iranian *Paulownia imperialis*;" that is, *Populus balsamifera*), the Annals of the Former Han Dynasty mention a wild-growing tree as characteristic of the flora of the Lob-nor region; for it is said to be plentiful in the kingdom of Šan-šan 鄯善.¹ It is self-evident from the nomenclature that this was a species new to the Chinese, who discovered it in their advance through Turkistan in the second century B.C., but that the genus was somewhat familiar to them. The commentator Moñ K'añ states on this occasion that the *hu t'un* tree resembles the mulberry (*Morus alba*), but has numerous crooked branches. A more elaborate annotation is furnished by Yen Ši-ku (A.D. 579-645), who comments, "The *hu t'un* tree resembles the *t'un* 桐 (*Paulownia imperialis*), but not the mulberry; hence the name *hu t'un* is bestowed upon it. This tree is punctured by insects, whereupon flows down a juice, that is commonly termed *hu t'un lei* 胡桐淚 ('*hu-t'un* tears'), because it is said to resemble human tears.² When this substance penetrates earth or stone, it coagulates into a solid mass, somewhat on the order of rock salt, called *wu-t'un kien* 梧桐鹼 ('natron of the *wu-t'un* tree,' *Sterculia platanifolia*). It serves for soldering metal, and is now used by all workmen."³

The *T'un tien* 通典, written by Tu Yu 杜佑 between the years 766 and 801, says that "the country Lou 樓⁴ among the Si Žuñ 西戎 produces an abundance of tamarisks 檉柳 (*Tamarix chinensis*), *hu t'un*, and *pai ts'ao* 白草 ('white herb or grass'),⁵ the latter being eaten by

¹ *Ts'ien Han šu*, Ch. 96 A, p. 3 b. Cf. A. WYLIE, *Journal Anthropological Institute*, Vol. X, 1881, p. 25.

² Pliny (XII, 18, § 33) speaks of a thorny shrub in Ariana on the borders of India, valuable for its tears, resembling the myrrh, but difficult of access on account of the adhering thorns (Contermina Indis gens Ariana appellatur, cui spina lacrima pretiosa murrae simili, difficili accessu propter aculeos adnexos). It is not known what plant is to be understood by the Plinian text; but the analogy of the "tears" with the above Chinese term is noteworthy.

³ This text has been adopted by the *T'ai p'in hwan yü ki* (Ch. 181, p. 4) in describing the products of Lou-lan.

⁴ Abbreviated for Lou-lan 樓蘭, the original name of the kingdom of Šan-šan.

⁵ This is repeated from the Han Annals, which add also rushes. The "white grass" is explained by Yen Ši-ku as "resembling the grass *yu* 茭 (*Setaria viridis*), but finer and without awns; when dried, it assumes a white color, and serves as fodder for cattle and horses."