

THE SPINACH

36. In regard to the spinach (*Spinacia oleracea*), BRETSCHNEIDER¹ stated that "it is said to come from Persia. The botanists consider western Asia as the native country of spinach, and derive the names *Spinacia*, *spinage*, *spinat*, *épinards*, from the spinous seeds; but as the Persian name is *esfinadsh*, our various names would seem more likely to be of Persian origin." The problem is not quite so simple, however. It is not stated straightforwardly in any Chinese source that the spinach comes from Persia; and the name "Persian vegetable" (*Po-se ts'ai*) is of recent origin, being first traceable in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*, where Li Ši-čen himself ascribes it to a certain Fañ Ši-yin 方士隱.

Strangely enough, we get also in this case a taste of the Čaň-K'ien myth. At least, H. L. JOLY² asserts, "The *Chinese and Japanese Repository* says that Chang K'ien brought to China the spinach." The only Chinese work in which I am able to find this tradition is the *T'un č'i* 通志,³ written by Čeň Tsiao 鄭樵 of the Sung dynasty, who states in cold blood that Čaň K'ien brought spinach over. Not even the *Pen ts'ao kan mu* dares repeat this fantasy. It is plainly devoid of any value, in view of the fact that spinach was unknown in the west as far back as the second century B.C. Indeed, it was unfamiliar to the Semites and to the ancients. It is a cultivation that comes to light only in mediæval times.

In perfect agreement with this state of affairs, spinach is not mentioned in China earlier than the T'ang period. As regards the literature on agriculture, the vegetable makes its first appearance in the *Čuň šu* 種樹書, written toward the end of the eighth century.⁴ Here it is stated that the spinach, *po-liň* 菠薐 (*pwa-liň), came from the country Po-liň 菠薐國 (*Pwa-liň, Paliŋga).

The first *Pen ts'ao* that speaks of the spinach is the *Čeň lei pen ts'ao* written by T'aň Šen-wei in A.D. 1108.⁵ This *Materia Medica* describes altogether 1746 articles, compared with 1118 which are treated in the *Kia yu pu ču pen ts'ao* (published in the period Kia-yu, A.D. 1056-64), so that 628 new ones were added. These are expressly so designated in

¹ *Chinese Recorder*, 1871, p. 223.

² Legend in *Japanese Art*, p. 35.

³ Ch. 75, p. 32 b.

⁴ BRETSCHNEIDER, *Bot. Sin.*, pt. 1, p. 79.

⁵ Ch. 29, p. 14 b (print of 1587).