

floating oil is the best, and reserved for the harem; the second is for commerce.

The tree has existed in Egypt from the eleventh to the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was presumably introduced there by the Arabs. D'HERBELOT<sup>1</sup> cites an Arabic author as saying that the balm of Mathara near Cairo was much sought by the Christians, owing to the faith they put in it. It served them as the chrism in Confirmation.

The Irish pilgrim Symon Semeonis, who started on his journey to the Holy Land in 1323, has the following interesting account of the balsam-tree of Egypt:<sup>2</sup> "To the north of the city is a place called Matarieh, where is that famous vine said to have been formerly in Engaddi (cf. Cant., I, 13), which distils the balsam. It is diligently guarded by thirty men, for it is the source of the greater portion of the Sultan's wealth. It is not like other vines, but is a small, low, smooth tree, and odoriferous, resembling in smoothness and bark the hazel tree, and in leaves a certain plant called *nasturcium aquaticum*. The stalk is thin and short, usually not more than a foot in length; every year fresh branches grow out from it, having from two to three feet in length and producing no fruit. The keepers of the vineyard hire Christians, who with knives or sharp stones break or cut the tops of these branches in several places and always in the sign of a cross. The balsam soon distils through these fractures into glass bottles. The keepers assert that the flow of balsam is more abundant when the incision is made by a Christian than by a Saracen."<sup>3</sup>

In 1550 PIERRE BELON<sup>4</sup> still noted the tree in Cairo. Two specimens were still alive in 1612. In 1615, however, the last tree died.

The Semitic word introduced into China by the *Yu yan tsa tsu* seems to have fallen into oblivion. It is not even mentioned in the *Pen ts'ao kan mu*. The word "balsam," however, was brought back to China by the early Jesuits. In the famous work on the geography of the world, the *Či fan wai ki* 職方外紀,<sup>5</sup> first draughted by Pantoja, and after his death enlarged and edited in 1623 by Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), the Peru balsam is described under the name *pa'r-sa-mo* 拔爾撒摩. The same word with reference to the same substance is employed by

<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèque orientale, Vol. I, p. 392.

<sup>2</sup> M. ESPOSITO, The Pilgrimage of Symon Semeonis: A Contribution to the History of Mediæval Travel (*Geographical Journal*, Vol. LI, 1918, p. 85).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. the similar account of K. V. MEGENBERG (*Buch der Natur*, p. 358, written in 1349-50).

<sup>4</sup> Observations de plusieurs singularitez et choses memorables, trouvées en Grece, Asie, Iudée, Egypte, Arabie, p. 246.

<sup>5</sup> Ch. 4, p. 3 (ed. of *Šou šan ko ts'un šu*).