



The Chinese Husbandman.

The Husbandman belongs to a privileged class of the population in China: In importance, immunity, and honour, he is next to the Mandarin and the man of letters, and from the remotest antiquity, his avocation has been styled "The grand science of the citizen and of the prince." The great maxim of the government has been, that agriculture is the true source of national prosperity and wealth, and, keeping this principle in view, they have in practice afforded every possible encouragement and security to the cultivators of the soil. Even the Emperor himself thinks it not beneath him once a year to be a tiller of the ground, for on the arrival of spring-time, he repairs in splendid pomp to a piece of land marked out for the purpose, attended by his suite of officers, and prostrating himself on the ground nine times, in a prayer prepared by the Court of Ceremonies, he invokes the benediction of Tien, the God of heaven, on the industry of himself and of his subjects. Then as the High Priest of the Empire, he sacrifices a bullock, during the offering

of which, a plough, drawn by a pair of oxen, and richly ornamented, is brought to the Emperor, who, throwing aside the robes of majesty, puts his hand to the plough, and in the presence of his princes, mandarins, and peasantry, opens up a few ridges of land, and casts in the first seed of the season,—a ceremony which is performed on the same day by the viceroys of the different provinces throughout the kingdom.

Perhaps two-thirds of the inhabitants of China are employed in the manual labours of the field, and, without exaggeration, they may be spoken of as the happiest and the most independent of the nation, for "although they pay to the amount of a tenth annually to the Emperor, they have neither priesthood, nor poor to support, unless the poor of their own families, for whom all classes are bound to provide. Of the extent of land brought under culture, it is impossible for us to speak with precision, but from the latest census published by order of the government, there are about 640,576,381 English acres under proper tillage, the greatest part