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THE EVENING HOUR.

BY MRS. L. WILSON.

This is the hour when memory wakes
Visions of joys that could not last ;
This is the hour when fancy takes
A survey of the past.

She brings before the pensive mind,
The hallowed scenes of other years,
And friends who long have been consigned
To silence and to tears.

The few we liked, the one we loved,
A sacred hand come stealing on ;
And many a form far hence removed,
And many a pleasure gone.

Friendships that now in death are hushed,
And young affection's broken chain,
And hopes that were too quickly crushed,
In memory live again.

Few watch the fading beams of day,
But muse on hopes as quickly flown ;
Tint after tint, they died away,
Till all at last were gone.

This is the hour when fancy wreathes
Her spell round joys that could not last ;
This is the hour when memory breathes
A sigh to pleasures past.

TEA.



The history of commerce does not, perhaps, present a parallel to the circumstances which have attended the introduction of tea into Great Britain. This leaf was first imported into Europe by the Dutch East India Company, in the early part of the seventeenth century ; but it was not until the year 1666 that a small quantity was brought over from Holland to this country by the Lords Arlington and Ossory : and yet, from a period earlier than any to which the memories of any of the existing generation can reach, tea has been one of the principal necessities of life among all classes of the community. To provide a sufficient supply of this aliment, many thousand tons of the finest mercantile navy in the world are annually employed in trading with a people by whom all dealings with foreigners are merely tolerated ; and from this recently acquired taste, a very large and easily collected revenue is obtained by the state.

The tea plant is a native of China or Japan, and probably of both. It has been used among the natives of the former country

from time immemorial. It is only in a particular tract of the Chinese empire that the plant is cultivated ; and this tract, which is situated on the eastern side, between the 30th and 33rd degrees of north latitude, is distinguished by the natives as "the tea country." The more northern part of China would be too cold ; and farther south the heat would be too great. There are, however, a few small plantations to be seen near to Canton.

The Chinese give to the plant the name of *tcha* or *tha*. It is propagated by them from seeds, which are deposited in rows four or five feet asunder ; and so uncertain is their vegetation, even in their native climate, that it is found necessary to sow as many as seven or eight seeds in every hole. The ground between each row is always kept free from weeds, and the plants are not allowed to attain a higher growth than admits of the leaves being conveniently gathered. The first crop of leaves is not collected until the third year after sowing ; and when the trees are six or seven years old, the produce becomes so inferior that they are removed to make room for a fresh succession.

The flowers of the tea tree are white, and somewhat resemble the wild rose of our hedges : these flowers are succeeded by soft green berries or pods, containing each from one to three white seeds. The plant will grow in either low or elevated situations, but always thrives best and furnishes leaves of the finest quality when produced in light stony ground.



[Tea-gathering—from a Chinese drawing.]

The leaves are gathered from one to four times during the year, according to the age of the trees. Most commonly there are three periods of gathering ; the first commences about the middle of April ; the second at Midsummer ; and the last is accomplished during August and September. The leaves that are earliest gathered are of the most delicate colour and most aromatic flavour, with the least portion of either fibre or bitterness. Leaves of the second gathering are of a dull green colour, and have less valuable qualities than the former ; while those which are last collected are of a dark green, and possess an inferior value. The quality is farther influenced by the age of the wood on which the leaves are borne, and by the degree of exposure to which they have been accustomed ; leaves from young wood, and those most exposed, being always the best.

The leaves, as soon as gathered, are put into wide shallow baskets, and placed in the air or wind, or sunshine, during some hours. They are then placed on a flat cast-iron pan, over a stove heated with charcoal, from a half to three quarters of a pound of leaves being operated on at one time. These leaves are stirred quickly about with a kind of a brush, and are then as quickly swept off the pan into baskets. The next process is that of rolling, which is effected by carefully rubbing them between men's hands ; after which they are again put in larger quantities, on the pan, and subjected anew to heat, but at this time to a lower degree than at first, and just sufficient to dry them effectually without risk of scorching. This effected, the tea is placed on a table and carefully picked over, every unsightly or imperfectly dried