

CHINESE PECULIARITIES.

The Chinese are a singular people.— They are industrious and ingenious. They have made very considerable advances in the arts and sciences, in some of which they have shown ingenuity and skill far beyond that of Europe. If they had been willing, since the opening of European commerce, to learn from "outside barbarians," they might have added largely to their stock of knowledge, and so have kept up in the race of improvement. Their self-conceit and jealousy of foreign ideas have been as effectual a barrier against the invasion of a higher civilization from the south and east, as the Great Wall has been against the irruption of barbarism from the north. They are exceedingly ingenious and nice in small matters of fancy, and will spend years of patient industry over some trinket of gew-gaw, whose only merit will be to excite the wonder and admiration of the curious. But they have no fancy for labor-saving machinery or useful inventions. Even their agricultural implements are of a truly patriarchal simplicity. The plow, the hoe, and the harrow, all of the rudest construction, are almost the only instruments used. The spade is seldom seen. The plow is usually drawn by buffaloes, but often by men and even women. In a country so over-peopled as China, it is not strange that they do not desire our machines for saving labor, manual labor being very abundant and cheap, and many millions depending upon it for subsistence.

Not only are men employed to draw the plow and the harrow, but as carriage horses, to convey the magistrates and the nobles from place to place. The *mandarins*, who are a sort of inferior magistrates, are not allowed to walk in public. It is strictly forbidden as inconsistent with their official dignity. They never go out, except in a sedan chair, with a proper retinue of attendants. They are also prohibited from participation in the common amusements of the people, as unfitting them for the more serious duties of their station. They are not permitted to entertain their friends with theatrical representations except at stated periods. Gaming, private visits, and assisting in public meetings are all prohibited to them, while they remain in office. They indulge in no amusements, except such as

they can enjoy in the privacy of home.— Such is the law, but, as in other lands, the law is often evaded. The mandarins of all ranks are elected for three years only, and then are appointed by the government to some other place.

Vast numbers of the Chinese live in boats or floating houses, having no houses on the land. The water population of Canton is estimated at two hundred thousand. The men go on shore in the daytime, and get what work they can; the women, in the meantime earning a little money by carrying passengers in their floating houses, which they manage with great dexterity.

The male children are very early taught to swim; and until they can manage themselves in the water, they always wear a calabash suspended round their neck, to buoy them up, in case they should fall overboard.

The boats on the canals, as well as on many of the rivers, are drawn by men. The drawing of the government barges is a sort of tax on the people, who are pressed into the service by order of the magistrates. Every district is obliged to furnish a certain number of men for the purpose. Even the wealthiest farmers are not exempt. They must either do the work themselves or find substitutes, and pay them. It is a cruel system, and productive of much misery, and the men often desert during the night. The officers are then obliged to send to the nearest village, surprise the men in their beds, and drive them off the yachts. If they attempt to escape, or plead old age or infirmity, as an excuse, they are whipped in, and compelled to work, till their keepers are caught napping, when they are sure to run away, to be caught again by the next yacht that comes along.

A REMARKABLE NUT.

Only a small portion of British Guiana is cultivated; probably all the towns, plantations, and settlements are within less than fifty miles of the sea coast. Beyond that are dense and almost impenetrable forests, abounding in inexhaustible treasures of rare and valuable woods. This region is seldom visited by travelers, and not even by the inhabitants of the cultivated portion of the country, save for the purpose of obtaining the rich woods for exportation. As there are no roads nor

footpaths through the forests by land, excursions into the interior are made with boats upon the rivers. Indians are employed, on these inland voyages, to propel the boats, and, when a landing is made, to cut away, with their machete, the underwood, vines, &c., which render the forests impassable. It is usual for the voyaging party to encamp on shore at night.

Among the great variety of trees, nuts, and fruits that abound in this productive region, there is a nut, the seed of a tree, which is more remarkable and curious than all others. This wonderful nut slightly resembles a bitter walnut in external appearance, yet it often attains to the size of an English walnut. It grows with a smooth husk of rind covering a thin shell. When dried, the outside of the shell is of a dark brown color, while the inside is whitish, with a beautiful pearly surface. The kernel of the nut grows in the form of a snake, as it lies coiled upon the ground. One end is large, resembling the head of the snake, and from this it gradually tapers, in coils to the other extremity. The entire length of the kernel, if uncoiled, would be from six to eight inches, according to the size of the nut. When fresh from the tree, the kernel may be thus uncoiled, and if suspended in a bottle of spirits, it appears like a miniature snake.

While the nut is green, the kernel is white, and fills the shell; but when it ripens, and has been kept for a long time, the kernel becomes shrunken, hard, and of a dark, woody appearance, more nearly resembling a dried snake than any thing else with which we can compare it. The serpentine form of the embryo may be distinctly observed, on first opening the shell, although it is entirely covered by a thin, brownish, silky skin. This skin may be easily removed, and then the perfect form of the snake appears, with coils more distinctly separated than in the snake. The spaces within the coils of a green nut are filled with a downy, or silken substance, which hardens when drying, yet it is easily removed. When vegetating, its root-germ springs from the small end of the embryo. Under a microscope, the appearance of the interior of the kernel is very much like that of a piece of coarse grained maple sugar.

The traveler who discovered and named