

The extracts from the Peking gazettes, of which our compilation will chiefly consist, are gleaned principally from the Indochinese Gleaner, the Malacca Observer, the Canton Register, the translations of the Royal Asiatic society, and a few translations given in the appendix to sir George Staunton's account of the embassy to the khan of the Tourgouths. Some quotations are given also from other sources, which are indicated in their proper places. As we owe our fullest descriptions of China to Roman Catholic missionaries, so do we owe the present notices chiefly to missionaries of the reformed church; for nearly all of the translations found in the first three periodicals quoted above were furnished by the late doctor Morrison, the interpreter to the British East India company's factory at Canton, whose name is a sufficient guaranty for their fidelity. The extracts commence with the first number of the Indochinese Gleaner, a work which is now nearly out of print, and are continued more or less from that date, May, 1817, to the present year. This space of time includes the three last years of the reign of Keäk'ing and the whole of the present emperor's. A compilation gathered from such sources must necessarily be very defective and the results often inconclusive; but it is instructive nevertheless as far as it does go, because it narrates actual events, detailed by the Chinese themselves in the ordinary routine of official duty. Whilst scattered through the pages of a newspaper or magazine, as isolated facts, they command little attention and are distrusted by those who do not know how they are obtained. Collected together and classified, they confirm each other and tend to elucidate more fully the subject to which they refer.

Some account of the Peking gazette will be found in a former number of the Repository, vol. I, p. 506. For the manner in which it is compiled we are indebted to the Journal Asiatique for December, 1833. "The supreme council of the empire," we are told in that periodical, "which includes the ministers, sits in the imperial palace at Peking. Early every morning, ample extracts from the affairs decided upon or examined by the emperor the evening before, are fixed upon a board in a court of the palace. A collection of these extracts forms the annals of the government, and thence the materials for the history of the empire are drawn. The administration and the government establishments at Peking are ordered, therefore, to make a copy of the extracts every day, and to preserve them in their archives. The government officers in the provinces receive them by their *tehi tshan* (couriers), who are retained in the capital expressly for that purpose. But in order that all the inhabitants of the empire may obtain some knowledge of the progress of public affairs, the placarded extracts are, by permission of government, printed completely at Peking, without a single word being changed or omitted." The result is the Peking gazette. A court circular is issued daily at Canton also, and slips of paper are occasionally hawked about the streets like an extraordinary gazette in London, on occasions of eventful news, or sometimes to report mere trifles. Many

of the local events of Canton recorded in the Canton Register were taken perhaps by Dr. Morrison from these publications, and sometimes, as is generally stated, on common report.

The penal code. Although the despotism of the sovereign is subordinate to the despotism of established usage, we must guard against the supposition that his laws, like those of the Medes and Persians, alter not. The penal code has undergone several emendations since sir George Staunton's translation appeared. It consisted originally of the *leuh*, which for several ages comprised only 457 heads; in the fifth year of the emperor Yungching it was reduced to 436. The *le* (novellæ) or modern clauses, to limit, explain, or alter, the old statutes, were first introduced during the Ming dynasty, which preceded that now on the throne. In the first year of the present reign they amounted to 1573.*

The Criminal Board at Peking addressed the emperor in 1829 to recommend a new edition.† The late emperor ordered that a revised and corrected edition of the code should be published every five years; the first five being a slight revisal, and the next a thorough one. "In consequence of the many alterations," continues the Board, "which have taken place during the present reign, the law and practice no longer correspond." A new edition‡ was published the following year, in compliance no doubt with this request, composing 28 volumes octavo. The emperor decreed at the same time,|| that instead of fixing ten years or any other period for the republication of the whole code, the supreme courts shall make as few alterations as possible on the last code, and that when they are obliged to do so, they shall report them immediately to receive the imperial sanction, and then promulgate them throughout the empire. The reason assigned for this rule is, that wily litigators and lawyers avail themselves of the numerous laws made by the six supreme courts at Peking, to act upon the new law or upon the old, as suits their purposes, which they are able to do, so long as the laws are not published.—It may not be out of place to notice here, that the 'orders' which have been promulgated at Canton during the last ten years, as the laws of the empire relating to foreigners, are not found in the last edition of the code, and that they have neither personal access to the Chinese courts of justice, nor that advantage of publication of the laws affecting them, which is here admitted to be due to the natives of the country. We may digress further too, to remark, that so far from usage being immutable in China, the emperor does not hesitate even to alter the characters of the language; for on his accession he decreed|| that *shün*ing, 'repose,' the name of the late emperor, his father, be hereafter sacred; and that to prevent its profanation it should be written 寧, the character *æ* *sin*, 'the heart,' which enters into its composition, being changed to a horizontal line.

* Canton Register, July 2d. 1829. || Canton Register, July 3d. 1830.

† Canton Register, Jan. 19th. 1830. ‡ Indochinese Gleaner, p. 108. Ap. 1829.

§ Chinese Repository, vol. 2d. p. 11.