T'ang Laorenkia.
By W. J. Hunnex.

T'ANG LAORENKIA was eighty years of age when his photograph was taken a few months ago. He is a native of K'ai-fengfu, the Capital of the Province of Honan, Central China. Although unknown to fame, it is worthy to be put on record that this notable Son of Han enjoys the distinction of being the envied owner of what are, probably, the longest finger nails possessed by any of the teeming multitudes of the Celestial Empire. It is by no means unusual to meet in China with literary men whose finger nails are several inches in length, but this old gentleman rejoices in the possession of two which are 3 feet 3 inches long, as verified by actual measurement. His little finger nail is just 1 foot long. The old gentleman's better half has also nails of quite respectable length, they being about 18 inches long.

Chinese ladies devote a great deal of time and attention to the care and beautifying of their finger nails, which are protected from injury by elaborately executed gold and silver sheaths. The eldest sister of Prince Mu, 4th Order (Mu Pei-tze), a Manchu lady, has what one might call, from a Chinese point of view, respectably long finger nails. They are several inches in length. There are, however, few of the
fair sex in China with nails as long as those of T'ang Laorenkia's wife. This is well, as one shudders to think what might happen in the event of a serious domestic difference between a couple armed with such formidable weapons of offence and defence.

In the photograph of T'ang Laorenkia his nails are not actually visible, as they are encased in bamboo sheaths to protect them from injury.

The Chinese literati, generally speaking, allow their nails to grow long as an indication to all whom it may concern that they are under no necessity of doing manual work. T'ang Laorenkia, however, asserts that he permitted his to grow from quite a different motive. He was, when young, very strong and muscular, and fond of fighting. He, therefore, hit upon the happy and unquestionably original expedient of allowing his finger nails to grow in order that it might be physically impossible for him to gratify his pugilistic propensities. Certainly an extraordinary remedy for combativeness!

This old gentleman's nails have been growing for more than 60 years; it is, therefore, not to be wondered at, if he should feel a little bit proud and elated over his; in the judgement of educated Celestials, unique and valuable possession. It will, presumably, be handed down as a venerated heirloom to future generations. Occasionally, as a special mark of friendship, a Chinese gentlemen will make a present of several inches of finger nail that he has cut off for that purpose.
It will be readily understood that a man with finger nails 3 feet, 3 inches long would find himself incapacitated from doing many things which ordinary mortals find no difficulty in accomplishing. As a matter of fact, T'ang Laorenkia cannot dress himself without the assistance of two other persons; but his inability to do so is only because of the extraordinary length of his finger nails, for otherwise he is a strong and healthy old gentleman. With his right hand, the finger nails of which are of ordinary length, he can lift about 100 pounds, while he thinks nothing of walking 100 li (say 30 miles) in one day. All his teeth are in a good state of preservation, and he presents, in fact, the picture of a hale and hearty octogenarian. It is questionable, however, whether any enterprising and mendacious quack in the Middle Kingdom, the paradise of these gentry, would have the hardihood to assert that his longevity could in any way be ascribed to the abnormal length of his finger nails.

The Chinese not infrequently are induced to reduce the length of their finger nails by the belief they have that after a time the blood is absorbed by the long nails, with the result that the arm becomes paralysed. They assert that such cases have been known. They also experience great difficulty in keeping them straight. The fakirs of India afford illustrations of the nails curving until they penetrate the flesh. The sheaths worn by the Chinese also help to obviate this.

Lao Tsz, or T'ai Shang Lao Kiiin, who is given a place by native artists among the celebrated Eight Genii, when Taoism was young, is represented by them in their paintings as having slender, tapering fingers, which terminate in very long nails.