

## THE DAFFODIL IN AUSTRALIA—SOME RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

HAROLD ALSTON

*Braemar, Diamond Creek, Victoria*

The quest of the perfect Daffodil still goes on in Australia. Despite the exigencies of the war period and the shortage of efficient labour, daffodil growers throughout the Commonwealth have kept on steadily producing new varieties. They have also managed to keep together and in good health many of the older sorts. Although the standard of show flowers has reached such heights of perfection that it would seem impossible to find something superior each season amongst the many thousand seedlings; new beauties appear year after year to compete with their once unsurpassed parents on the show bench. Raisers each season make new crosses striving after the ideal flower though what this ideal is none can say. Even the most perfect daffodil may have something lacking which the raiser thinks could be improved upon in a future generation. New varieties are coming forward each season and it is expected that the first of the war-time seedlings will be making their appearance on the show benches this spring.

Naturally imports of new varieties from overseas have been limited owing to import restrictions so that growers have had to work with well-tried and acclimatised varieties raised prior to 1939. The demise of several noted raisers has thinned the ranks of experienced growers but in most cases they have left a legacy of first-rate flowers for those who follow to work with; and the fact that the gaps are being filled with young and enthusiastic daffodil lovers who will profit from the work of those who have gone, predicts a safe future for the daffodil in Australia. Some idea of the enthusiasm of these younger growers may be gained from the fact that one prominent amateur in Tasmania has this season set out 22,000 two year old seedlings all from flowers hand-pollinated with a definite objective in view. Others, however, limit their sowings to a thousand or so depending on the seed harvest and space limitations.

So successful have some growers been that when exhibiting they place reliance on seedlings of their own raising rather than named varieties from overseas. This does not mean that overseas productions are decried, far be it, as had it not been for the productions of British and Dutch bulb growers they would not have had the material with which

to work. The high prices asked for new novelties, however, act as a deterrent to the amateur who is already satiated with the multiplicity of extravagantly priced varieties, and who although eager to try his hand at the production of new varieties from seed, is not in a position to expend a large amount on bulbs which may or may not produce the desired results under Antipodean conditions, and which take from two to three years to become acclimatised and settle down. Despite this handicap amateurs throughout the Commonwealth and the Dominion of New Zealand are producing varieties that can hold their own and in some cases surpass those of overseas raisers. In fact several have already received high commendation in Great Britain. After a careful survey of the magnificent specimens to be seen on the show benches to-day, the acme of the plant breeder's skill and of cultural practice, it seems that raisers frequently overlook those characteristics of the garden plant which are not essential for exhibition purposes. The old idea that the perfect show flower would be out of place in a garden has gone by the board, and it has been the aim of Australian raisers of recent years to produce flowers of size and substance without the loss of form and balance with tall strong stems, short necks and above all strong constitution. The flowers should have long stems, the petals be strong in texture and substance, the neck of the flower should not be long and willowy, but short to withstand heavy rains and strong winds. Stiff upright foliage is the best. Refinement and quality, although exhibition points must be preferred to coarseness and size, and the balance between the corona and perianth must be maintained. These are points just as important in a garden flower as one for exhibition purposes.

Daffodil growing in Victoria got its send-off in August 1892 when the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria held its first all bulb show in The Melbourne Athenaeum. This combined with the activities of the late Mr. Walter J. Smith of Riddell, Victoria and the publicity given to the flower by the celebrated actor Mr. George S. Titheridge stimulated public interest. In 1897 Mr. Alister Clark of "Glenara," Bulla, Victoria and Sir Heaton then Mr. Heaton Rhodes were members of a syndicate importing the latest productions of the great English raiser the Rev. Geo. H. Engleheart. Among their first introductions were *Albatross*, *Dante*, *Bennet Poe*, *Lucia* followed by *Flambeau*, *White Queen*, *Seneschal*, *Solfatarre*, *White Lady*, *Noble*, *Lady Mgt Boscawen* and *Great Warley*. In the meantime Mr. Titheridge had been amassing a collection of both species and garden hybrids and on his departure for England in 1898 sold his collection and the late Mr. Leonard Buckland of "Keyham," Camperdown and Mr. Alister Clark purchased the bulk of his bulbs. Rapid progress was made and on Mr. Titheridge's return ten years later, when he judged the flowers at the Melbourne show, he was astounded at the excellence of the seedlings on exhibition. Since then much water has flowed under the bridge and varieties which graced the show benches of those days would be today regarded as curiosities. Prominent growers at this period were the late Mr. Henry Boyce, the late Mr. James Lang of Harcourt and Mr. C. A. Nethercote of Hawthorn, the present treasurer of the Royal Horticultural Society of Victoria, and who although an octagenarian is still raising seedlings and



Hybrid pink-crowned *Narcissus*—(Left) **Kuranja**; raised by C. E. Radcliff, Hobart, Tasmania. (Right) **Pink a Dell**; raised by H. A. Brown, Mount Macedon, Victoria, Australia.

Plate 291

judging at shows. Mr. Boyce's memory is perpetuated in the Henry Boyce Memorial trophy awarded for the best twelve seedling daffodils not in commerce and raised by the exhibitor, which annually is keenly contested. For many years the Late Mr. Buckland was successful and many of his productions figure in the ancestry of modern seedlings. His first notable success was with a white-perianthed incomparabilis which he called "*Pink Un*," a seedling from *Mary Magdeleine de Graaff* which sported with him showing a tinge of pink in the corona. From *Pink Un* several notable seedlings have been produced. Of late years the late Mr. D. V. West of Casterton was the most successful raiser of seedlings and on his death was followed by his son-in-law, the late Mr. Hubert Fell. He produced many fine trumpet daffodils and later some splendid incomparabilis in which *Bernardino* figured prominently in their pedigrees.

Mr. Nethercote and his friend the late Mr. Scott Morrison of Wandin, Victoria started growing daffodils in 1890 and Mr. Nethercote has been a consistent importer of new varieties ever since and has raised many seedlings, among them many beautiful flowers, but apart from distributing some to his friends has not disposed of any commercially. A severe critic, but good judge he like many others is still searching for his ideal flower. He and Mr. Alister Clark must be considered the doyens of the *Narcissus* world in the State. Mr. Clark's achievements are remarkable inasmuch as he has consistently worked with his own productions, using pollen of overseas varieties only on rare occasions. His development of and interest in the production of flowers of the Leedsii type with pink or pink edged coronas has resulted in the raising of many flowers of decorative beauty, and stimulated the interest of other growers in the development of pinks. Mr. C. E. Radcliff of Hobart, Tasmania already has to his credit several magnificent pinks of which the following varieties have all received awards: *Rosario*, *Kuranja* (Plate 291) and *Roslyn*. Mr. O. Ronalds of Tarago, Gippsland, Victoria has also been successful in raising pinks and last year his variety *Mrs. O. Ronalds* (Plate 292) when shown for the first time was accorded acclaim by all who saw it. It is a really fine flower borne on a tall strong stem with a pure white perianth with well overlapping segments and a pale rosy corona right to its base. Both Mr. Radcliff and Mr. Ronalds are producing flowers of outstanding merit which could successfully compete with the best of overseas productions. Dr. Jackson of Dover, Tasmania has also many fine flowers to his credit and although also an octagenerian is still sowing seed and keeping an accurate record of his crosses and the dimensions of the flowers he raises. Mr. Bisdee of Tasmania is also another enthusiastic seedling raiser as is Mr. Raphael of Hobart, and as the Tasmanian climatic conditions are particularly suitable many still finer flowers may be looked for in the future from that State. Mr. J. R. Byfield is also an enthusiastic grower and a noted judge in Tasmania while the late Mr. J. Hinsby was for many years guide and friend to young breeders.

Prominent hybridists in Victoria are: Mr. C. O. Fairbairn of "*Ganongill*," Skipton near Ballarat who has raised some fine seedlings



Hybrid pink-crowned *Narcissus*—(Left) **Mrs. O. Ronalds**; *incomparabilis*, raised by Mr. O. Ronalds, Tarago, Grippsland, Australia. (Right) **Hugh Dettman**; *Leedsii* raised by Mr. Alister Clark, Bulia, Victoria.



especially some from *Carbineer*; Mr. S. Mann of Ballarat a consistent exhibitor and the winner of many prizes; Mr. J. Davey also of Ballarat; Mr. A. S. Overton of Wandin; Mr. Hugh Dettman of Kyneton; Mr. L. K. Daly of Gisborne; Mr. Hancock of Ferntree Gully; Mr. H. A. Brown of Mount Macedon who has on several occasions been successful in winning the Henry Boyce cup and many other prizes with his seedlings; Mr. Ernest Gibson of Essendon; Mr. O. Ronalds of Tarago; Mr. D. Gunner of Healesville; and Travers Morrison of Wandin. In New South Wales; Dr. Hugh Poate of Sydney and Mr. R. M. Twomey of Albany are also enthusiastic seedling raisers.

In Tasmania the leading growers are Messrs. C. E. Radcliff; S. J. Bisdee; J. R. Byfield; T. D. Raphael; Dr. W. Jackson; W. Jackson, Jr.; and Dr. Drake.

New Zealand growers and their work are not so well known to Australian growers but many fine flowers have been, and are being produced, by Mr. George Lewis of Christchurch, South Island; and Mr. J. T. Gray of Palmerston North; Mr. Alan Gibson of Marton; F. B. Burns of Timaru; and Dr. McKillop of Christchurch.

Regarding the flowers themselves, very few outstanding bi-color trumpets have appeared in recent years. Of these *Oliver* raised by Mr. O. Ronalds is a fine show flower with broad pure white perianth and nicely flanged light yellow trumpet. *Restford* raised by the late Mr. H. Fell is a really good large flower with broad overlapping creamy white perianth and a shapely yellow trumpet. *Mondo* is also another of Mr. Fell's bi-colors of fine quality and smoothness and solid texture. Of white trumpets *Bridal Day* (Ronalds), *Allan Millikan* (Fell) and several seedlings from *Bersheeba* and *Slemish* have been prominent on the show benches. There is quite a number of good yellow trumpets of which *Ismaris* and *Leslie Fell* (Fell), *Bonnington* and *Robert Montgomery* (Radcliff), *Golden Coin* and *Cloth of Gold* (Ronalds) and *Clio* (Morrison) are all fine exhibition and garden sorts. There is such a plethora of *Incomparabilis* or short-cupped varieties that it is impossible to mention more than a few of the very best. *Jean Hood* (Plate 293) (D. V. West) is a variety of great merit with white overlapping perianth and beautiful open, red cup with strong stiff stems; *Ivo Fell* (Plate 293) a large round flower of good substance with creamy-white perianth and intense orange-red cup right to the base is an outstanding flower. *Daisy Jean* (Ronalds) is also a good white-perianthed *Incomparabilis* somewhat similar to *Jean Hood* while *Skylark* by the same raiser is a yellow with broad smooth segments and a large cup of deep orange. *Rubra* (H. A. Brown) is a distinct flower with white perianth and an apricot crown, with an edging of deeper shade.

In the Leedsii section the most remarkable progress has been the appearance of so many pink flowers, that is white petals with pink or pink-edged cups. Mr. Alister Clark has been successful in producing many of these flowers the best of which are *Hugh Dettman* (Plate 292), *Madge Buckland* and *Mabel Taylor*. The greatest advance, however, has been made by Mr. Radcliff of Hobart, Tasmania and his variety *Pink of Dawn* a bi-color trumpet with bluish pink trumpet has been



Hybrid Incorporabilis *Narcissus*—**Jean Hood**; raised by the late D. V. West, Casterton, Victoria, Australia; (Inset at lower left) **Ivo Fell**; raised by West & Fell, Casterton.

the grandparent of some outstanding flowers of which *Rosario*, *Kuranja* (Plate 293), *Roslyn* and *Roselip* have aroused admiration whenever shown. *Pink a Dell* (Plate 291) raised by Mr. H. A. Brown of Mount Macedon, Victoria is also a most decorative flower but on first opening the cup is yellow but quickly turns to pink. Last season Mr. Ronalds of Tarago, Gippsland showed for the first time his *Mrs. O. Ronalds* (Plate 292) a really fine show flower with broad overlapping perianth and cap of rosy pink right to the base and a slightly deeper edge. Borne on a strong stiff stem this promises to be an outstanding pink. Several good Barriis have made their appearance of which the best is probably *Metaphor* raised by Mr. Alister Clark, while Mr. S. Mann of Ballarat reports a fine flower the result of crossing *Flamenco* and *Rosslare*. Mr. H. A. Brown also has some fine tall flowers of this type but as yet most are under number. There are several nice *N. triandrus* hybrids but little or no work has been done, or is being done, with the Poeticus section which seems a great pity as these charming flowers prolong the season well into early summer. While the foregoing notes do not do sufficient justice to the work of Australian and Dominion growers they are sufficient to show that the cult of the Daffodil is firmly established and its prospects for the future extremely bright.