

A HANDBOOK OF NARCISSUS

by

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XVII

POETICUS

THE FIRST use of the name poeticus was by Lobel, as *N. poeticus mediocroceus purpureus*, in *Stirpium Adversaria Nova* in 1570. Tabernaemontanus also used it in his *Kreuterbuch* in 1588. Linnæus gave it botanical authority by using it in *Species Plantarum*, defining it as, spathe one-flowered, limb of corona rotate very short. In the Second Edition he added scariosa and crenulate.¹ The character of one flower to a spathe he also applied to Pseudo-Narcissus, Bulbocodium and serotinus, to distinguish them from Jonquilla and Tazetta, with heads of many flowers.

He made the shape of the corona the distinguishing character in the four species with one-flowered scapes. In poeticus it must be rotate, that is wheel-shaped, circular and flat, in contrast with campanulate, bell-shaped, in Pseudo-Narcissus; turbinate, cone-shaped, in Bulbocodium; and very short and six-cleft in serotinus.

It is not clear whether Linnæus knew that the corona varied in its degree of flatness in certain forms of poeticus. Mr. Pugsley, after careful examination, believes that the specimen in the Linnean herbarium had in life a cup-shaped corona and therefore does not agree with Linnæus's definition 'rotate', and he thinks some form with a cup-shaped corona must be considered as the type.

This depends on what we consider was in Linnæus's mind when he used the term rotate. In the *Philo-*

¹ *Narcissus spatha uniflora, nectarii limbo rotato brevissimo—scarioso crenulato.*

sophia, published in 1770, he explained the terms he used in botanical descriptions. On p. 52 he defines *rotatus* as *planus*, *nulli tubo impositus*, and *Hypocrateriformis* as *planus*, *tubo impositus*, and for an example of this he refers to his Fig. 142, which is apparently the flower of a Cowslip, judging by the round spots at the throat. Fig. 145 on the same page represents '*Nectarium campanulatum in Narcisso*' and consists of a perianth and corona proportioned as in Jonquilla or Tazetta, that is with a shallow cup. Thus it seems probable that any cup less shallow than in these would be regarded by Linnæus as *rotate*, and that he used it in a wide sense to include slightly concave corollas. Further evidence is found in *Species Plantarum*, where he distinguishes the Oxlip, *Primula elatior*, by its *plane* flower from the Cowslip with a *concave* flower. Oxlip flowers, however, are not perfectly flat, but slightly concave, though generally described in Latin as '*planus*'. Linnæus may have been contented, as in the case of his *N. minor*, that a variable species should be represented in his Herbarium by a specimen showing some degree of variation from his description.

The corona of *N. poeticus* dries badly, shrinking and appearing much flatter when dry than when fresh. The two flowers in the Linnean herbarium are no exception, and the best that Mr. Pugsley can say of their coronas is that they are 'apparently cup-shaped' and 'though its precise characters may be indeterminable the specimen certainly recalls the *N. patellaris* of Salisbury and the plant figured in *English Botany*'.

It seems to be as impossible to recognise a living representative of the Linnean specimen as to discover the identity of the Man in the Iron Mask.

Those who wish to go deeply into the botanical history of *N. poeticus* should study Mr. H. W. Pugsley's

exhaustive paper, '*Narcissus poeticus and its Allies*', in the *Journal of Botany*, 1915.

He considers there are nine species, and arranges these in two series, of which the following is an abridged summary:

I. *Poetici*. Stamens unequal, perianth segments usually shortly narrowed and imbricate below.

* Corona flat:

1. *N. poeticus*

** Corona more or less cupular:

2. *verbanensis*, dwarf and small-flowered

3. *hellenicus*, plant tall

4. *recurvus*, The Pheasant's Eye, large-flowered

5. *majalis*, corona with a white zone below red margin.

II. *Radiiflori*. Stamens subequal, perianth segments usually narrowed below.

* Corona small, cupular:

6. *radiiflorus*, corona $2\frac{1}{2}$ mm. deep, 8 broad

7. *stellaris*, corona 2 mm. deep, 10 broad

** Corona flat or nearly so when mature:

8. *poetarum*, corona wholly red

9. *exertus*, corona flat and discoid.

This arrangement is also justified by slight variations in the shape of the fruits.

For garden purposes, wild or reputedly wild forms can be distinguished as *early flowering*, of which *ornatus* (Pugsley's *N. exertus* var. β , *ornatus*) is the most familiar garden plant, and *late*, as *recurvus*, the Pheasant's Eye. Or again by the form of the perianth segments, whether overlapping to form round flowers or with narrowed claws resulting in starry flowers. These last are interesting for botanical collections rather than for garden value.

As a wild plant *poeticus* has a wide range in montane

pastures in France, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Dalmatia and the Balkans, reaching as far as Montenegro and Greece; it is subspontaneous in England, Scandinavia, Denmark, Germany and Belgium; and it is not surprising that it should be so variable. It is generally so abundant where it occurs that miles of mountain-sides are whitened by the masses of its blossoms. I have met with it in the Pyrenees, Le Lautaret and Lanslebourg, and found the colonies very variable, especially at Le Lautaret, where some flowers were starry as a windmill and many so well formed that had they appeared in a seed bed they would be worth naming. Someone leaving that neighbourhood on the Sunday before a R.H.S. Show in early July might easily select a dozen distinct forms of newly opened blooms and stage them for the show on the Tuesday.

It is likely that the old forms known as garden plants to Gerard, Parkinson, Salisbury and Haworth were clones and the vegetative increase of distinct variations selected among colonies of wild ones. The chance of repeating such selections is clearly shown by a photograph reproduced in *The Garden* for March 12th, 1904, in which starry flowers can be seen among others with widely overlapping perianth segments.

Herbert's var. *verbanensis* is a microform found in Italy, Savoy and the Mont Cenis country, but is frail and uncertain in gardens.

Salisbury's *radiiflorus* has a more eastern range; according to M. Correvon it is the prevailing form in the pastures of Château d'Œx above Aigle in the Canton of Vaud. It is well shown in a photograph in *The Garden* for January 2nd, 1904. Curtis's figure, t. 193 in the *Botanical Magazine*, as *N. angustifolius*, and Fig. 3 in the frontispiece of Pugsley's paper, represent it.

Narcissus ornatus of gardens is a newcomer. It is

appeared as a cut flower sent to Covent Garden from Paris; Mr. James Walker went to Paris, learnt where it was grown and introduced it to England. It is not the *N. ornatus* of Haworth, so really has no right to the name it bears.

Its early-flowering habit makes it easy to force, and it is a free grower in beds or grass in the open. Though now outclassed in form, its rounded perianth segments and brightly ringed cup are not to be despised in their early season.

Mr. Pugsley makes it a variety of *exertus*, a name used by Haworth in his *Revisio* in 1819 for a variety of his *majalis*. Its principal feature is found in the anthers, all six of which are prominent in the throat of the corona. It may be the form represented by Redouté's drawing of *N. poeticus*, t. 160, in vol. iii. of *Les Liliacées*.

N. hellenicus is a new specific name bestowed by Mr. Pugsley on the plant known for many years as *N. poeticus* *verus* of Linnaeus. He recognises it as the form represented by herbarium specimens at Kew and the British Museum, collected by Haussknecht in Greece.

It is so distinct in its great height and comparatively small but beautifully rounded flowers that it looks like a form from an outlying locality far away from the main distribution. It flowers late and the charm of its form tends to disappear after the first day, as the perianth reflexes more than is desirable. Some hybrid varieties raised from it have had signal successes as show flowers. 'Crimson Braid' and 'Dinkie' owe their charm to it.

The variety *poetarum* has contributed greatly to the beauty and history of present-day 'red cups', as it has been the source of all their intense colour. It has a poor perianth, very gappy between the segments, and its value is centred in its early flowering and

corona stained throughout with deep red. It has never been traced to a wild source, and it is equally ridiculous to select it as the Narcissus of Ovid and other poets as to call it 'Saffron-cupped' as Haworth has done.

This useful flower has been treated ungratefully by gardeners after they had got what they wanted from it, for it has almost disappeared from gardens and there is no good portrait of it.

N. poeticus recurvus, the Pheasant's Eye, or Sweet Nancy of some, like the last is not known as a wild plant. It is so robust, late-flowering and beautiful that if its discoverer were known, whether he found it wild on a hillside or in his seed beds, he would deserve a monument in Kew Gardens. *Recurvus* is figured by Sweet in *Brit. Fl. Gard.*, Series II., t. 188. With the sparkling whiteness of its solid, reflexing segments and the brilliant colouring of its greenish-yellow cup ringed with crimson it comes as a grand finale to the end of the Daffodil season.

Its scent is almost too powerful if many blooms are brought into any but a very large room. There is a great deal of nutmeg odour about it that is delightful in the open air, but on a dinner table is disastrous to the palate, causing all delicate flavours to partake of nutmeg. A similar result, but with a different type of savour, comes from bunches of Almond, *Azalea mollis* or Sweet Peas when too close to dinner plate and wineglass.

A form with a spathe unlike that of any other Narcissus is the latest addition to the wild forms of poeticus. It is described by M. Beauverd in *Bull. Soc. Bot. Genève*, Series II., xxiii., p. 549 (1931), as *N. poeticus* var. *physaloides*. The exaggerated inflation of the spathe causes it to resemble the enlarged calyx of *Physalis*, the Winter Cherry, and suggested the name. After the flower has emerged the spathe



SEA-GREEN

MUCH AFRAID

remains dilated below and bears two tongue-shaped lobes at its summit.

Garden-raised varieties of *N. poeticus* are so numerous that it has become a hard task to provide fresh names of poets or styles of poetry for the newcomers.

Mr. Engleheart has enriched gardens with many lovely flowers with charming names. His 'Horace' was one of the first, and I have heard him say that he would not have believed a prophet who told him that the small bed of this variety, which at one time contained the whole stock, would in so short a time have provided the old and new worlds with millions of bulbs of this popular flower. Its parents were *ornatus* and *poetarum*, and it inherited good features from both, especially earliness, a wide perianth and a brilliantly edged cup.

These garden varieties can be roughly divided into two sets, those with the corona yellow, edged with a narrow red ring, and those with the corona suffused with orange, deepening towards the edge to vermilion or crimson. There are, however, many intermediate forms.

The red-ringed varieties are the most numerous, and some of the most distinct were raised by Mr. Engleheart. Among his best are 'Huon', 'Wide Wing', 'Papyrus', 'Opera' and 'Laureate', and also the two, 'Sea Green' and 'Much Afraid', illustrated on the plate facing page 184. Both of these have remarkably flat cups with such distinct crimson rings that they produce a wide-eyed, startled expression in the flower.

'Snow King' (Dawson) is a good early form, very useful for cutting over a long period if some are grown at the foot of a south wall and others in open positions.

'Sarchedon' and 'Sonata', two Engleheart seed-

lings, have very large perianth segments. The first is excellent for forcing and a good, all-round garden plant.

'Marseillaise' (Chapman) is a small, round, very bright flower, its flat orange cup neatly edged with crimson. 'Dactyl' and 'Hexameter' are other beautiful varieties well named. Others as good, but lacking the titular connection with poetry, are 'Raeburn', 'Ringdove', 'Dulcimer', 'Coronation' and 'Pinkie'.

The red cups show more strongly the influence of the variety poetarum.

'Acme', 'Ace of Diamonds' and 'Steadfast' are good examples, and the new, and therefore costly, 'Smyrna' gained an Award of Merit in 1933 and is rightly worthy of it. 'Ditty' (Chapman) is a borderline flower with an orange eye rimmed with red.

A few forms exist, and I hope more will come, in which the red ring has been softened down to a light coral colour that is very pleasing.

'Mallard', raised by Mr. A. M. Wilson, is a lovely, small flower, its ring more orange than red. 'Estèrelle', from the same raiser, has a very thin, picotee-like edge.

'Tiddlywinks', from Mr. P. D. Williams, is one of the neatest, roundest flowers ever seen, and has a flat lemon-yellow cup edged with light coral. It is small enough to wear in a buttonhole if it were not too beautiful for such cruel treatment.

N. poeticus has produced double forms from early times. The first of these would probably be that described and figured by Clusius in the *Historia*, which had a second whorl of six perianth segments springing from the inside of the unbroken, red-edged corona.

He grew another with as many as twenty segments, heard of one with sixty-four, and figured and described one much like the double form of the present day known as the Gardenia-Flowered Narcissus. C. de Pas has a beautifully drawn figure of a form with nine-



SARCHEDON

teen perianth segments, which he says show traces of yellow among the whiteness and stamens in the centre.

Gerard mentions no double poeticus, but Johnson added the two figures from Clusius and extracts from his description. Parkinson figures one form showing no coronal portions, and describes two others. The first he seems to have grown, as he found that when crowded and starved it produced flowers 'very little double and almost single', but if he set his roots single the flowers would be goodly and double. The other two are described in a manner so reminiscent of Clusius and C. de Pas that they may well be paraphrases and afford no evidence of direct knowledge.

N. poeticus plenus, the *Gardenia Narcissus* and *N. albus plenus odoratus* of catalogues, is a wonderfully good plant where it grows well, and unfortunately that is by no means everywhere. Deep and rich soil in orchards and an equable climate help it to thrive, but when it meets with a check from changes of temperature, cold nights or hot and dry days during its growing season, the buds frequently become blind and the flowers do not develop inside the inflated bags of the spathes.

In some western districts it is a valuable market plant, flowering in the latter part of May when all others are over, and is so white that it is a most useful florist's flower for wreaths and church vases.

Several new varieties have been raised lately. The best is Mr. Engleheart's 'White Rose', which received a F.C.C. in 1933 and is figured facing p. 128 in *The Daffodil Year Book* of that year, unfortunately from an old and rather transparent specimen; a smaller figure from better specimens is in Mr. Calvert's *Daffodil Growing*, Pl. 202.

It resulted from the self-pollination of a poeticus flower which Mr. Engleheart noticed had one petaloid anther. The seedlings produced several doubles, and

'White Rose' is the best. 'Carnation', its sister, is not so purely white, but its slightly sulphur flowers are as fully double and as regularly formed as those of a Border Carnation.

'Daphne' has a more exciting history. It appeared suddenly about 1908 in a large batch of poeticus ornatus forced for market by Mr. F. Culpin of Spalding. It was not noticed until the flowers had been cut and were being bunched, so it was impossible to mark the bulb that season. Mr. Culpin, realising the value of a double form of such an early-flowering variety, had the whole of this forced stock planted in the field, and after two years he was rewarded by the reappearance of the precious novelty. A large stock of over 1,400 bulbs was worked up and passed into the hands of Mr. George Monro for £1,000, and it was named after his daughter. It is a beautifully formed flower, not too double and with large overlapping segments, which create a fascinating play of light and shade that I long to paint. However, since it received the F.C.C. at the Narcissus Committee in 1924 I have not again set eyes upon it. It is well shown in a photograph reproduced in *The Gardeners' Chronicle* for May 10th, 1924.



TIDDLYWINKS

ESTERELLE