

Development of the Narcissus During the 19th Century—A Review

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Every item dealing with the evolution of the modern daffodil is a story of absorbing interest, and even a brief and sketchy account of those pioneers who originated and disseminated the new race of garden flowers may be of interest, at this time, when a somewhat tardy realization of their value is being experienced by American gardeners.

Probably no flower has ever undergone such radical changes in developments of form and color over so comparatively short a period, as has been accomplished in the case of the daffodil. Always a subject of deep interest to botanists, as well as a favorite garden flower, much attention has been paid to it in botanical literature since the early date of 1629, when Parkinson gave the first detailed and illustrated list of ninety varieties in his *Paradisus in Sole Terrestris*.

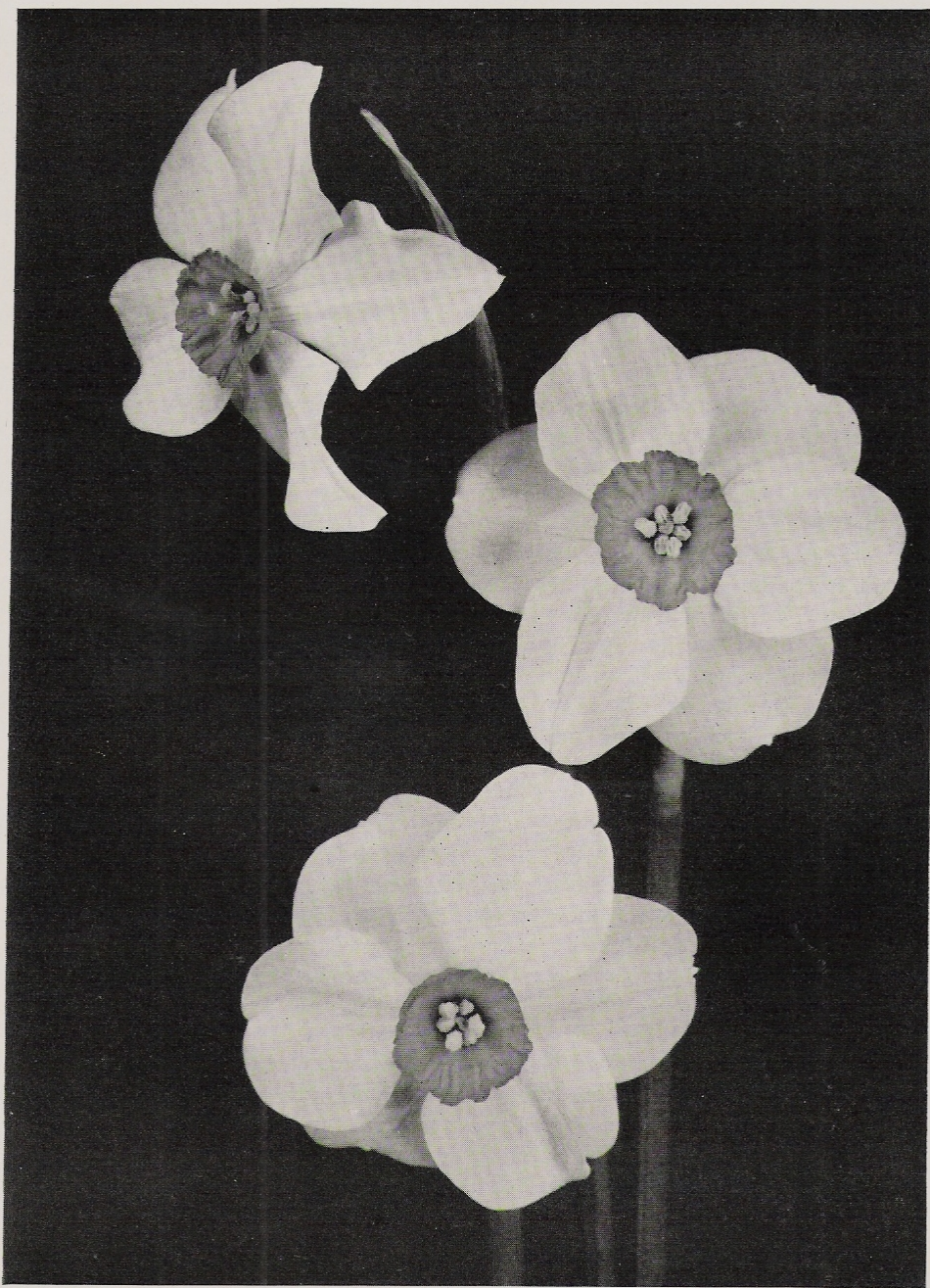
Parkinson's classification was accepted and generally followed by succeeding botanists for two hundred years, and up to the first half of the 19th century it was still the universal belief that all the known forms then in use (increased from the 90 of Parkinson to about 148) were species—not hybrids.

All the contributions of notable botanists followed this same line; the fine monograph of Salisbury, the writings of Robert Sweet, John Lindley, Joseph Sabine, and above all the great Narcissus monograph of Adrian Anthony Haworth accepted this form of classification, and it was only by the boldness of a botanist advanced beyond his time that discoveries were made that revolutionized the breeding of Daffodils and opened up the road which has led to the flower that we have today.

It was just one hundred years ago, in 1836, that an English clergyman, the Honorable William Herbert (later Dean of Manchester) published a great work on the Amaryllis family, Amaryllidaceae. In this he included an exhaustive treatise on narcissi, describing and classifying the one hundred and fifty varieties then in cultivation in England. From Herbert's long and close study of the daffodil he had become convinced that botanists up to that time were wrong in considering the varieties then known, as species, and that many were merely natural hybrids.

He was an advanced thinker on natural history and zoological subjects, and shared with Darwin views which at the time were considered nothing short of heretical, especially by the clergy and even by contemporaneous botanists. But in spite of bitter criticism, he persisted in his conviction, and to prove his theories, began to make crosses between the Trumpet, *Incomparabilis* and *Poeticus* sections then in existence.

The success of his experiments was probably far beyond even his expectations, for they established conclusively and immediately his revolutionary theories; and moreover they opened up the hitherto unsuspected field of vast possibilities to the hybridist, which has resulted in the superlatively beautiful and diversified forms of modern times.



Lilian A. Guernsey

Narcissus, Cossack and Ruby

Dean Herbert produced many seedlings from these new crosses, but unfortunately, due to neglect or distribution, none have survived. However, a collection of six water color drawings which was published in the Botanical Register for 1843 gives sufficient evidence of the value of his discoveries. These pictures show the beauty of his hybridizations and furthermore, their close resemblance to later forms developed by other hybridists prove the correctness of his theories.

Next in the pioneer line came a younger contemporary of Herbert's, whose studies and discoveries fully bore out the theories of the older man. Edward Leeds, born in Lancashire in 1802 (died 1870) spent a long life working in his leisure hours in improving the existing varieties of narcissi, and it is to his deep interest in developing white forms that we are indebted for the discoveries as to parentage in the development of the class that today bears his name. In 1850-1 six of his new seedlings were described in Moore & Ayre's Gardeners' Magazine of Botany, one Leedsii, three Incomparabilis, one yellow trumpet called Major Superbus, and a fine bi-color trumpet, Bi-color Grandis. Again, all save the last has disappeared.

Several years before his death Leeds gave up his work on account of ill health, and decided to sell his collection of 169 varieties of seedlings. Several narcissus enthusiasts were persuaded by Peter Barr, founder of the great horticultural firm of Barr & Sons, to form a syndicate for the purchase of this unique collection of over 24,000 bulbs, and for the sum of £100 it was acquired by these public spirited horticulturists. Two tenths went to Peter Van Velsen of Overveen, Holland, one tenth each to three English amateur growers, and the major part or one-half was taken by Barr himself. From this collection came the many descendants of Leeds' seedlings produced later by the sons of Peter Barr.

In 1807 was born William Backhouse, a banker by profession, a daffodil enthusiast and hybridist on the side; not until he was nearly fifty years old, thirteen years before his death, did he start making the crosses which were to perpetuate his name in the annals of narcissus history. His first seedlings to be produced and shown were Emperor and Empress, followed later by Weardale Perfection and many others, among them Barrii conspicuus. The first two created an enormous sensation and at once achieved a popularity undiminished even today, with the competition of the newer forms.

It is interesting to read that his hybridizing activities occupied only a very few minutes in early morning, before catching a train for his business; while the flowers he used were grown in pots, and kept in a small glass porch adjacent to his study.

Backhouse worked for variations in color, as well as improvement in size, as may be seen in his highly colored varieties of Burbidgei, Barrii and Incomparabilis which are still grown today.

William Horsfield, another early hybridist, was a handloom weaver near Manchester, and though the record of only one daffodil is left as his achievement, that one stands out among the famous early discoveries. Bi-color Horsfieldii (named in 1851) was a great achievement, and took a leading place among the most popular and extensively grown varieties.

Following these pioneers, and stimulated by the first Daffodil Conference

of the R. H. S. in 1884, several notable narcissus enthusiasts turned their attention to hybridizing, and from then till the end of the 19th century and the first part of the present, there were several whose successes made history in daffodil raising. Among them was the Rev. George Philip Haydon (born 1846, died 1913), Vicar of Hatfield, in Yorkshire, who commenced making his crosses in 1885. He produced many handsome trumpets, and was particularly interested in trying to establish the parentage of some of the natural hybrids.

Barr & Sons have been extensive hybridizers almost from the beginning, and have brought out countless successful subjects, valuable for the amateur, for the hybridizer and for commercial growing. Among their greatest triumphs was the development of the first large pure white trumpet daffodil, Peter Barr, which still holds its own among later introductions.

Mrs. Robert Ormston Backhouse, the daughter-in-law of William Backhouse, began her hybridizing in 1888, and her successes in the color range were almost at once phenomenal. She has produced flowers of such widely differing character as Ladybird, the small brilliantly colored and wholly charming *Incomparabilis*, and Lord Kitchener, the giant Leedsii; and to her belongs the honor of developing in 1905 the first bi-color trumpet having a shell pink cup. This was later named for her, Mrs. R. O. Backhouse, by the R. H. S. Narcissus Committee, and given an award of merit. Her husband worked in conjunction with her and since her death in 1921 has continued her garden.

The greatest of this group, and indeed of succeeding groups, for he is still living, is the Rev. George Herbert Engleheart. To him we owe such fine garden varieties as Sea Gull, Oriflamme, Horace, Albatross, White Queen, Beacon, Laureate, Will Scarlett, etc. And few, even among latest triumphs, can outclass the giant Leedsii Tenedos, or the White Trumpet Beersheba. White Rose, a pure white double daffodil is looked upon by many as his finest achievement.

The late Mr. P. D. Williams very truly said that "Engleheart developed the daffodil to the high standard that exists today."

In 1884, the small group of men interested in the new varieties approached the Royal Horticultural Society with the request that the Society assume the direction of a revision of the then existing classification. A conference was held in April of that year, attended by all those interested, including E. H. Krelage, a Dutch grower whose name, with those of de Graaff and Van Waveren, is closely associated with the new introductions. This resulted in the first descriptive classified list of 361 hybrids, published in the *Florist and Pomologist* of June-August, 1884.

From 1884 to 1900 we have a list of fourteen English daffodil enthusiasts who commenced hybridizing, and during this period were produced many subjects which time has shown to be of lasting quality and merit.

W. F. M. Copeland of Southampton raised the lovely Mary Copeland, John Philip Worsley gave us Bernardino, John Kendall, a solicitor, produced King Alfred.

Two men who today are foremost among daffodil hybridizers, Percival D. Williams of St. Keverne, Cornwall (died Nov., 1935) and The Brodie

of Brodie of Brodie Castle, Forres, began their hybridizing in 1895 and 1898 respectively, and have steadily raised the standards over these forty odd years. Guy L. Wilson comes immediately after in importance.

Names that cannot be omitted, though lack of space forbids more than a mere mention are: the Rev. S. Eugene Bourne, J. Duncan Pearson, Alexander M. Wilson, Henry Backhouse, W. B. Cranfield, Charles Smith, Thomas Batson, Sir Charles Cave, E. M. Crosfield, Charles Dawson and W. A. Watts. All of these contributed materially to the advancement of the modern daffodil.

Our story of the birth of the modern daffodil, brief as it must be of necessity, is incomplete without mentioning at least a few of those men of vision and devoted interest who could foresee the possibilities held out in the new born race of hybrids, who gave their support in its infancy, and through whose writings and later co-operation with the Royal Horticultural Society the modern forms came into their own. Among the most important of these is Peter Barr. Barr began his business life with the firm of Barr & Sugden, which was founded in 1863, and in 1883 he founded its successor, the present firm of Messrs. Barr & Sons.

He was an ardent horticulturalist and plant lover, and his contributions to the classifying of various plant families have been widespread and valuable. But we are chiefly concerned with the part he played in the drama of the daffodil.

As before noted, in 1874 Barr acquired half of the hybrid seedlings produced by Edward Leeds, amounting to about 13,000 bulbs, of 169 distinct sorts. Shortly after, he purchased the entire collection of seedlings left by William Backhouse, containing 192 varieties, making a collection of 361 new and unnamed daffodils. Later he added a complete collection of all the old forms known to amateur horticulturists since Parkinson's day, developed by the Rev. John Gudgeon Nelson, so that the firm of Barr & Sons owned the most extensive collection of Narcissi, old and new, in the horticultural world of that period.

By this time the stock of these bulbs had increased and outgrown the limits of Barr's nurseries, so he sent a portion of his collection to S. A. de Graaff, at Leiden, Holland, to be grown for him, and it was from this stock that many notable Dutch seedlings were raised. Madame de Graaff, one of the best, was produced in 1887.

Peter Barr's long life of eighty-five years was one of enthusiasm and of action, and his contributions to horticulture were of paramount value. The stories of his travels in search of wild daffodils, which he later succeeded in introducing to English gardens, are full of romantic, as well as horticultural interest.

Among Barr's contemporaries were many whose contribution to the cause of the daffodil was made along other lines than the actual hybridizing. Famous botanists and horticulturalists gave their support to furthering the development of the new hybrids, to classifying them, to writing of them and to promoting them through the Royal Horticultural Society.

John Gilbert Baker, keeper of the Herbarium at Kew, assisted Barr in making a classification of the new forms which, though artificial botanically, made it convenient for reference and classifying new seedlings.

F. W. Burbidge, curator of Trinity College Botanical Garden, Dublin, author of the *Narcissus, its History and Culture* (published in 1875) rendered valuable assistance through his ardent love of the daffodil, and his researches into its life history.

The Rev. Henry Nicholson Ellacombe was a notable daffodil enthusiast and collector. The Rev. C. Wolley-Dod is a collector and writer. Miss Willmott gave to the daffodil a large part of her great enthusiasm for gardening subjects. The Rev. John Jacob, Vicar of Whitewell, not only wrote, but was conspicuous in promotional activities for daffodil advancement.

The turn of the century seemed to suddenly inaugurate a new era, and the stimulation given by the Royal Horticultural Society through the Daffodil Committee, with its conferences and publications, put the hybrids on a definite footing as a new race of flowers whose existence completely upset all past traditions of its family.

New standards, new theories, and new great hybridists are giving us new flowers whose forms and colors surpass probably even the wildest expectations of those pioneer adventurers of one hundred years ago; and while time is needed to definitely prove the lasting qualities of more recent introduction, the sturdiness shown by countless varieties over the past fifty years gives fair promise that the new race has come to stay.