CALIFORNIA the NEW LAND of the BULB

Now It Is Planting Time Among the Enthusiasts of the Tulip and Daffodil

By Tyndale Bishop

TO write of spring flowers at the end of the summer may seem to most readers somewhat out of season. Yet the summer's end is just the time to take thought of the spring garden and now is the time that the successful amateur is scanning his catalogues, making his selections and preparing the ground to receive not later than November the little brown bulbs which in the springtime are to yield their harvest of gorgeous and delicate bloom.

During the last few years a small unorganized band of enthusiasts have been showing that north of Tehachapi, Cal., is pre-eminently the land of the bulb. From year to year the number of our enthusiasts has increased and each season sees a larger number of bulbs planted. Yet the bulb fad has not spread here as it has over the rest of the civilized world. And even among those of us who are interested there has not been the specializing and seeking after novelties which has characterized the growth of the fad elsewhere.

THE $150 DAFFODIL, THE PETER BARR

GROUP OF NARCISSUS EMPEROR

When the London auction rooms are crowded with purchasers eagerly contesting for rare specimens, when a single bulb of a narcissus readily fetches £80 and a single tulip bulb brings $75, it would almost seem as if a revival of the seventeenth century craze were at hand. Nor is it surprising, for no other hobby takes such a hold on one. We have all gone through stamp and autograph collecting. Old brasses, ceramics and brocades have their limitations. The rich alone can indulge in prints and rare books. These, as well as other fads, after awhile fall; but once a bulb culturist always one. It entices alike both rich and poor—the man who must content himself with bulbs at a few dollars a thousand and he who can fill his garden with $100 specimens. No other hobby is so beautiful and none other so devoid of selfishness. Books, prints, fabrics all make their devotees self-centered. The satisfaction of exclusive possession—the showing of something that excites just a spark of envy in the man shown. Does this not constitute the sine quo non? How different with bulbs. Taking his pleasure in painting scape with masses of varied and delicate color the bulb enthusiast not only gets joy for himself, but gives it to all who may pass the way of his garden. Hence it is no wonder that the fad grows and only the more wonder that it does not grow more rapidly in California.

Recent years have brought into cultivation many new forms. This is particularly true of the tulip. Many of the present day forms would scarcely be known to the gardener of the seventeenth century. Then those greatest prized were the short stemmed, early blooming sorts. These we still have, and wonderfully beautiful they are with their unending range of colors. But modern fashion decrees long stems.

The whole gesneriana tribe takes its name from **Konrad Gesner**, a popular botanist of the sixteenth century. He first saw the flower in 1559 and his description and pictures played a large part in bringing it into popularity. It is a mistake, however, to suppose that Gesner introduced the flower into Europe. That honor belongs to the elegant savant and diplomat Angier Ghislau de Bushecq, who in 1554, while Austrian ambassador at the court of Solyman the **Magnificent**, obtained some seed from a garden in Constantinople. The flower must have been prized by the Turk, for Bushecq states that he had to pay dearly for them. On his return the seeds obtained by him were planted in Vienna, where five years later the first tulip bloomed in Christian Europe. At that time interest in gardening was just awakening and the new and wonderful flowers, naturally much sought after, rapidly became well disseminated. When and how they first got into Holland we do not know. Old writers say that the first shipment made was taken by the merchant to whom they were sent for onions and as such cooked and eaten by him. Be this as it may, the enterprising Dutch gardeners were soon engaged in their culture and it only needed the stimulus given by the introduction of new varieties by the herbalist Clausius to make the flower a favorite in Holland and change the fad into a craze. So intense had the fad become that many of the Clausius most valued varieties were stolen by admirers of the flower, unwilling or unable to pay the price asked by him, and it is said that the stolen bulbs are the ancestors of most of the garden tulips now in existence. Prices continued to advance by leaps and bounds. It was no uncommon thing for the price of a bulb to rule between 2,500 and 4,600 florins. Exchanges were established like the stock and bond exchange of our modern commercial life and on such boards tradings were had that would put to blush the wildest May wheat flurries in the Chicago pit. From 1634 the wildest speculation prevailed until high water mark was reached when an individual specimen of the variety of semper Augustus sold for 13,000 florins (about $5,200). Ownership of single bulbs were divided into shares, which shares found ready sale at high prices. Transactions were often had without the existence of any bulb at all. By 1637 speculation had reached such alarming proportions that the government was forced to interfere, but this was not until many of the greatest families had been impoverished and the evil effects of the speculation had been felt through all Europe.

Perhaps the most potent factor in the California bulb world is Carl Purdy of Ukiah. For years Mr. Purdy has been a collector of California bulbs. Like a true prophet he is more honored abroad than in his own country. His marvelous collection of brodiaa and Mariposa or butterfly tulips is far better known in Europe than it is in California. From his collections not only the great botanists' gardens of Europe but the gardens of royalty are supplied with these charming and delicate flowers. But not being satisfied with gathering around him and naturalizing the entire wild bulb flora of the Pacific slope, he has also engaged extensively and successfully in the cultivation of Dutch bulbs. And it is said by those who have visited both places that on his Mendocino flower farm Mr. Purdy gets better flowers than the Dutch growers get from the same stock grown in Holland.

This spring a well known Polk street florist exhibited for Mr. Purdy a wonderful novelty in the form of a perfect pink tulip of the Gesneriana type, having larger flowers and longer stems than any tulip before shown in California. Its origin is as yet a secret, and we are not told whether the flower is a seedling of Purdy's or some rare importation. We are assured that quite a stock is on hand and that next year will see a plentiful supply. It is certain to prove a valuable acquisition to both florist and home growers.

While Purdy is the leading spirit among our bulbomaniacs he is by no means unsupported. Dr. Harry Tevis' efforts along this line are well known and among the things most missed since the fire is the garden of the old Tevis home on the corner of Taylor and Jackson streets, and which in the spring was a veritable sea of color—tulips and narcissi. Not so well known, because so much more remote, is the place of Walter Bliss on the shores of Lake Tahoe. In its high altitude spring and the flowers come late, but it takes no amount of imagination to picture the charm of the chromatic scheme carried down to the limpid water's edge.

The most remarkable of all our California collections is one hidden away in the Santa Cruz mountains. It is that of a poor attorney's clerk—a lover of nature and of outdoor life. By force of circumstances he was obliged to earn his living in the musty atmosphere of a dingy law office. This young man, by dint of close economy, managed to secure a place in the woods as a haven to which to flee at the week's end. The place once secured, the garden was the next consideration. Without knowledge of garden subjects, but bent on covering the largest space possible, he purchased a large stock of cheap mixed tulips. Where they came from the dealer could himself scarcely tell. They were despised refuse without pedigree. But the young man planted in full faith. In the rich leaf mold the plants grew vigorously. When the flowering time came lo and behold! The chance purchase gave blossoms of the rarest beauty and value.

Such fortune is not the lot of all, nor is it advisable to follow the example. Good results are not apt to be had from bargain counter lots and the beginner should make certain that his stock, no matter how inexpensive, is sound and true to name. For this reason it is better to avoid the mail order houses and to buy directly of a local dealer where you can examine the goods and by a personal inspection make certain that the bulbs are sound and free from disease.

The number of good varieties are legion and there would not be space in this article to give the names of the one hundredth part of them. All that can be done is to give a fairly representative list. The narcissus being the earliest to bloom claims attention first. Good results can be expected if any of the following are chosen: In the mayne caronati group (large crowned or trumpet daffodils).

Golden spur, which has a large trumpet, and in color is a deep self-yellow.

Emperor, which has a perianth of deep primrose and trumpet of deep yellow. It has a very large flower and is perhaps the best for cutting.

Trumpet major is not so fine as the above, but recommended for its earliness and persistency of bloom.

The best bicolor daffodils are: Empress, with large flowers, perianth white and of great substance, trumpet rich yellow. A very beautiful thing.

Princips, a large, showy flower, with perianth sulphur white and trumpet yellow.

In the incomparabilis group, the incomparabilities and the Sir Nathan should be planted in quantities. The last named is a giant, chalice cupped variety, with handsome bold flowers. Its perianth a rich sulphur, and its cup a yellow slightly tinged with orange.

In a section by itself and one not to be neglected is the poeticus or true poet's narcissus. No gardener should be without it nor without its hybrid, the narcissus.

Poetas Elvira—This new hybrid bears on long graceful stems heads of three to four large white petal flowers, centered by a golden yellow cup.

Turning to the tulip the only advice as to the selection that can be given is to avoid the early blooming varieties and to go in exclusively for the May flowering Darwins, Rembrandts and Gesnerian. Limited as the choice here seems it, in fact, opens a field really without bounds.

The selection of Spanish iris will offer more difficulties. A list of the distinct varieties would fill a volume. Their curious and charming blendings of shades remind one of rare orchids, and if we could we would have them all. But as a choice has to be made the following are given as being perhaps the most distinct:

The bell chinoir, a full yellow and the earliest of yellows.

Cajouns, a large, tall growing handsome flower with canary yellow standard and falls of rich, clear yellow blotched with orange.

Chrysolora, probably the finest of all yellows.

Humboldt and blue beauty are the finest blues.

For white we would choose between her majesty and the avalanche.

In this climate but few cultural directions are necessary. The chief points to be borne in mind are to plant in as pliable a soil as possible; to plant about six inches apart and to plant so as to have about two inches of soil over the crown of the bulb. A bulb placed in the ground anywhere will grow and bloom but a little. Intelligent work adds so much to the success of the garden that every effort expended will prove well worth while.