

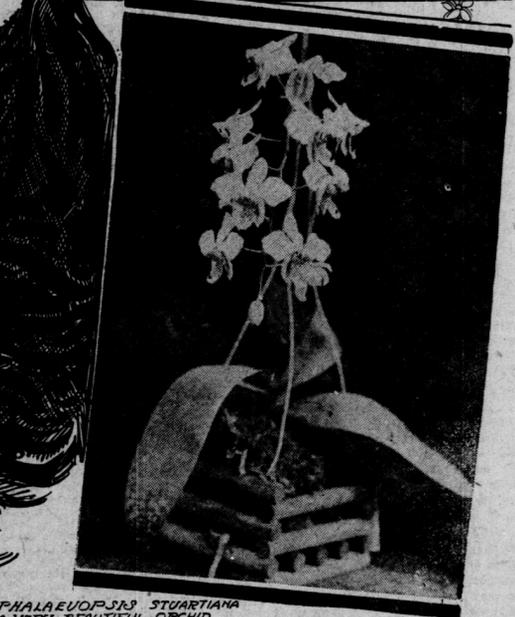
San Francisco Supplies Orchids to Britain's Queen

Wealthy Faddists and Commercial Growers Have Made This City One of the Great Flower Centers of the World



Queen

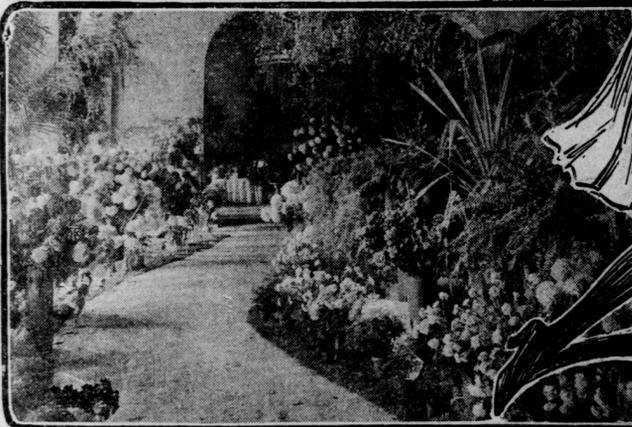
COTTELEVA ORCHID PERHAPS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL AND CERTAINLY THE MOST COSTLY



PHALAEOPSIS STUARTIANA A VERY BEAUTIFUL SPECIMEN



FLAMING REGIMENTS OF POINSETTAS IN ONE OF THE SAN MATEO CONSERVATORIES



DAYS BY SOCIETY PEOPLE AT THE SAN FRANCISCO FLOWER SHOW



By Robin C. Bailly

EVEN the American duchess, who had drifted everywhere and been bored by everything, was present. It was a state banquet at Windsor castle—a scene bewildering in its brilliance. The flash of jewels and not less dazzling eyes, the varied patches of uniforms, the glittering medley of gold, glass and naper on the table, the frowning gray walls of the immemorial fortress partially veiled by ancient tapestry—formed a spectacle of majestic splendor. The inspired pens of Scott, Macaulay or Dumas have not conjured up a more gorgeous picture.

The president's daughter of this great republic, a vision in tissue of old gold, said to her neighbor, a pink checked admiral:

"How beautiful it is, but, do you know, I think these delicate purple orchids are the most charming part of it all. They are, at least, the crown touch. I wonder where his majesty secured them."

"Why, they came from California," was the reply.

"What, the United States?" answered the duchess in a tone of amazement.

Yes, the king and queen noticed some of these flowers at a function in India and asked to have some. Wireless and your enterprising countryman did the rest."

At the recent ball of that American heiress, the sensation of the season, her palace was smothered in those purple orchids from California, and she has established a fashion that seems likely to develop into a rage.

But, as a matter of fact, orchids have now been shipped from San Francisco to the European aristocracy for a number of years. Queen Alexandra, the gentle lady whose love of purple amounts almost to a passion, has long had these fairy flowers dispatched to her from this city, where they grow their best. The office files of local firms and the archives of San Francisco's leading families contain communications bearing the royal crest of England acknowledging the receipt of orchids.

It will, perhaps, interest San Fran-

ciscans to know that the taste of their fellow citizens, and the qualities of the climate have made it possible to supply the fastidious wants of royalties, but it will be more satisfaction for them to realize that this constitutes but one diminutive phase of a gigantic industry.

The wealthy families of San Francisco were the first to cultivate flowers on a large scale in this locality. They still do so, and their gardens and conservatories are unsurpassed by any in the world. Indeed it will surprise many people who have lived in this city all their lives to know that connoisseurs of flowers and horticulturists come from Europe and Asia to see the floral wonders of these palatial homes. But from a pastime of society leaders floral culture has developed into a gigantic business that is growing at a phenomenal rate, and which has literally boundless possibilities.

San Francisco's geographical situation and climate make her the natural center of the floral industry of America. The most important factor in the situation is the proximity of the tropics. It is hence that the orchids—the diamonds of flowers—are secured. The orchid branch of the business is the most rapidly developing and important from every point of view. For something like a decade the whole fashionable world of Fifth avenue to Monte Carlo and from Park lane to Simla has gone literally crazy about orchids. The rush for these rare blossoms is greater every year and the supply can not be increased beyond a certain well defined limit. San Francisco is the greatest orchid market in the world. From here the collectors are sent out on their adventurous expeditions into the most inaccessible forests of South America, India and the Philippine islands. Since the acquisition of those islands by the United States the collection of orchids has become quite an important business. San Francisco firms establish depots at Manila and the flowers are there matured before being dispatched on their voyage to the Golden gate.

The costliness of the orchid is chiefly

due to its own delicacy, but the indelicacy of certain head hunters has an influence on the current price. When you are sent out in search of a purple flower and are apt to lose your head in the process, the estimate of the value of the blossom in question is likely to rise to giddy altitudes. More than one party of orchid hunters has mysteriously disappeared amidst the gloom of the trackless forests of the Philippines. Whether they fell victims to the inconvenient heading customs of the Moros is unknown, but they did not return.

The orchid is really a weed. To scientists it is known as an epiphyte, which means that it lives on another growth or rock. The mistletoe, innocent cause of so much excitement in human affairs, is in a horticultural way a parasite, and it eventually strangles the tree in which it lives by sucking away their strength. The orchid twines itself around trees in the same way, but gains its vitality from the air and the gases rising in the forest and not from the object that it adorns. There are also terrestrial orchids that grow on the ground. But those that have been described in the foregoing are here most frequently seen.

"COTTELEVA SPERVIN, WORTH THOUSANDS OF DOLLARS, THE PROPERTY OF A SAN FRANCISCO SOCIETY LADY."

"NORO HEAD HUNTERS EMPLOYED BY FREDERIC J. BERTRAND, COLLECTOR OF ORCHIDS"

The orchids that are brought to San Francisco travel many hundreds of miles from the tropical interiors on mules and pack horses in carefully constructed cases through which the air is allowed to filter, and are then matured for a year at depots on the coast. After being shipped to San Francisco it will be a couple of years in most cases before the flower that is the object of all this effort and attention is produced. It will be impossible to enumerate all the expeditions that are adopted in the local conservatories to humor these delicate flowers. There are 200 species and each of these includes as many varieties. Each has its own little peculiarities, for which the gardener has to allow. For instance, take one variety that may be

seen in the conservatories of the peninsula hanging in boxes ingeniously devised to reproduce as nearly as possible its native haunts. The roots twine round little bits of jagged rock held together by a specially prepared dried fern fiber. The temperature these exotics require is 80 degrees, but in the great squat glass palaces of Alameda or San Mateo they will switch you anything from India moist and 90 degrees to something dry in the forties. They have all climates at their fingers' ends, and, in the words of the gardener, "we need them for these fussy flower folk."

"Why men go to such pains to cultivate a tropical weed will be understood when it is stated that \$25,000 has been paid times without number for a solitary plant and that this figure has frequently been exceeded. San Francisco's indomitable determination to get the best is manifested by the fact that there are more orchids sold here than in any other city of equal size in the world. This is quite apart from the export trade. It is impossible to tell the price of an orchid by its appearance. A gay young thing in 15 hues that would make a stormy sunset look as pale as a summer moon can often be picked up for a mere song, say \$250. A humble white flower that looks like the mere second cousin of a daisy may be worth something substantial in five figures. Orchids take the most fantastic forms. Some have little dolls inside their subtly tinted interiors; others take the form of beasts such as the illustrations of fairy stories conceive. Indeed, it may be safely said that there is scarce any shape in creation or any combination of colors, however bizarre and grotesque, that may not be found represented among orchids.

Among the society folk who have devoted particular attention to these rare flowers are Miss Jennie Crocker, John Martin, J. B. Corryell, C. Frederick Kohl, H. E. Huntington and A. H. Hills. Among the gardeners are many who served their apprenticeship in the great houses of Europe. McMillan Brown, who has a charge of some acres of glass, was for a number of years one of the principal gardeners at Sandringham, King Edward's private estate. It was his duty every day to provide the bunch of vases for the conservatory and get the flowers himself, and Mr. Brown says that the king could talk like an experienced horticulturist about flowers. He was profoundly interested in the subject, especially in orchids, but he curiously enough never wore them. When King Edward was away, Mr. Brown had to dispatch the daily bunch of flowers in a hermetically sealed tin. Like many other gardeners (and they most of them have the Scotch accent), the man who served the king was attracted to America by the better salaries that are paid on this side of the Atlantic. At Sandringham 10 years' service secures a pension.

Next to orchids the rose is the most popular flower in San Francisco. The private displays are not to be surpassed anywhere, and the florists send them as far away as Utah. Roses vary in fashion almost as much as hats. The very latest thing is the Aron Ward, a delicately tinted, single pink flower. Kate Moulton, at their fingers' ends, and, in the words of the gardener, "we need them for these fussy flower folk."

Some of the ingenious local cultivators are endeavoring to produce a special and most lovely variety in honor of the 1915 exhibition. If they succeed it is safe to say that the American beauty, historic and famous, will not be more illustrious than the queen flower of the Pacific coast.

Many of the city's leading ladies have a penchant for particular varieties. In addition to her interests in orchids Mrs. C. Frederick Kohl especially cultivates gardenias, that small, fragrant, pure white flower that is so fashionable just now. Dahlias, chrysanthemums, carnations in their glory of many tints, and violets are all produced in abundance by San Franciscans.

The cosmopolitan character of the population has undoubtedly stimulated and improved this industry. The Italians specialize on violets, though as a matter of fact it does not require much science to make these humble but beautiful ground gems flourish beneath the sunshine and dews of California. The Japanese, with their deft ingenuity, devote themselves to their national flower, the chrysanthemum. It is a tribute to the American facility for picking up wrinkles from other people that the home gardeners are already beating the clever little Asiatic islanders at their own game.

The flower shops of San Francisco would make this industry notable there were no other reasons. There are more than 90 of them, and some of the establishments are so important that there is over \$200,000 of capital behind them. Travelers from all parts of the world gaze in wonder at the display that the climate renders possible. Paris, New York and London view their best, but there the flowers on display have to be protected from frosts, fog and extreme heat. Here the window dressing artist can marshal regiments of rhododendrons, cavalcades of carnations and multi-colored masses of roses, orchids, lilies and violets, the whole displayed to advantage amid cool green ferns and palms.

San Francisco has been called the city of many things. Perhaps "The City of Many Things" would be in itself an appropriate title. But the other gardeners (and they most of them have the Scotch accent), the man who served the king was attracted to the merit of being true