



Gillette and His Kian Loy Gardens in Trinidad

By RICHARD EVANS SCHULTES

ONE OF THE PLEASANTEST ORCHID GARDENS which I have ever visited is located in St. Augustine, Trinidad, British West Indies. It is a joy to see, not only because of its large number of rare items growing in an unusually happy and healthy state but equally because of the true companionship between the owner and his plants which the visitor immediately senses.

Doctor H. P. S. Gillette, founder and owner of Kian Loy Gardens, was born in British Guiana and, from an early age, learned to love plants through caring for his father's extensive collection of tropical foliage species and orchids. In his youth, Gillette took up residence with the family in Trinidad. Here his association with horticultural pursuits continued. It is fascinating to hear him tell with deep affection about his association with such outstanding figures of Trinidad botany as the late Mr. William E. Broadway, avid collector and student of the flora of the island, who used to supply Dr. Gillette's father with prize plants of native forms of *Caladium* and other foliage species; or the late Venerable Archdeacon Arthur Hombersley, Trinidad's famous student of ferns, who prepared young Gillette for confirmation in the local Anglican church in Port-of-Spain.

Steeped as he was in the horticultural and botanical environment, Gillette himself, however, did not have much time for active participation. From 1922 to 1940, he was absent from Trinidad, most of the time in the United Kingdom, where he earned his medical degree and prepared for his medical career in Edinburgh.

Upon returning to the Colony, he started his work on malaria control which was to span twenty years. His services in this field are internationally recognized, and he is now Head of the Federal Medical Services of the West Indies.

In 1942, the Rockefeller Foundation initiated a malarial survey of Trinidad, and Dr. Gillette was assigned to work on the project. His keen interest in orchids dates from this assignment. The scientists on the project were obliged to spend hours at a time in the tropical forests collecting insects and studying their biology in the natural habitat. It was not long before the latent love of plants, dating from his childhood, sprang to life under the influence of such close association with the native flora in the jungle. Two groups of plants vied with each other for Gillette's major interest. For a long time, he thought he would dedicate his efforts to cultivating the ferns of Trinidad. But one day, he met with a magnificent specimen of *Oncidium haematochilum* growing thirty or forty feet up in a tree in the deepest and darkest part of the forest. He sent one of his boys up to retrieve it. Even today, he describes the plant with unbounded enthusiasm. "I had never seen anything so glorious. I remember to this very minute how excited I was when I counted the 132 beautiful flowers on its inflorescence. That discovery clinched matters, and from that day on I was an orchid man all out."

At first, Dr. Gillette collected only native orchids for his garden, including the tiny botanicals. Then his interests widened, and he began to build up his astonishing collection of foreign botanicals and hybrids, mainly through exchange with fellow orchidists, all of whom were anxious to acquire some of the native treasures of Trinidad. He himself then became absorbed in hybridizing. Yet, even today,

wide though his interests, he loves above all else his native West Indian botanicals and finds one of his greatest pleasures in showing these to his many visitors. His garden, which also boasts a very extensive collection of foliage plants, especially aroids, African violets and other groups of tropical horticultural, contains more than ninety-seven genera of orchids, half of which are West Indian. He cherishes especially such prizes as a white form of *Rodriguezia secunda*, his *Vanda Tan Chay Yan* from Malaya and the green-and-black flowering *Coelogyne pandurata* which grows superbly under his care. He proudly points out his specimen of the pure white form of *Gongora quinquerivis*, the fascinating "Jack Spaniard" of Trinidad, grown from bits of the original and only collection of this rarity made in Trinidad



Dr. H. P. S. Gillette examines one of his Vandas.

by Potter in 1897. He is also very justly proud of his extensive showing of Vandas.

Dr. Gillette, who is President of the Trinidad Orchid Society, is widely known in international orchid circles, having had a prominent part in the Second World Orchid Congress in Hawaii in 1957, where he served as Moderator of the Vanda Section. As much as his busy schedule of medical work has permitted, he has engaged in orchid hunts in many countries outside of Trinidad and Tobago. This activity has taken him to British Guiana, various West Indian islands, Costa Rica and Guatemala, and he hopes soon to visit the boundary region between British Guiana and Brazil.

Only sixteen years old, the Kian Loy Gardens comprise more than a acre around his home which is adjacent to the grounds of the famous Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture. The garden is one of the healthiest outdoor tropical collections of growing plants which I have seen in a number of years in the

tropics. Dr. Gillette is out in his garden every morning by six o'clock, and one finds lounging chairs and tables scattered throughout the estate, enabling him to sit and enjoy plants as they come into flower. He likes to use calabash blocks, especially the thin-barked form, much more widely than is commonly done; and he finds that his Cattleyas do exceedingly well on this base. Routinely, he sprays the whole garden three weeks out of four: the first week with white oil, the second with DDT, the third with Aldrex. He finds that Aldrex keeps down the ant population almost completely. The fourth week, he rests the plants from treatment. This routine, if we are to judge by appearances, is indeed an ideal one for local conditions.

A genial host, Dr. Gillette enjoys sharing the joys of his garden with visitors. He keeps up a voluminous correspondence with orchid-lovers the world over, and his orchid library is evidence of his deep study of the literature both of the present time and of the past. He speaks feelingly, almost paternally, of the duty which modern orchidists should acknowledge of familiarizing themselves with the lives and work of the great and dedicated orchid collectors of the past who carried out their explorations often under the most trying of hardships, sometimes even meeting death itself in their endeavors to enrich horticulture. "I wish that all of us," he says, "would take time from the rush of life to write short and popular articles to make all orchidophiles cognizant of the great of the past to whom we all owe, sometimes without realizing it, such a debt of gratitude."

These words, more than anything else that he said to me during my several visits with him, bring to the fore that modesty underlying Dr. Gillette's character, a modesty which certainly has not been one of the lesser factors in his outstanding success as an orchid-grower in Kian Loy Gardens. — *Botanical Museum of Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

Disa uniflora Exhibited in New York

AT THE REGIONAL MONTHLY JUDGING in New York on July 23, 1958, a flowering plant of *Disa uniflora* was exhibited, possibly for the first time in history, as far as knowledge or records can determine. Shown by Dr. and Mrs. William W. Wilson, of Wynnewood, Pennsylvania, the plant had two flowers fully opened and two buds which opened subsequently in the Wilsons' greenhouse. The seedlings were sent to them in a bottle by a friend in South Africa, but the bottle was broken upon arrival and the seedlings were intermixed with agar, glass and packing material. Some seedlings grew from flask size to maturity although mortality rate was high. Of the plants approaching maturity, along with several others received later from Europe, one by one would succumb until only a single plant remained. Finally, the Wilsons found a suitable spot in their greenhouse and the plant prospered from then on, with a flower spike appearing late in May and one flower opening by early July. Dr. Wilson has tried to pollinate it and at the moment it would appear that he has a seed pod set. But he has his fingers crossed! — *G. W. D.*