

## RENANTHERA (ARACANTHE) MAINGAYI. (SCORPION OR SPIDER ORCHID)

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**T**HIS useful, hardy orchid was introduced into Ceylon about 1899 from the Malay Archipelago but its cultivation does not appear to have received any serious attention till quite recently. As an ornamental plant it takes rank with the most beautiful of the orchid tribe, besides being also amongst the largest. Its long branching and rooting stems climb on supports to considerable heights.

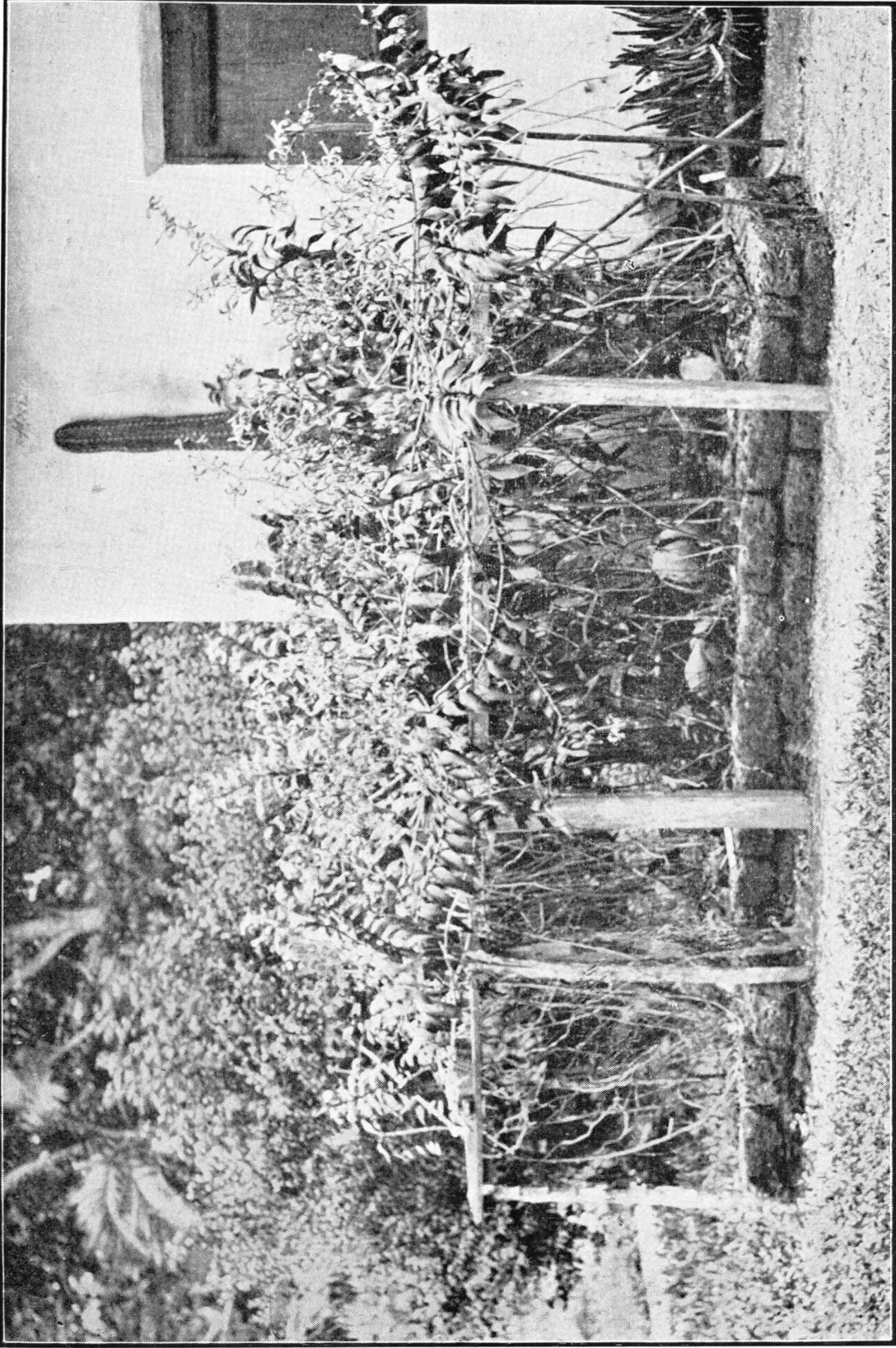
*Description.*—An epiphytic orchid, stem long, with vermiform roots, with thick leathery strap-shaped recurved leaves about 6 by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches. Flowers large, pale green, blotched with brown, in the shape of a scorpion, about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches long by  $3\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, borne on branched panicles about 2 to 3 feet long, produced from the sides of mature stems.

*Cultivation.*—The cultivation of the plant is simple. It thrives best in soil where natural drainage and moisture exist. In the selection of cuttings for planting preference should be given to side or end shoots of mature branches. The shoot should be cut below a node or joint with a sharp knife and should have a couple of roots to each cutting. In no case should the cutting be pulled off the stem as pulling will injure the mother plant. If sufficient cuttings are available they should be grown in the ground. The place selected for their cultivation should be sunny and warm and removed from trees; it should have natural drainage.

A fair-sized bed should be dug about 12 inches deep and filled with a compost of leaf mould, bits of charcoal and porous bricks to which is added a small quantity of earth in the process of filling. The bed when filled and made level with the ground should be surrounded with bricks or cabook stones (the latter are preferable) for the purpose of forming a well over the bed with a depression of 6 to 8 inches. The cuttings should be placed in the depression 12 inches apart and tied to thick stout sticks about 3 feet high to encourage rooting and to prevent shaking by the wind. The depression should then be filled with a mixture consisting of about equal parts of old tree bark, broken crocks or pieces of brick, charcoal, decayed wood and pieces of coconut husk and covering at least a couple of roots of each cutting.

A durable artificial rough trellis on 3-foot posts over the plants should be provided for their support (as shown in the photograph). Plants grown in this way produce blooms twice a year, from March to June and October to January.

This particular species of *Renanthera* when once established does not require much attention or watering. The plant should be completely rested after flowering, during which period no water should be given to the roots even if the weather is dry. It will receive sufficient moisture from dew and from an occasional shower. Plants kept in this state of starvation will show tips of flower panicles on the mature stems in the course of sixty to eighty days, when free supplies of water, both at the roots and overhead, become necessary until the flowers are opened. During flowering watering or syringing of plants should again be reduced. This will help to prolong the life of the flowers. The plant is at home at the Heneratgoda Botanic Gardens, 33 feet above mean sea level with a rainfall of a little over 100 inches per annum.



*Renanthera (Aracanthé) Maingayi,*  
Scorpion or Spider Orchid.