

## NOTES ON ORCHIDS CULTIVATED IN CEYLON

### HABENARIA CRINIFERA LINDL.

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**H**ABENARIA is a fairly well-known and an extensive genus of the *Ophrydeae* tribe of orchids, embracing about four hundred species, well distributed in many parts of the world and consequently thriving in various climes and altitudes. All Habenarias are tuberous-rooted terrestrials. Though a large percentage of the species is interesting to the botanist only, there are several that should appeal generally by virtue of their handsomely rosetted foliage or their weird and curious flowers often resembling insects.

*Habenaria crinifera* Lindl., the subject of our brief notes this month, is one of our rather rare indigenous ground-orchids, familiar to the herbalist as "*Aha-ha-se-makuluwa*" (airy spider). It grows sparingly in the moist parts of the Island from almost sea level up to about three thousand feet.

The plant has a very short stem, rarely exceeding three inches, with a whorl of oblong-lanceolate bright green leaves about four inches long by one-and-a-quarter broad and flowers in February and September. The flower-scape rises from the centre of the plant to a height of about twelve or eighteen inches and produces a cluster of a score or more of queer-looking white flowers. Scale-leaves are borne at the nodes of the scape. The individual flower is about one-and-a-half inches in length and half-an-inch in breadth. The thin deeply cleft lip is the most distinctive feature of the flower, — being about three times as long as the other members. This lip with the outstretched sepals, the long and erect petals and the short column give the flower a pantomimic effect, well meriting its popular English name of "The Dancing Girl Orchid".

*Culture.*—As soon as the flowers begin to fade away the scape should be cut off from just above the whorl of leaves for if the pods are allowed to form and develop the plant will be

weakened and if it is already an unhealthy plant it may succumb altogether. After this the plant may be rested in dry, cool conditions for several weeks, only sufficient water being given to assist the ripening of the tubers now appearing at the root-tips. From eight to twelve weeks after flowering the plant may be removed from its old soil and the tubers separated and potted singly or in one large pot in fresh compost. The plant thrives in a sandy loam rich in humus. A mixture of one part of well-decayed leaf mould, with half as much of well-sifted red earth or turfy soil, and a sprinkling of sand and cattle manure makes a fine compost for most *Habenarias*.

After placing the usual drainage material at the bottom, fill the pot to its brim with the compost and bury the tubers about half-an-inch below the surface. When the young plants appear in due course, a layer of crocks should be placed over the soil for the foliage to rest on and to keep it clean and fresh.

The plant responds readily to stimulation by the application of liquid manure during active growth and weak doses may be given advantageously just as the plant is beginning to form its flower-scape.