

## AN INTERESTING PLANT RECORD FROM THE GULF OF ADEN AREA

During a brief visit to the Yemen in March–April 1974, the author spent some time making botanical collections along the WSW slopes and on the summit plateau of the Jabal Sumara, north of the town of Ibb.

Despite the unfavourable season at the very beginning of the spring rains, considerable material, both live and dried was brought together.

A special search was made for *Kniphofia sumarae* Defl., which had not been collected since Deflers's noteworthy journey to the High Yemen in 1887. Numerous plants, recognizable by their dried leaves, were found at an altitude of between 2 900 and 3 050 m in a narrow valley leading off to the south at the highest point of the new motor road over the mountains from Ibb to Yarim.

In its natural habitat, *K. sumarae* grows on moist, rocky slopes, heavily overgrazed and eroded. Its associates are *Aloe tomentosa* Defl., *Centaurea maxima* Forsk., *Trifolium semipilosum* Fresen., *Daucus yemensis* Defl., *Macowania ericifolia* (Forsk.) Burt & Grau, *Alkanna* sp. cf. *A. orientalis* (L.) Boiss., *Erica arborea* L. and others. It seems that these highlands were wooded with *Juniperus* Forest before the heavy hand of man reduced them to their present depauperated state.

Flowering material obtained in cultivation from some of the plants collected at this locality (*Lavranos* 11292, 26 March 1974), makes it possible to give a more detailed description of this interesting species which, in certain respects, complements the original one by Deflers.

Our flowering material of *K. sumarae* (Fig. 1) agrees fairly well with Deflers's description of the species and with that of Marais in *Kew Bull.* 28,3: 482–483 (1973). However, the perianth tube, narrowly campanulate in its lower part, widens abruptly from about the middle; the filaments shorten only slightly after anthesis; the style, in fresh material, is never exerted beyond 2.5 mm; the flowers are pale yellow and rather strongly scented.

It is worthy of note that this species has no obvious close relatives within the general area where it

grows. It seems to be related, at least where the perianth form is concerned, to certain species from Southern Africa, notably *K. acraea* Codd and *K. brachystachya* (Zahlbr.) Codd. With these, and with the related *K. typhoides* Codd and *K. umbrina* Codd and some others, it also has in common scented flowers. The geographical isolation of *K. sumarae* from the above species makes it difficult to postulate



FIG. 1.—*Kniphofia sumarae* flowering in cultivation (*Lavranos* 11292).

their derivation from a common ancestor within the genus. One may rather assume that the genus contains (or did in the past) one or more genetic factors prone to mutate at different times and places but in the same manner, giving similar character combinations. Marais *l.c.* rightly states that *K. sumarae* forms a good link between the species formerly placed in *Notosceptrum* Benth. and such taxa as *K. pumila* (Ait.) Kunth and *K. foliosa* Hochst.

In addition to the type gathering and the present collection at the same locality, *K. sumarae* was collected by Botta in 1837 near the summit of Jabal Sabir (3 008 m) south of Ta'izz.

DESCRIPTION.—Plants rhizomatous, their leaves dying off during the dry (winter) season, their rootstock rather robust and fleshy, mostly simple, occasionally 1- or 2-branched. *Leaves* ensiform, carinate, acute, erect, 30–50 cm long, c. 15 mm broad at base, bright green, rather soft and fleshy; margins serrulate-ciliate, keel smooth except in the apical portion where it is serrulate; remains of dry leaves fibrous, rather tough. *Inflorescence* simple,

50–100 cm tall; peduncle 5–7 mm diam., terete, glabrous, green with 6–8 deltoid, acute, 1-nerved sterile bracts the lowest of which are usually green, fleshy, ensiform with acute apex and ciliate margins, c. 20 mm long and 5 mm wide, while the upper are scarious, brownish, up to 7 mm long, decreasing upward in size. *Raceme* densely flowered, conical, 80–100 mm long, elongating to 15–200 mm when in fruit, flowers held horizontally. *Bracts* ovate-lanceolate deltoid, brown, scarious, 3,5–5,0 mm long with acute or rounded apex. *Flowers* pale yellow, with one indistinct green nerve from base of tube to apex of segments. *Pedicels* 1 mm long elongating to about 3 mm when in fruit. *Perianth* funnel-shaped, 8–9 mm long, cylindric in its lower half, flaring abruptly from about the middle, 2 mm wide over the ovary, 4 mm at mouth; tube 5,5–6,0 mm long, segments oblong, free for 2,5–3,0 mm their apex straight (not reflexed). *Filaments* pale yellow, terete, tapering towards the apex, the anthers broad, two-lobed, in turn exerted by 5 mm. *Style* terete, the stigma at length exerted by about 2 mm. *Ovary* green, 2 mm long, 1,2 mm diam., narrowly ovoid in long section, obtuse at apex.