

CRYPTOCORYNE LONGICAUDA



Overhead view of a flowering *Cryptocoryne longicauda* plant.

*A plant which dislikes direct sunlight
but needs ample growing space*

by Dr. H. C. D. de WIT

THE great island of Borneo is the natural haunt of many attractive species of *Cryptocoryne*. Some of them are also found in the Malay Peninsula or on Sumatra but the majority are confined to Borneo. Quite a number are insufficiently known and a few, I may add, are still undiscovered. One of these puzzling species was *Cryptocoryne longicauda* Becc. et Engler.

Odoardo Beccari was an excellent explorer and plant-collector. He was an Italian who travelled for many years in the second half of the nineteenth century in numerous parts of tropical Asia and secured (e.g. from Borneo) exceptionally fine collections of forest plants.

The *Araceae* which he brought to Europe were elaborated by Professor Engler, the most distinguished and extremely successful director of the Berlin Botanical Gardens at Dahlem (1889-1921). Engler published large monographs of the *Araceae* Family and in some smaller publications also paid special attention to Beccari's plants, among them the *Cryptocorynes*.

In 1879 Engler published, in an Italian horticultural periodical, the description of *Cryptocoryne longicauda*, which he had copied from Beccari's notes or, rather, he made the description from a drawing of the inflorescence found in Beccari's papers, and from some jottings concerning the leaves made by Beccari when he found the plant in Sarawak. Beccari added some comments to the effect that he had been unable to preserve a specimen. That was all.

No Rediscovery

Later on Beccari's drawing was published (1882) but nobody was able to add any more data to the scant information given and there seemed to be no collector who succeeded in rediscovering the plant.

In 1952 the Botanic Gardens at Bogor (formerly Buitenzorg), Java, Indonesia, sent me, for trial in aquaria, all the living *Cryptocorynes* available. Among them were fine specimens of an unknown species grown

for many years in the Gardens. The plants had been gathered by a Dutch expedition into Borneo.

These plants were successfully introduced to Holland. They are now becoming increas-

ingly popular on the Continent and I have seen fine specimens grown by English aquarists as well. I tried to name this species but the leaves of *Cryptocoryne* are so variable that, unless one is thoroughly familiar with the species beforehand, it is often hardly possible to identify a plant with certainty until flowers are produced.

Very fortunately, a Dutch aquarist Mr. W. Veldhuizen, succeeded in obtaining several flowers and then I was able to establish the identity of our plant:—*Cryptocoryne longicauda* Becc. et Engler.

It was a fine example of the valuable help the aquarium hobby can give to solve puzzles in plant systematics. A full description could then be made and a beautiful plant was added to the aquatics suitable for aquarium purposes.

Rules to Follow

Cultivation is easy but some rules have to be closely observed. First of all, never expose your *Cryptocoryne longicauda* to direct sunlight and, if possible, guard against direct daylight entirely. An aquarium that receives its light from electric bulbs, or only fluorescent lighting, is entirely suitable. Secondly, give it ample space. All other plants should be kept at a distance of four or five inches. In dim light and with plenty of space, the deep green leaves will develop beautifully and rapidly.

A good number of well-developed *Cryptocoryne longicauda* specimens in the middle of the aquarium, either along the sides or in the centre of the tank, makes a fine display.



Cryptocoryne longicauda. a = flowering plant, b = flower just before opening, c = the opened kettle of the flower, and d = a stigma.