

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN TREES.

No. 5.—The Red-flowering Gum.

(By C. A. GARDNER, Government Botanist.)

With the approach of the Christmas season there are two very striking trees which burst into flower, giving rich colour to the landscapes they decorate. One is the Christmas tree, the crown of which is heaped up with piles of intense orange flowers; the other is the Red-flowering Gum, a tree which is dear to the hearts of most Western Australians. Its intense scarlet is the despair of the painter who cannot reproduce its living colour, and this tree is considered by many to be the finest flowered of all the Eucalypts. It is strange that the two most glorious trees of South-Western Australia should burst forth into flower during the heat of summer.

The Red-flowering Gum is one of the most uncommon of our Eucalypts. It grows in a few spots only in the extreme south-west of the State. The best known of these, and perhaps the largest, is a small patch near Nornalup Inlet, between the Bow and Frankland Rivers. Other patches occur on the Gordon River, and between the Shannon and Deep Rivers. In its native woods it is usually a straggling tree of 20 to 35 feet, and branches as a rule close to the ground. Under cultivation, however, where the trees are spaced and well-lighted, it develops into an upright, sturdy, but still small tree with thick-spreading leaves. The bark, which is rough and somewhat furrowed and fibrous, is brown or grey in colour. It is much like the bark of the Marri, except that the patches and stains, which usually mark the latter, are absent from the Red-flowering Gum. The leaves are stiff, short, and bright green, and often have reddish midribs. The flowers are borne in large bunches which we call "corymbs"; they are never in "axillary umbels," that is, they never spring in umbrella-like bunches from the axilla, or junction of the stem with the stalk of a leaf, like those of the trees we have discussed up to the present. In South-Western Australia there are only three trees with flowers arranged in this way. They are the common Marri, the Mountain Gum of the South-West, and the species we are discussing.

These trees have other peculiarities also. The leaves are often broader and greener than in other gum trees; they have their secondary veins closely parallel to each other; and the fruits are of the type known to many children as "hockey nuts"—large roundish objects with slight necks or projections at the upper end. The Marri has the largest of these fruits, and must be well known to many of you. The Red-flowering Gum has smaller fruits, and often the neck is not very evident. The capsule is deeply enclosed within this fruit, the valves being well sunk into the neck. The seeds are reddish or brown in colour, with wings on one or more of the angles. These wings are very important, for their presence enables us to distinguish this tree from the Marri which has a black seed without any wing.

Another character peculiar to this group of trees is the "operculum" or lid-like cover of the fruit. This is thin and almost flat, and rarely if ever falls off completely from the calyx as in other Eucalypts; but hangs on by a small hinge, falling after the flower is fully developed.

The colour of the true Red-flowering Gum is scarlet, or scarlet-*vermilion*. Most of the trees in cultivation are hybrids, that is, they are crosses between the Marri and the Red-flowering Gum. There are many of these hybrid forms which can be distinguished by the colour of the flowers—various shades of pink, crimson, or white. They may also be distinguished by the shape of their fruit, and by their leaves which, in the hybrid forms, tend to become larger and lose their red vein marks.

LOOKS AND FEELINGS.

(By JAMES POLLARD.)

Can you read an animal's feelings from its looks? As a rule the expression of the eyes or face, or the whole appearance shows clearly enough the state of the animal's feelings; but now and then you may be misled. Dogs and cats as a general rule show their feelings plainly; but a dog may turn cunning and deceive you by its looks; a cat, when thoroughly cowed, gives no indication whatever of the state of its feelings. The owl always seems solemn or wise; the eagle always looks fierce and truculent; the hen in the farm-yard always wears a disdainful look: but the eagle can be affectionate to its young, and a hen can become attached to a human friend. Yet on the whole you can very largely judge the character of almost any creature from its expression.

Laughing Birds.

The great majority of birds are gay folk, bright, full of life, and seemingly light-hearted. We think of them as happy creatures often laughing in their own way. But can we be sure that the little creature is happy? The Kookaburra, whose laughter has such a human note, seems a thoroughly happy bird. But see him when his burst of rollicking laughter has died away: how solemn, how thoughtful he looks!

There is a bird in the Zoo, the Macaw, that has a laughing expression. When it opens its beak wrinkles appear about its mouth exactly as if it were laughing. But the impression of mirth is immediately shattered by its piercing shriek. Surely no bird that screeches so can be happy.

All Sorts of Expressions.

There are other parrots, too—the twenty-eight, for instance—that seem to smile; and if we study our birds we shall find many other definite expressions. Thus the wagtail looks severe, the pipit or