

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN WILDFLOWERS.

No. XXVIII.—THE SLENDER LOBELIA.

(*Lobelia tenuior.*)

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

No doubt many of you are familiar with the blue *Lobelia* which is so widely used as an edge plant in border gardens. Its lovely intense blue enlivens the summer garden pathways with a colour which vies with clear skies, and imparts a freshness while the other garden plants languish in the sun. Although you may be familiar with this plant, known to horticulturists as *Lobelia Erinus*, I doubt if many of you are aware that we possess in our extensive flora species of *Lobelia* which are quite as lovely as this familiar plant of cultivation. In Western Australia we have eleven species of the genus, all of which are summer flowering plants whose habitats vary from the black soil swamps to the dry loose sand, or the hard red loam of the interior. The genus takes its name from Matthias de L'Obel, a Flemish botanist and author who lived between the years 1538 and 1616, and is widely spread over the globe, both in temperate and subtropical lands.

The local species of *Lobelia* commence to flower in the late spring. Their flowers are of a characteristic structure, having a narrow calyx-tube with erect awl-shaped lobes, and a very irregular corolla, the three lower lobes of which are larger than the remainder. The central lobe is straight, and the lateral lobes curve out gracefully, the three reminding one of the "*Fleur-de-lis*"—a conventional flower suggested by the Iris, which was formerly identified with the Royal arms and adornment of the Kingdom of France. England borrowed this design, and it is figured both on the Royal Standard and the Imperial crown. The two upper segments of the corolla are usually much smaller and insignificant.

The stamens are five in number, with filaments which are usually joined together in their upper portions, and the anthers are united into a ring or short tube around the style. Either two, or all five of the anthers possess short tufts of silky white hairs at their tips, and these are of importance in the determination of the various species.

The ovary is two-celled and inferior, with a more or less slender style and broad two-lobed stigma which is often hairy. Each cell of the ovary contains numerous ovules. The fruit is a thin capsule which is usually oblique or gibbous in outline, and formed within the enlarged calyx-tube, to which it is adherent. It



LOBELIA TENUIOR, R.Br.

Explanation of Plate.—A. Plant (slightly reduced). B. Basal leaf (natural size). C. Flower (enlarged). D. Upper segment of corolla (slightly enlarged). E. Anthers (enlarged).

(Icon. origin.)

opens in two valves, and numerous small seeds are ripened in each cell. The seeds of *L. tenuior* are ruby-coloured, smooth and semi-transparent, and have the appearance of small rubies.

The leaves are usually toothed or divided, and are as a rule alternate. In the annual species they wither early, so that the plant is often leafless when in flower. Amongst the inland species it is common to find plants with succulent stems, and with these plants the leaves die off before the flowering season has developed. As the flowers open from the base of the inflorescence upwards, so does the stem dry and wither from the roots upwards, so that, by the time the last flower has expanded, the only part of the plant remaining alive is the upper portion of the now leafless stem, the lower portions and roots being quite dead. It will be noticed that such species grow in very dry soils, often with rock at a shallow depth, and it is remarkable to see these plants which exhibit their full beauty only when they are already half dead.

Some other dry country plants also have this characteristic; I will tell you something about them at some future date.

The accompanying plate gives you all the details of *Lobelia tenuior*, which is the common summer-flowering coastal species. From its structure you will be able to identify your own local species of the genus. Its flowers are of a beautiful soft and intense azure blue, and blue is the colour of all the local species of this genus.

BOOKS AND THEIR WRITERS.

"Wild Folk at Home."

(By JOHN K. EWERS.)

There are very few people who do not enjoy watching animals at play or at work, either in their natural haunts or in the artificial surroundings of a zoo. But you who live in the country have the best opportunities of spying upon them in their own forests and grasslands. Hardly a day goes by that you do not see the rabbit, the kangaroo, the ground-lark, or listen to the songs of the cicada and cry of the curlew, or watch that eagle-hawk soaring with graceful ease high in the blue of the sky. But I wonder if you ever realize that all these birds, animals, reptiles, and insects have lives of their own to live, problems to solve, difficulties and hardships to overcome. A little book which will help you to realize this is "Wild Folk at Home," by Maribel Edwin (J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, London). Although it deals with English birds and animals it is of great interest to Australian readers, because the habits of wild life are, more or less, similar the world over.

A study of various forms of life helps us to understand how dependent they all are upon one another. Human beings depend upon animal and vegetable matter for their food and clothing. Indeed, in the matter of food, we can easily trace our dependence to the humble grass of the pasture paddock. We would have no roast mutton for dinner were there not an abundance of green feed, no milk for our porridge were there not ample clover for the quiet cud-chewing cow. Grass and pasture, however, have the power to draw nourishment from non-living materials—the air and soil-water.

Wherever we look in Nature we find this same dependence. The eagle preys upon the rabbit; the rabbit feeds upon the grass. The wild cat devours the wild birds, which in turn feed upon seeds, insects, or fruit. In some parts of the world man is preyed upon, and in jungle life we find men preying upon one another. Some people, on looking for the first time at this vast tangle of life and