

NOTES UPON SOME PLANT SPECIMENS COLLECTED BY DR. THOS. L. BANCROFT ON THE DIAMANTINA.

By F. M. BAILEY, F.L.S., Colonial Botanist.

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WHEN that excellent scientist, my friend Dr. T. L. Bancroft, is called upon to visit distant parts of the colony he invariably makes it a rule to bring back with him as many specimens of the flora as time will allow. Thus while on his recent visit to the Diamantina to make enquiry into a disease affecting the live stock of the district, he then collected specimens of a number of the indigenous plants, particularly those of an economic character. These specimens having been presented to me, I thought a few notes on the most interesting species might be worthy of a place in the Society's Proceedings. It would occupy far too much space to enumerate all the plants, so only those of economic or botanic interest will be brought under notice.

CAPPARIS SPINOSA, var. nummularia. This, the Australian representative of the caper of commerce, is found more or less abundantly from Western Australia to the coast lands of Tropical Queensland. In appearance it rather closely resembles the common caper plant, yet, strange to say, seems never to have had its young unexpanded buds gathered for pickling. The fruit, however, which is about the size of a pigeon's egg, and longitudinally ribbed, is eaten when ripe, like that of *C. sarmientosa*, *A. Cunn*, which is so plentiful in the Brisbane district.

C. MITCHELLI, *Lindl.* This bears a fruit about 2 inches in diameter, the pulp of which is sweet and agreeable, and known to bushmen as the Pomegranate. The tree is one of the best for shade on the inland plains.

PORTULACA OLERACEA, var. *grandiflora*, *Benth.* The small seeds of this plant furnish the natives with a highly nutritious food. The whole plant is often roasted by them also for food.

TRIBULUS OCCIDENTALIS, *R. Br.* The specimens obtained by Dr. Bancroft leave no doubt upon my mind as to their being identical with the above species partly described by Dr. Robt. Brown in appendix to Capt. Sturt's expedition, and also the flowers referred to by Mr. Bentham, *Flora Australiensis*, Vol. I., p. 289, as having been gathered near the Fink River. The flowers are large, showy, and well worthy of garden culture.

PSORALEA PATENS, *Lindl.* This plant is said to attain the height of 6ft., and to produce a large quantity of strong tough fibre. *P. Archerii*, *F.v.M.*, is another species of the genus, from the stems of which the natives obtain fibre for bag and net-making. These two plants should be worth cultivating for the sake of their fibre. Mr. E. Palmer gives the mode adopted by the natives to obtain the fibre as follows:—"They pull the plants up, soak in water for some hours, then take them out and allow to dry, when the fibrous bark peels off and is ready for use."

TEPHROSIA ROSEA, *F.v.M.* This small shrub is reported both in Port Darwin and Queensland as a poison bush injurious to stock.

SESBANIA ACULEATA, *Pers.* (the Pea-bush), is a useful plant. The stems yield a good fibre, and seeds are largely depended upon by the natives for food. In India the same use is made of the seeds.

CASSIA STURTTII, *R. Br.* During the last year or so, specimens of this shrub have been sent to me as a suspected poison bush.

ACACIA PEUCE, *F. v. M.* A useful timber tree. The wood is extremely hard, and known in the district as "Ironwood." The long needle-shaped leaves give to the tree a pine-like appearance, and the broad thin curled pods somewhat resemble those of the American Honey-locust.

A. ANEURA, *F. v. M.* (The Mulga). Amongst Dr. Bancroft's specimens are two or three forms of this useful cattle-bush.

A. HAKEOIDES, *A. Cunn.*, and *A. SALICINA*, *Lindl.*, are of interest on account of the natives using the ash of the burnt green leaves to mix with pitchery.

BAUHINIA CARRONI, *F. v. M.* The natives are said by Mr. E. Palmer to make a drink by steeping the flowers of this tree in water. The flowers of one of the grass-trees were used by the natives on Stradbroke Island for the same purpose.

CUCUMIS TRIGONUS, *Roeb.* The small melon-like fruits of this trailing plant are eaten when ripe by the natives in many parts of Queensland. The plant has also the reputation of having caused the death of many horses in this district.

EUCALYPTUS BICOLOR, *A. Cunn.* Seeds used for food by the natives. Dr. Bancroft tells us that this tree, like *E. microtheca*, is known by the name of "Coolibar."

AMMANNIA MULTIFLORA, *Roeb.* The minute seeds of this small plant are produced in great abundance, and furnish food for the natives.

GNAPHALIUM LUTEO-ALBUM, *Linn.* This, according to Mr. E. Palmer, is one of the plants used by the natives as a medicine in fever cases. For a like purpose we are told they use the leaves of the Gidya mistletoe—*Loranthus Quandong* and *Moschosma polystachyum*; specimens of these latter were also in Dr. Bancroft's collection.

SARCOSTEMMA AUSTRALE, *R. Br.* (The Caustic plant). This fleshy climber is generally considered a dangerous poison to sheep. It is said to be used by the natives at Port Darwin in cases of smallpox.

SOLANUM OLIGACANTHUM, *F. v. M.* A very pretty little plant not before met with in this colony. Fruit small and very bitter.

S. ESURIALE, *Lindl.* A dwarf shrub; the fruit eaten by the natives either raw or roasted.

LYCIUM. Amongst the specimens were a few fragments, which may prove a new species of this genus, but the material is insufficient for determination. In foliage it agrees with *L. australe*, *F. v. M.*, while the flowers closely resemble those of *L. vulgare*.

NICOTIANA SUAVEOLENS, *Lehm.* (The native tobacco plant). This is firmly believed poisonous to stock by many stockowners. The collection contained about 17 species of those known under

the names of Blue-bush, Cotton-bush, Salt-bush, &c. It will be sufficient to mention a few of the most useful fodders amongst them, viz., *Chenopodium auricomum*, *Lindl*, the Blue-bush; *Kochia brevifolia*, *R. Br.*, the Cotton-bush; *Atriplex nummularia*, *Lindl*, the Old Man Salt-bush; *A. vesicaria*, *Heward*—this is considered at the Diamantina as the best for fodder of all the salt-bushes.

EREMOPHILA POLYCLADA, *F. v. M.*, and *MUHLENBECKIA CUNNINGHAMII*, *F. v. M.*, are both frequently met with growing together, and have each received the local name "Lignum," which is probably an abbreviation of *Polygonum*—a genus to which the latter is closely allied. By some they are considered useful fodder bushes.

LORANTHUS EXOCARPI. *Behr*. The fruit of this and other mistletoes is eaten by the natives.

The three *Euphorbias* which the collection contained, viz., *E. Drummondii*, *Boisd*; *E. eremophila*, *A. Cunn*; and *E. serrulata*, *Rim*, are all considered poisonous to stock.

The grass specimens of the collection numbered about thirty kinds, including the *Spinifex*, *Mitchell-grass*, *Blue-grass*, *Star-grass*, and many of the *Love-grasses*. The most interesting of all, however, were two growths of that excellent pasture grass, *Sporobolus virginicus*, var. *pallida*. The one of these gathered on the Cooper, spreads over the land by its long trailing stems, forming distant plants in a somewhat similar manner to that of the Strawberry. The other, obtained on the Georgina, was of a more slender habit, the stems frequently forming tufts at the joints. Many of the shorter erect stems were coated with a peculiar substance, probably of fungus origin, and approaching the genus *Epichloe*, which seems to excite a growth of adventitious leafy short shoots, which are said to fall from the stems and take root in the mud.

MARSILEA DRUMMONDII, *A. Br.* (The Nardoo). This plant produces at the present time, as in the days of Burke and Wills, the staple food of the natives of the Diamantina. Dr. Bancroft brought some of the damper made by the natives from the pounded involucres and spores to Brisbane, one of which may be seen on the table this evening. Besides furnishing food for the natives, the plant is prized as a fodder for stock.



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