

WHAT THE TREES SAY (March 1930)

A Lesson in Nature Study

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"The trees, like the longings of the earth
Stand a-tiptoe to peep at the heaven."

Tagore—(*Stray Birds*).

The hot season has commenced in earnest with the maximum temperature going up to 99 degrees. The air is laden with dust and the grasses and weeds of the roadside have dried up. Water in the well has gone deep and the atmosphere is languid. The weary pedestrian lays his heavy load on the bear-weight and crows above are "silent on the Tamarind branches". Tobacco and wheat were harvested some time ago and cotton is picking. The Cactus blooms and the Mexican thistle has its erect capsules full waiting to be delivered by the wind. With the demon of drought in the soil beneath and in the atmosphere above, the tree flora presents a mixed and unique aspect which is worth recording.

The Evergreens.—Best known of the evergreens is the mango which is in an advanced stage of flowering and the "fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice". The Nim reigns in splendour as if defying drought and wastes its complete flowers. The hardy Morinda blooms in the night and pervades its fragrance till morning. Stately Polyalthia puts forth its bunches of flowers in the branches amidst luxuriant and wavy leaves and both Sirish and Rain tree flower extravagantly carrying loads of old fruits, leaves and flowers. Pongamia shows a similar tendency and Peltophorum flowers and fruits in an irregular and inconsistent manner throughout the year. The fruiting season is over in Tamarind and Cassia which undergo periods of rest and the Portia sheds its hollow fruits and buds.

Deciduous Trees.—Desperate among the deciduous is the Indian Elm which casts off its leaves thoroughly undergoing as it were a severe penance. Cordia and Odina behave likewise and the Cork tree stands aloft "seeking the solitude of the sky" with perchance a crow's nest at the summit. The Gul Mohr, the Coral tree and the Golden Shower shed variously in an interesting manner and are reluctant to part with their ripe pods. The Indian almond stands bare with outstretched arms and the Loranth-infested Peepul shakes off its "trembling" leaves quickly and clothes itself as quickly with new and tender leaves. More trees of a partly or wholly deciduous nature may be noticed in the garden.

It may be said in general that of the above trees the Nim challenges drought, the mango endures it, the Peepul gets over it, the Elm surrenders (its leaves) to it and other trees are indifferent to it. In none of them, however, the behaviour is quite absolute for each individual tree solves its difficulty in its own way in spite of a general periodicity which is characteristic of the whole species.

TWENTY-FOUR TREES

| Name of tree | Common name | Notes |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| Acacia arabica | Babool | Leaves, old fruits and flowers. |
| Albizia Lebbeck | Sirish | Old fruits, leaves and flowers. |
| Azadirachta indica | Nim, Margosa | New leaves and flowers. |
| Cassia Siamea | Golden shower | Old leaves and fruits. |
| Cassia fistula | .. | Deciduous, old fruits. |
| Cordia myxa | .. | Leafless, old fruits. |
| Delonix regia | Gul Mohr | do |
| Enterolobium saman | Rain tree | Old fruits, leaves and flowers. |
| Erythrina indica | Coral tree | Leafless or leafy, old fruits. |
| Ficus religiosa | Peepul | Leafy or leafless. |
| Holoptelea integrifolia | Indian Elm | Leafless with fruits. |
| Mangifera indica | Mango | Evergreen, flowers and young fruits |
| Millingtonia hortensis | Cork tree | Leafy or leafless. |
| Moringa oleifera | Drumstick; horse reddish | Leaves, fruits and flowers. |
| Morinda tinctoria | Nona (Tam.) | Flowers and young fruits. |
| Odina wodier | Odiyan (Tam.) | Leafless. |
| Parkinsonia aculeata | St. John's thorn | Leaves, fruits and flowers. |
| Peltoporum ferrugineum | .. | do |
| Pithecolobium dulce | Korkapille | do |
| Polyalthia longifolia | Asoka | Leaves and flowers. |
| Pongamia glabra | Pongam (Tam.) | Old fruits, leaves and flowers. |
| Tamarindus indica | Tamarind | Leafy or leafless with or without flowers. |
| Terminalia catappa | Indian almond | Leafless or leafy. |
| Thespesia populnea | Portia, Tulip tree | Leaves, flowers and fruits. |