

BEE-CULTURE IN THE COUNTRY.

With the advent of a new style of propaganda in the county by means of the Beevan, the Berks Bee-keepers' Association hope their continued efforts in the extension and transmission of knowledge on the subject may be further extended to a class that they have not been able to reach by the ordinary methods, and it redounds to the credit of our County Council, who doubled the grant of previous years to enable the Association to purchase the "Van" and carry on the work amongst our rural population. That great interest is taken in the matter, the numbers who attend the lectures prove beyond a doubt. The methods by which the Association works are different from those followed in conveying instruction in some of the other subjects taught by the technical schools. If a working man decides on starting bee-keeping, the Association advises him to become a member of the Bee-keepers' Association, for which he pays 2s. 6d. per year, and for this 2s. 6d. he receives the Bee-keepers' Record monthly. This publication costs the 2s. 6d., so that the member gets the full value of his subscription back at once, and he is also entitled to receive gratis two visits per year from the expert of the Association, who looks through his hives, and gives the best practical advice on how to proceed. Then all over the county there are district advisers, bee-keepers who are old hands in the craft, who will and do give beginners the benefit of their practical experience. So that to any one who really wishes to add a few pounds to his yearly income at a small outlay, I would say as the poor curate said to the Bishop, "Keep bees!" If more hives were kept there would be a better stock of fruit, a larger crop of seed for the farmers; so that every one benefits by the extension of the industry, and I believe that there is no more profitable stock among the minor industries than bees, and no stock that can be kept at less expense and labor. If I pass a garden that has a few well-kept hives in it, I know the owner is one of the best men on the farm. This fact has been proved to me many times during the past twenty to thirty years. The Association was established with the primary idea of helping the cottager and teaching him a better system of bee-keeping than that followed by his forefathers, who smothered their bees with brimstone to secure the honey. All this is now changed by those who adopt the modern system with bar-framed hives, and the bee-keeper would

as soon think of cutting down his trees to gather his fruit as of destroying his bees to take the honey. Neither does he want his bees to swarm; what he would like for them to do would be to work straight away through the whole season, and not attempt to swarm, as strong, populous colonies of bees are those that fill the biggest supers, and store the heaviest lump of honey. The publication I mentioned before teems with information for the novice in bee-keeping—what to do and when to do it, all written in an understandable style, that he who runs may read.

Then another point of even greater importance, to many than the production of honey is the disposal of the same. There the Association steps in with a helping hand to its members, and is still opening up outlets for honey by establishing agencies for the sale of members' honey in every centre of the county, so that there is scarcely a respectable retail establishment in the county that will not shortly, if it has not already taken hold of the commodity. I know the great bar to starting cottagers in bee-keeping on modern lines is the initial expense of hive and swarm; but these same cottagers manage somehow to raise the wind to start pig-keeping. Now, comparatively, the pig costs, with its sty, trough, tub, and pail, quite as much as the useful modern hive and the swarm of bees to stock it; but, after establishing the hive, the cost of maintenance is comparatively, vastly in favour of the bees. These industrious little creatures stock their own hive, board and keep themselves, and, even in the first year, if a good honey season, furnish a surplus for the bee-keeper, whereas the pig requires constant attention, and, if food happens to be dear, he metaphorically eats his head off before he gets fat enough to kill; even with the best of luck, piggy only results in a small margin of profit to the keeper. With the same investment in bees the profits would be cumulative, as there would be the natural increase by swarming, and this increase could be sold as stock to start another bee-keeper, or the bees driven and united to the bar-frame colony, thus leaving the hive strong in bees to go into winter quarters, ensuring success the following season, and the contents of the hive appropriated by the bee-keeper, the best parts retained for consumption in the winter, the combs soaked, and the liquor made into mead (once the principal beverage of the island), while the wax can be sold to the chemist or grocer. Therefore, to the poor cottager who would like to live rent-free, I say keep bees, and, if kept intelligently, I say, without fear of contradiction, that the bees (but not piggy) will pay the rent.—W. WOOLLEY, *World's End, Newbury*, in "Newbury Weekly News."