

CHAPTER XVII.

How to build up a Weak Hive.

A hive that is strong in bees in early spring will attain great strength early in the season, while one that is weak will make very little headway, possibly may have a hard struggle to live. The laying capacity of the queen is limited by the number of larvae the workers are able to care for; therefore, if we can add more bees to the colony, the quicker will it develop. The skillful apiarist in the spring often does quite a business in transferring bees from one hive to another, but to be successful he must understand the limitations. In the first place, it never pays to rob a medium strong colony to aid one that is weak. A hive that has every frame covered may be drawn upon, but never one that is weaker. Second, it is useless to give a frame of brood without nurse-bees to a weak colony, as the workers there are doing all they possibly can; but, on the other hand, it is risky to give old bees with a frame of brood, as these strangers may attack the queen, at least early in the season. Young bees are less liable to interfere.

To give young bees to a weak colony, go to a strong hive, select a frame containing brood, but be sure the queen is not on it—the only way to be certain is to see her—and shake the bees on to a large board in front of the hive. The old bees will fly home in a few minutes, then shake those that remain on the alighting-board of the hive to be strengthened. They will crawl inside and be made welcome.

Some give aid by exchanging sealed brood, preferably hatching, for eggs. To do this, take a frame of sealed brood from the strong hive and shake off the bees; then carry it to the weak one and exchange it for a frame of eggs, as before shaking off the bees. In each case place the new frame in the centre of the cluster.

When the weak hive is fairly strong, say with bees on five or six frames, one need not hesitate to give it a frame of brood with adhering bees, provided it is not put next the frame on which the queen happens to be at the time.

To combine a queenless colony with another hive, in the evening, when flying has stopped, go to the latter and remove the cover and quilts and spread a sheet of newspaper above the frames, punching a hole with a pencil in the centre of it, so as to give communication. Then lift the queenless hive and set it on top. The bees will gradually remove the paper and intermingle without fighting. In about a week remove the frames that are unoccupied, so as to make a compact brood-nest.

As a general rule, when nectar is coming in freely, the bees of a hive will welcome additions to their strength, but in times of dearth they will eject or kill the intruders.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Women Bee-keepers.

There are at the moment of writing at least a score of women bee-keepers in the Province, and by the title it is meant that they actually do all the necessary work round the apiary—build and paint hives, assemble frames, insert foundation, and manipulate the colonies. The only occasion when they call for help is when they have to face a specially heavy lift. On the average, the crop they secure is equal to that got by the men-folks; but in one respect they decidedly excel, they certainly do keep tidier bee-yards. Our men bee-keepers have not yet realized that a well-kept apiary may be made a thing of beauty, and that a few plants, such as roses, hollyhocks, foxgloves, and currant-bushes, among bee-hives have great value in decorative effect.

The biggest apiary managed by a woman is located in the Wet Belt and numbered sixteen colonies in 1914, when the crop was fully 1,000 lb. of extracted honey.