



Selections from Eminent Writers.

The Pastoral Bees.

(From "Locusts and Wild Honey," by John Burroughs.—a most delightful book.)

The honeybee goes forth from the hive in spring like the dove from Noah's Ark, and it is not till after many days that she brings back the olive leaf, which in this case is a pellet of golden pollen upon each hip, usually obtained from the alder or swamp willow. In a country where maple sugar is made, the bees get their first taste of sweet from the sap as it flows from the spiles, or as it dries and is condensed upon the sides of the buckets. They will sometimes, in their eagerness, come about the boiling-place and be overwhelmed by the steam and the smoke. But bees appear to be more eager for bread in the spring than for honey; their supply of this article, perhaps, does not keep as well as their stores of the latter; hence, fresh bread, in the shape of new pollen, is diligently sought for. My bees get their first supplies from the catkins of the willows. How quickly they find them out! If but one catkin opens anywhere within range, a bee is on hand that very hour to rifle it, and it is a most pleasing experience to stand near the hive some mild April day and see them come pouring in with their little baskets packed with the first fruitage of the spring. They will have new bread now; they have been to mill in good earnest; see their dusty coats, and the golden grist they bring home with them.

When a bee brings pollen into the hive, he advances to the cell in which it is to be deposited, and kicks it off as one might his overalls or rubber boots, making one foot help the other; then he walks off without ever looking behind him; another bee, one of the indoor hands, comes along and rams it down with his head and packs it into the cell as the dairymaid packs butter into a firkin.

The first spring wild flowers, whose shy faces among the dry leaves and rocks are so welcome, yield no honey. The anemone, the hepatica, the blood-root, the arbutus, the numerous violets, the spring beauty, the corydalis, etc., woo all lovers of nature, but do not woo the honey-loving bee. It requires more sun and warmth to develop the saccharine element, and the beauty of these pale striplings of the woods and groves is their sole and sufficient excuse for being. The arbutus, lying low, and keeping green all winter, attains to perfume, but not to honey.

The first honey is perhaps obtained from the flowers of the red maple and the golden willow. The latter sends forth a wild, delicious perfume. The sugar maple blooms a little later, and from its silken tassels a rich nectar is gathered. My bees will not label these different varieties for me, as I really wish they would. Honey from the maple, a tree so clean and wholesome, and full of such virtues every way, would be something to put one's tongue to. Or that from the blossoms of the apple, the peach, the cherry, the quince, the currant—one would like a card of each of these varieties to note their peculiar qualities. The apple-blossom is very important to the bees. A single sweet apple has been known to gain two pounds in weight during its growth. Bees love the ripened fruit, and in August and Sep-

tember will suck themselves tipsy upon varieties like the sops-of-wine.

The interval between the blooming of the fruit trees and that of the clover and raspberry is bridged over in many localities by the honey locust. What a delightful summer murmur these bees send forth at this season! I know nothing about the quality of the honey, but it ought to keep well. But when the red raspberry blooms, the fountains of plenty are unsealed indeed; what a commotion about the hives then, especially in localities where it is extensively cultivated, as in places along the Hudson. The delicate white clover, which begins to bloom about the same time, is neglected; even honey itself is passed by for this modest, colorless, all but odorless flower. A field of these berries in June sends forth a continuous murmur, like that of an enormous hive. The honey is not so white as that obtained from clover, but it is easier gathered; it is in shallow cups, while that of the clover is in deep tubes. The bees are up and at it before sunrise, and it takes a brisk shower to drive them in. But the clover blooms later, and blooms everywhere, and is the staple source of supply of the finest quality of honey. The red clover yields up its stores only to the longer proboscis of the bumblebee, else the bee pasturage of our agricultural districts would be unequalled. I do not know from what the famous honey of Chamouni, in the Alps, is made, but it can hardly surpass our best products. The snow-white honey of Anatolia, in Asiatic Turkey, which is regularly sent to Constantinople for the use of the grand seignior and the ladies of his seraglio, is obtained from the cotton plant, which makes me think that the white clover does not flourish there. The white clover is indigenous with us; its seeds seem latent in the ground, and the application of certain stimulants to the soil, like wood ashes, causes them to germinate and spring up.

The rose, with all its beauty and perfume, yields no honey to the bee, unless the wild species be sought by the bumblebee.

Among the humbler plants, let me not forget the dandelion that so early dots the sunny slopes, and upon which the bee languidly grazes, wallowing to his knees in the golden, but not oversucculent pasturage. From the blooming rye and wheat the bee gathers pollen, also from the obscure blossoms of Indian corn. Among weeds, catnip is the great favorite. It lasts nearly the whole season, and yields richly. It could, no doubt, be profitably cultivated in some localities, and catnip honey would be a novelty in the market. It would probably partake of the aromatic properties of the plant from which it was derived.

Among your stores of honey gathered before midsummer, you may chance upon a card, or, mayhap, only a square inch or two of comb, in which the liquid is as transparent as water, of a delicious quality, with a slight flavor of mint. This is the product of the linden or basswood. Of all the trees in our forest, the one most beloved by the bees. Melissa, the goddess of honey, has placed her seal upon this tree. The wild swarms in the woods frequently reap a choice harvest from it. I have seen a mountain-side thickly studded with it, its straight, tall, smooth, light-gray shaft carrying its deep-green crown far aloft, like the tulip or

maple. . . . As a shade and ornamental tree, the linden is fully equal to the maple, and if it was as extensively planted and cared for, our supplies of virgin honey would be greatly increased. The famous honey of Lithuania, in Russia, is the product of the linden.

It is a homely old stanza current among bee folk that,

"A swarm of bees in May
Is worth a load of hay;
A swarm of bees in June
Is worth a silver spoon;
But a swarm in July
Is not worth a fly."

A swarm in May is indeed a treasure; it is, like an April baby, sure to thrive, and will very likely itself send out a swarm a month or two later; but a swarm in July is not to be despised; it will store no clover or linden honey for the "grand seignior and the ladies of his seraglio," but plenty of the rank and wholesome poor man's nectar, the sun-tanned product of the plebian buckwheat. Buckwheat honey is the black sheep in this white flock, but there is spirit and character in it. It lays hold of the taste in no equivocal manner, especially when at a winter breakfast it meets its fellow, the russet buckwheat cake. Bread with honey to cover it from the same stalk is double good fortune. It is not black, either, but nut-brown, and belongs to the same class of goods as Herrick's

"Nut-brown mirth and russet wit."

How the bees love it! And they bring the delicious odor of the blooming plant to the hive with them, so that, in the moist, warm twilight is redolent with the perfume of buckwheat.

Yet, evidently, it is not the perfume of any flower that attracts the bees; they pay no attention to the sweet-scented lilac, or to heliotrope, but work upon sumach, silkweed, and the hateful snapdragon. In September they are hard-pressed, and do well if they pick up enough sweet to pay the running expenses of their establishment. The purple asters and the golden-rod are about all that remain to them.

Bees will go three or four miles in quest of honey, but it is a great advantage to move the hive near the good pasturage, as has been the custom from the earliest times in the Old World. . . . It is the making of the wax that costs with the bee. As with the poet, the form, the receptacle, gives him more trouble than the sweet that fills it, though, to be sure, there is always more or less empty comb in both cases. The honey he can have for the gathering, but the wax he must make himself—must evolve from his own inner consciousness. When wax is to be made, the wax-makers fill themselves with honey and retire into their chamber for private meditation; it is like some solemn religious rite; they take hold of hands, or hook themselves together in long lines that hang in festoons from the top of the hive, and wait for the miracle to transpire. After about twenty-four hours, their patience is rewarded, the honey is turned into wax, minute scales of which are secreted from between the rings of the abdomen of each bee; this is taken off, and from it the comb is built up. It is calculated that about twenty-five pounds of honey are used in elaborating one pound of comb, to say nothing of the

time that is lost. Hence the importance, in an economical point of view, of a device by which the honey is extracted and the comb returned intact to the bees. But honey without the comb is the perfume without the rose—it is sweet, merely, and soon degenerates into candy. Half the delectableness is in breaking down these frail and exquisite walls yourself, and tasting the nectar before it has lost its freshness by contact with the air. Then, the comb is a sort of shield or foil that prevents the tongue from being overwhelmed by first shock of the sweet.

Hope's Quiet Hour.

This We Also Pray For.

For we rejoice, when we are weak, and ye are strong: this we also pray for, even your perfecting.—2 Cor. xiii. 9 (R. V.).

"Lovest thou Me? True love is strong,
Ready to work and suffer long.
Patient and meek, she fills her tasks,
And no reward but love she asks."

I have lately been reading Hamilton Wright Mabie's "William Shakespeare," and notice that he says of Helena (the heroine of "All's Well that Ends Well"), that Coleridge thought her Shakespeare's loveliest creation. He also speaks of Isabella (the heroine of "Measure for Measure") in this way: "Isabella's stainless and incorruptible chastity invests purity with a kind of radiance, and she finds her place in the little company of adorable women in whom Shakespeare's creative imagination realized and personified the eternal feminine qualities." And yet Helena seemed careless of her husband's holiness and honor, if only she could—by fair means or foul—win his affection; and Isabella, though scrupulously particular about her own white robes, was eager to buy her brother's pardon at the expense of the whiteness of other souls. Thank God, there are many thousands of women in the world who are not only trying to walk with God themselves, but who rejoice when others are strong, and who pray constantly for the perfecting of those they love.

Only God can measure the influence one soul may have on another. Only God knows how many men have echoed the excuse of Adam: "The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." It was the woman God had given him to help him in his upward climb who tempted him successfully. He might have resisted the temptation, certainly, and so might other men; but woman has much power for good or evil, and power means responsibility. How high does her ambition soar? Is she satisfied if she can win her husband's affection, or does she earnestly pray for his perfecting? Is she content to keep jealous watch over her own white garments, or does she care about the sin of her brothers and sisters? Tennyson's "Enid" could not endure the fact that her husband loved her more than he loved his duty. His boundless love for her made him forgetful of the work and responsibility of his high position. No wonder she said that she would rather gird his armour on him, and ride with him to battle, than know that he was wasting his strength and time. No wonder she felt that it would be better for him if she were "laid in the dark earth," rather than weaken him by her loved companionship.

Then there is that other lovely woman pictured by Tennyson in "The Holy Grail." While living a hidden life of