

FOR THE CANADIAN BEE JOURNAL.

Standard for Italian Bees.

ALMOST a year ago the International Convention at Albany attempted to fix a standard for Italian bees. They, perhaps, pretty much all agreed that it was desirable to have one; but what should that standard be? They had a rather stormy time of it, but finally settled upon the following:—Italian bees must adhere to the combs when properly handled, and not cluster about or rush around and fall to the ground. They must have three bands of a color ranging from golden yellow to leather color; they must be quiet when well handled; and, in time of scarcity, must place their honey in a compact shape.

Schedule marking in a scale of one hundred points:—

Comb building.....	10 points.
Honey-gathering qualities.....	40 "
Prolificness.....	20 "
Wintering.....	15 "
Gentleness.....	10 "
Color.....	5 "

Just here we may pause and enquire, why do we want a standard at all? We can consider the subject better if the object is understood. There are about three objects to be attained. We want a standard, 1st as a test of purity. What are the marks of a pure Italian bee? 2nd. As a gauge of quality. We want to breed the best bee, and hence we want to know what points are desirable in a bee for business, and their relative value. 3rd. We want a standard for judging bees exhibited at fairs.

As a standard of purity, the one adopted is perhaps correct, but incomplete. They should have put it "three or more bands," etc. As a criterion of quality, it is vague and questionable. For judging bees at fairs it is utterly impracticable.

It is noticeable that in the schedule of purity, color is given only five. Yet we judge of their purity chiefly by color, and we breed to that more than to anything else. The different strains are known by color, and it is vehemently claimed that the best qualities accompany this or that color of bee. So far as intrinsic value is concerned, there is no reason why color should score anything. But as a test of purity alone it is worth more than five points, and why it should be rated so low I do not understand. True, what color of strain is best is a disputed point; but in declaring that they must have three bands ranging in color from golden yellow to leather color, it was intended to satisfy all claims.

Wintering is given fifteen points. Why? Other things being equal, won't one bee winter as well as another? That is my belief. Some will build up more rapidly than others in the spring; but that is due to the same traits that make them better honey gatherers. Either one of these excellences always accompanies the other; and the trait or traits I would sum up in the term "thrifths." That and color should be given about equal prominence. Gentleness should give way to quietness. The scoring thus would stand about as follows:—

Color and markings.....	30 points.
Thrift.....	30 "
Prolificness.....	20 "
Quietness.....	10 "
Gentleness.....	5 "
Comb building.....	5 "

On judging by this schedule, the different points will have to be carefully balanced. For thrift and prolificness I am not afraid to put my hybrids beside anybody's Italians. They are, in fact, better breeders take the season through. They do not crowd the brood nest with honey, and they breed later in the fall as a rule.

The markings need to be carefully noted. Regular hybrids resemble Italians so closely in color as often to deceive the most expert. They generally have the three yellow bands, but not always so clear and so plainly marked. Color and markings must be very pronounced to guard against error in this respect. Quietness is an excellent determining point. Hybrids may adhere to the combs pretty well at first except as one darts into your eye now and then; but if kept disturbed very long will go to running around and crowding into the corners. Italians are distinguishable by their generally quiet demeanor.

But assuming that a standard is or should be settled upon, what will it amount to after all? Breeders will still go on breeding to color, advertising, puffing—aye, and selling too—their stock, paying comparatively little attention to anything in the schedule, yet honestly claiming everything. Sometime, perhaps, the different strains, with their peculiar points and claims, may be clearly defined and recognized. Whether the points of value obviously accompany any one type, or the difference be so slight that every strain may have its advocates, color and markings, and possibly size of the bee, will ever remain the standards of judgment and value. If any one type is really superior to all others, beekeepers will probably find it out, sooner or later, and that strain will acquire the