

The Past and Present of Bee-Keeping.

By G. M. Doolittle.

Having occasion, lately, to look over an old diary to find something that was called in question, I ran across an item which was written by a friend to prove that bee-keeping was always to be a lucrative business, which item read as follows:

"Notwithstanding the great demand for bees, and the immense quantities of honey that are produced from year to year, the amount largely increasing each year, I do not see any reason to think that overstocking or overproduction is a factor that need trouble us in this generation. At any rate, I don't see that the price of nice honey is any lower than years ago."

This was written in 1881, or about 12 years ago, and in reading there was a strange sound to it; strange not only from the standpoint of 1896, but from the standpoint of 1869, as well, at which time I commenced to keep bees. I fell to wondering if "this generation" that existed 12 years ago had passed away, for surely, if I read our present bee-literature aright, both "overstocking" and "overproduction" are causing a wail to come from nearly every hand. Hear Mr. Hutchinson telling in the Review how the forests have been cut off, the swamps been dried and the fence-corners cleaned out, till the flora which we had a few years ago—which invited the little busy bee to a sumptuous feast—was becoming nearly as scarce as the trails of the Indian. Then hear Dr. Miller and others asking if the good old times will ever come again. All of which point to the fact, that whether overstocked or not, from some reason the average bee-keepers does not secure the average good crops of honey that they did years ago.

Then look at the talk of low prices, the planning to form a honey-association, and the censure of our commission-men, who realize only 10 cents a pound for nice white comb honey to their consigners, where they sell at 14 cents, and ask yourself if overproduction is not figuring in this matter of low prices. If it is not overproduction that makes the low prices for honey, what is it? Commission-men were not formerly criticised for charging 10 per cent., or that was the usual charge during the early seventies. All must admit that the market price of honey is much lower than it formerly was, and when 10 per cent. is taken from a low price it hurts the honey pro-

ducer much more than it does to have the same per cent. taken from a high price. Small honey-producers can sell their honey to advantage about home, in neighboring villages, but the large producer must always seek a market for his produce in the large cities, and the prices obtained in these cities has very much to do with home prices; hence the "market price" is what we have to look to in determining whether overproduction has had anything to do with the matter of prices.

I commenced bee-keeping 27 years ago the present spring, and at that time honey in six pound boxes, having glass on two sides, brought 25 cents per pound, delivered at the railroad, while in the fall of 1869 I was offered by a party from New York city, 50 cents per pound for the little I had, the advance of 100 per cent. being caused by a very poor season during 1869, so that the supply was very much less than the demand.

The season of 1870 being an extra good one, the price fell back to 25 cents again, at which price I sold my crop of that year, as well as that of 1871 and 1872. Owing to the loss of bees during the preceeding winter, the supply was insufficient again, so that in the fall of 1873 I sold at 27 cents, taking my whole crop light and dark, together, while in 1874 I received 28½ cents per pound for the whole of my crop. Those prices brought more persons into the business which, with but little loss in wintering, caused honey to drop, so that 26 cents was the price I obtained in 1875. while in 1876 the supply was again adequate to the demand, and 25 cents was the selling price.

That the readers of the American Bee Journal may know something of the past, without going over the matter for themselves, I have carefully looked up the market report as given in our bee-papers, and here give an average of quotations as I found them. For 1874, 28 to 30 cents; 1875, 27 to 30; 1876, 23 to 25; 1877, 20 to 22; 1878, 12 to 16; 1879, 20 to 22; 1880, 18 to 20; 1881, 18 to 22; 1882, 22 to 25; 1883, 18 to 20; 1884, 17 to 19; 1885, 15 to 18; 1886, 14 to 16; and during the past 10 years the prices have ranged between those of 1886 and the 18 to 15 cents of the present. Previous to 1871 I fail to find any quotations in any of the bee-papers which I have.

From the above it will seem that honey quotations at present, and for the past 10 years, are fully 100 per cent. lower than they were in the early seventies. Another thing which is, that honey in such shape as was sold from 1853 to 1873 at 25 cents or above, per pound, would not net to-day over 6 to 8 cents in any market. To bring from 18 to 15 cents now, honey must be very fancy, in