

Methods of Securing and Managing Swarms.

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The season of 18'6, in point of swarming has been a remarkable one. The bees lightly set at naught all the accepted canons of bee-keepers respecting that function. Lack of great strength had little restraining influence, and abundance of room, even in the brood-nest, none at all.

Swarming began the last of May, continuing just a month, during a very moderate flow of nectar, ending abruptly when that flow was at its best at the height of basswood bloom, though even then the secretion of nectar was very light. Not more than one or two per cent. of the colonies did anything at all in the supers before casting swarms, and many did not wait to fill the combs in the brood-nest. Under such circumstances it is safe to say that it would not be wise to cease efforts to determine the best methods of securing and managing swarms, on account of any bright prospect of speedy success in breeding out the swarming instinct, or even of any satisfactory invention that will practically allay it. Indeed it is a very serious question whether if this object could be secured in either of these ways, it would be satisfactory to more than a very small percentage of apiaries.

There are always more or less losses from various causes to be made good, and there is no cheaper or more satisfactory way of doing this than through the increase by swarming. The loss of even a few colonies each winter during a series of unfavorable years, where there is little or no swarming with occasional failure of queens and lack of stores, often best met by the uniting of colonies, sometimes makes the aggregate reduction in numbers rather startling. Then the serious item of the rearing of queens comes in, which must be done artificially if increase is secured without swarming. No doubt as good queens can be secured in this way as those obtained from cells built and cared for under the swarming impulse, but how few, comparatively, are the apiarists who have the aptitude, skill and punctuality required to do it. Nineteen out of twenty, for one reason or another, would fail, and in these times of financial stringency and uncertain honey crops, they cannot afford to purchase.

Besides, it can hardly yet be safely denied that bees receive an impetus to work by finding themselves in their newly-pitched tent, destitute of brood and provisions.

That there are some weighty objections to swarming, if it could be safely repressed is not to be denied, but these may be reduced to two, namely the time and labor required for watching and hiving swarms and the danger of loss from swarms absconding. Some may hold that undesirable increase is another and more serious one still, but one should be easily able to obviate that, and, indeed, thereby reap a decided advantage. It is only a question of the disposal of the brood in the hive from which the swarms issue, and that is generally, especially in early swarming, very valuable. To accomplish this, it is not necessary, as might be inferred from some discussions of the subject, that the brood, when hatched or before, should be returned to the identical colony that produced it; indeed, it may usually be used with decidedly greater advantage in other ways. There are always at the opening of the honey season some colonies that are not up to the strength required for the best work in the supers. Let the hives full of rapidly hatching brood be distributed among such deficient colonies as fast as they can be obtained, first driving out of each all the bees left behind, in the hive which with its swarm is, or is to be, put on the stand. Thus, in a few days, if swarming continues, all may be got into excellent condition.

Frequently, also, there are colonies out of condition on account of being possessed of superannuated or otherwise worthless queens. Destroy such queens as fast as hives of brood can be obtained, and place one on each now queenless colony, and in a few days it will be rejuvenated both in its strength and its queen. In some of these operations the advantages of a horizontally-divisible brood-chamber are especially apparent, for if one wishes to help two colonies with the brood of one it can be done without extra labor, or if one wishes to rear a few surplus queens to meet emergencies, without driving out the bees remaining after the swarm issues, by simply dividing the brood chamber, he may secure two queens as easily and as cheaply as one. Other ways of disposing of the brood thus obtained through swarming will occur to everyone in practice, so that soon instead of deploring its abundance one will be likely to wish for more.

There is one principle that is valuable in this connection which I should recall before passing, and that is, that a colony having a laying queen of the current year's rearing