

Will the Bee-Keeping of the Future Differ From That of the Past ?

(Read at the Ontario B. K. Convention.)

All well-informed bee-keepers know something of the bee-keeping of the past. They know that in early times bees were kept in log "gums," or in straw hives. Next came the box hive made of boards. In those days there were no specialists; at least, not in this country, and as we understand the word. Probably not every farmer kept bees, but a large share of them did, and in the fall the heaviest and lightest colonies were brimstoned. Then came the grandest invention of which modern bee-culture can boast—the movable comb hive. With the birth of this hive came the specialists. Then followed the bellows bee-smoker, the honey extractor, the section honey box, comb foundation, and queen excluder metal, and new journals sprung up and disseminated apicultural knowledge broadcast over the land, and bee-culture soon attained to the dignity of a profession, in which ignorance, superstition and slipshod management were supplanted by scientific knowledge and positive and accurate methods that brought certain and profitable results. Our country was in just the right condition to bring the best results from bee-keeping. It was not a howling wilderness in which there could be found no white clover, no orchards with their blush of bloom in the spring time and no fields white with buckwheat in the autumn; neither had it reached that stage where all of the grand lindens had been made into broom handles, barrel heads or buggy boxes, the hedge rows supplanted by the barbed wire fence, and the swamps once gorgeous with the purple and gold of autumnal flowers had been drained and converted into meadows of timothy. Then there were great forests that acted as meteorological balance wheels. They prevented floods in the spring, and draughts in the summer. Under these conditions bee-keeping flourished until the greatest problem connected with business was the disposal of its product. Farmers dropped the business because they could buy their honey more cheaply than they could produce it.

But a change has come in many parts of country. Good crops are the exception. I know of no reason for this change except that the natural honey pastures are cut

away and the artificial resources are not sufficient to make of the business a profitable calling. Added to this is the summer drouth that results from the clearing away of the forests. A forest is like a sponge for holding water. The earth is shaded and covered with a thick coating of leaves that acts as a mulch. Then there are fallen and decayed logs, brush and tree tops, all of which absorb water and retard its flow. The amount of water that a forest will absorb and hold is astonishing. Slowly the water evaporates or soaks into the earth to reappear in the shape of springs. With cleared fields the water is off for the sea with a rush, and when the July sun pours down its rays there is no water with which to moisten the parched, bare earth. The time will come when irrigation will be needed in places where it is not dreamed of. Man will be obliged to store up artificially the water that nature once stored for him before he destroyed her reservoirs.

I have always advocated speciality, and I still believe that the highest success can be hoped for when only one business is attempted, but there are many localities now in which I should not dare to depend for a living upon bee-keeping alone. Unpleasant as may be the admission, it seems to be true that in many localities bee-keeping as a speciality is doomed. Letter after letter comes to me saying "I have no fault to find with the Review, but three years with no honey crop are more than I can stand, and I am going out of the business." Some mention four and even five failures in succession. The trouble is drouth and a lack of blossoms. I am not a croaker, and I also know that, as a rule, the best time to buy is when everybody else is selling; that the time to embark in a business is when others are abandoning it, but not so if the natural conditions are against the business. There are probably localities where bee-keeping as a speciality will always be a success. In mountainous regions where the forests cannot be cleared away nor the posies plowed up; in Florida where there are orange groves and there is no inducement to cut down the saw-palmetto or the mangrove growing with their roots in the tide-water, or those localities where the alfalfa sends its roots so deep into the earth that it can smile at dry weather; in these favored spots, and in the newer portions of the country, bee-keeping as a speciality can be followed with every hope of abundant success; but those localities where the forests have been cut away, and the swamps drained, and fields of corn, wheat, rye, oats, potatoes and grass stretch away mile after mile, it