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Preparing for Winter

"What! preparing your bees for winter, so early, Doolittle?"

"I thought I would pack and get a few ready along as I had time, Mr. Brown. There is no prospect of any more surplus honey this year, and, as I have all my sections off, it will be better to get the bees ready for winter now than to wait longer about the matter."

"Why? I thought November, or the first of December was early enough to do this work?"

"Well, it is better to do it then than not at all; but disturbing the bees thus late in the season is not conducive to good wintering."

"Why not?"

"On the first cold weather in October the bees form their cluster for winter, and go into a partly quiescent state after having surrounded the cluster with honey near at hand, so it is within easy reach of them, and all disturbing of the hive after that causes them to break cluster, and go into an unnatural excitement that tends to throw them out of their normal condition. But were this not so,

why should the packing of bees, and preparing them for winter be put off till the cold, snowy or sloppy weather of early winter?"

"I do not know that I can give any good reason, come to think of it seriously, and I believe you are right in getting them ready as soon as the honey harvest is past, and the supers are off the hives—at least I will try a part of mine that way as soon as I get home. I see you do not pack very heavily."

"No. I learned some years ago that two or three inches of packing proved better than more."

"Why should that be? Would not six inches of chaff or sawdust keep out more cold than two or three?"

"That would look reasonable; and if the packing kept dry, I presume the thicker amount would answer as well. But a large amount of packing seems to get damp, so that the sun does not warm it up, and dry it out, as does less, and so the walls of the hive remain cold and damp—yes, oftentimes, almost wet—and the bees do not seem to do as well on this account, as they do where a little more cold works through in extremely cold weather, and the sun warms and dries things out whenever it shines."

"Have you any special means of allowing the bees to pass through the combs?"