A Observatory Hive.

My second season's experience.

It may be in the memory of some readers of the B. B. J. that an account of a season's experience with an observatory hive was published in February last. A few notes of what was seen and done the following summer are now supplied, and to avoid repitition I beg to refer any one interested to my previous contribution, page 66 and 76 of the British Bee Journal for 1900. (C.B.J. pages 177 and 211.)

As a change on the Ligurians, I established a colony of English bees in the middle of May, headed by a very dark queen of the previous year. They prospered and multiplied and soon started what may be called trial queen cells – those that resemble acorn cups, and are built on the face of the comb. They seem to afford the bees much pleasure; the workers are constantly busy on them, but the cells hardly ever come to anything. Of a kindred nature are the obviously futile short holes made by rabbits, or the nests that some birds are in the habit of building before they settle down to regular work. Wrens especially build such nests, and it is said that the cock bird inhabits one while the young are being raised in the family brood-nest. Three queen cells of the usual type soon appeared and at about the time of hatching the bees made an effort to swarm. The queen, however, failed to find the exit. She showed great excitement for a while, but by evening all was quiet. Next morning one queen cell was in course of being demolished, and the following day the other two disappeared. I could not see that the queen took any part in their destruction, but she may have done so during the night. Six sections only were completed. By the end of August the colony had become uninteresting and as the bees would not work on fresh foundation, I transferred them to winter quarters.

I could detect no racial distinction in the habits of these English bees as compared with their more showy Italian cousins, except that, as usual, the capping of their sections was both smoother and thicker, and in consequence of the latter quality it looked whiter. The queen was brisker in laying than her predecessor, her average time in depositing the egg and getting clear of the cell being 18 seconds as against 30. On the other hand she was more deliberate in the preliminary cell examination so that the total difference was not very remarkable. My conclusion as to the number of eggs deposited by queens in twenty-four hours remains unaltered, for the reasons previously given. This queen also, ween possible turned her head downward in laying. Her eggs as far as observed were always laid singly, one in a cell.

Fancy combs were again built on the glass with the same pleasing regularity, and in one of these combs cells I had the good fortune to be able to watch the gradual development of a drone bug into the perfect insect. The cell was nearly horizontal along the glass, and was open to view from its mouth to a point a little above where the rhombs angle off to form the base. The grub when I first saw it had been sealed in, and was still as far as I could see, in a state of rest; in appearance it was merely larval. The process of transformation was so very gradual that it would be useless to attempt to describe it in detail. It can be more accurately studied by any one who will take the trouble to uncap cells at various ages and examine them with a pocket lens than is possible when observation has to be made