

For THE CANADIAN BEE JOURNAL.

The Different Races of Bees and My Experience With Them.

The following interesting paper written by Mr. Ila Michener, of Low Banks, Ont., was read at the Welland Co. Bee-keepers' Association.

On this subject, as well as all others, we must adhere to the exact truth. And I could have no other motive, having ceased to rear queens for sale, for they have become so cheap as to render queen rearing unprofitable.

My experience with bees dates back forty years at least. Away back in the dim light of the early dawn of my existence, I can just remember the long row of straw hives containing Grandpa Kinnard's bees. Having always been an enthusiast with bees (my greatest earthly happiness consisting in the care of them) I can remember with joy my boyhood days, when in the golden time of autumn, father and I used to hunt wild bees in the woods, and we found many rich swarms.

During my recent years of sorrow, caused by the death of my wife, and the cares of a large family of children, what could I have done without the bees to cheer me?

Black or native bees were the first we had of course, obtained from the woods; at first kept in box hives, but while a boy I used to construct hives with doors and drawers and glass, so that I could observe the bees at work, but having no text book then and no bee journal, my education in bee lore was limited.

In the summer of 1865 we obtained our first movable frame hive, and then began my study of bees in earnest, having yet nine years experience with Black, I think I can give a truthful testimony.

Black bees are the most irritable of all the different races I have tried. They do not like one to approach the front of their hive, neither can they be handled without smoke, but they are very easily subdued with it, and made as submissive as flies. Indeed they are easily frightened out of the hive, which is a good quality where one is extracting from an upper story, for a little smoke will cause them to leave it altogether, but in taking off comb honey, one has to be very careful not to get them frightened, or they will rush to the cells, uncapping the beautiful comb honey, in order to fill themselves and spoiling its appearance greatly. Black bees are not very good at protecting their combs from moth, but the careful bee-keepers will remove all combs not covered by them, and therefore the moth trouble is not of much conse-

quence. One good quality of Black bees is they do not cap their honey close on the honey as Italians do, but cap it a little raised, that is the cell is not quite filled, so that all their comb honey appears more white and beautiful, even buckwheat honey. They are good comb builders and enter the sections more readily than the Italians, and in a season of plenty they will store as much honey as any other race, but in a season of scarcity, or when they have to fly a great distance, they are far behind Italians. They will work on buckwheat more readily than Italians, but they cannot work on red clover to any extent, and they are great robbers.

In the summer of 1874 I procured my first Italian queen from Mr. Dean, River Star, Medina Co., Ohio, and another that same season from Mr. Alley, Wenham, Mass. I afterwards obtained queens from Mr. Blakeslee, Mr. Nellis, and several from A. I. Root, including an imported queen direct from Italy. We found the Italians far more gentle than the Blacks, but more vindictive when badly handled, also that hybrids or a cross between the two races, were apt to possess the vindictiveness of the Italians, and the irritableness of the Blacks. But the Italians as a rule are far superior to the Blacks, more easily manipulated, sometimes without smoke or protector, and taking one year with another, they will gather more honey. Yes, sometimes double the amount, for they can work on red clover readily in dry seasons when the heads are small and always on the second crops, and they will fly greater distances than the blacks. They are excellent to protect their hives from robbers, and from the ravages of the moth, and will adhere nicely and evenly to their combs (their queens being very easily found) and properly managed by the aid of foundation they will store more comb honey. Their best quality of all, which most writers have overlooked, is, they will breed up early in the spring, and when the honey flow commences they will cease breeding so profusely and bend all their energies to gathering in the precious nectar. Even the queen seems to understand it all, and will walk leisurely over the combs, apparently proud of the great wealth of the colony, not trying to lay drone eggs in every place possible and wanting to swarm. Bear in mind I mean pure Italians not hybrids.

In the summer of 1881 we obtained from our esteemed friend, D. A. Jones, of Beeton, two select tested Syrian or Holy Land queens, reared on one of his isolated islands in the Georgian Bay, and although I have been sorry a thousand times, I never said anything against them publicly. But I feel it my duty to say