

The Bees of the Old World.

IF WE draw a diagonal line, beginning at Genoa, Italy, and ending at Tripoli, Africa, across the Mediterranean, we find the bees east of this line inclining to the yellow race—Italy, Greece, Turkey and Egypt having the banded bees, while Tripoli, Tunis, Algeria, Morocco, Spain and France have the black bee. Just as the banded Italian differs from its fellow-insect in Egypt, so does the black of France from that of Tunis and Tripoli. On the north of the Mediterranean the Alps are the limits, while on the southern shore the Libyan Desert forms a barrier. Again, if we compare all countries where Mohammedism has had its sway for any length of time, we find those countries lying like a big crescent, one tip beginning at the Pyrenees, the concave line running down below Italy, and mounting again to the Bosphorus, including Greece. These have hives lying horizontally, and, as a general rule, worked more humanely than those in the region of the "cross." Italy forms the vertical axis; the hives stand upright, and the bees are sulphured every autumn, to take away all wax and honey. In southern Europe the bar-frame hives are finding their way with great difficulty.

In the south of France the bee-keepers (or, rather the keepers of bees, for there are none that are real apiculturists) possess between five and one hundred hives, which they keep in long square boxes about three feet high and one foot broad. The top is nailed with a board, while the bottom is open, and put simply on a flat rock or stone, the unevenness of which forms different flying holes. Some are also kept in hollow tree trunks with big flat stones on the top, on an inclined plane for the rain to run down, and, at the same time, by its weight to keep the hive from falling in case of wind. Generally they place them against a wall to shelter them against the north and west winds. They expose them to the south and east.

It is a very curious sight to see a number of those hives standing upright and irregular, just as a flat rock may be right or left, up or down, in crooked trunks, with huge stones on top. I confess the apiaries away in Palestine or on the borders of the Nile, or in the wild recesses of the Atlas Mountains in Algeria, do not present such a novel and altogether savage aspect as does such an apiary in a civilized country, where everything is flourishing except apiculture. How often since I have been wandering about the Provencal Alps, and finding such neglected apiaries, have I put the question to others as well as to myself, "Why is apiculture

so low in such a beautiful country abounding in fruit trees, red and white clover, thyme, rosemary, heather, and a deal of other plants too varied to enumerate? They are free from taxes. The only answer I invariably got was, "The cruel winter kills so many bees, thus discouraging the farmers." I came across an old bee-book, written by an "Abbe Della-rocca," in Syria, in the Grecian Archipelago, and printed in Paris in 1790. The book is very ably written—or, rather, the three volumes—and it seems that, more than a century ago, the bees were treated here just the same as they are now; and the desolate priest says the cause of neglected apiculture in France is because the noblemen had a certain right on bee hives; and, second, when the farmer could not pay the heavy taxes asked for the treasury, the tax-gatherers would take away his hives to fill up the sum. Disgusted with such robbing they finally gave up bee-keeping. Since then the French Revolution has put a stop to all these abuses; but, still, apiculture has not come to its bloom. It was inevitable that this discouragement should then become so general that a century has not sufficed wholly to wipe away the bitter feelings that have so fast taken root in the French country people.

The way they now work the hives is as primitive as can be imagined. The swarms are lodged in a box or trunk of a tree, as above described, and left alone. In autumn all hives are visited and 75 per cent. are left untouched "for seed" as they call it. The other 25 are sulphured, and the combs, with the honey, sold to dealers who come yearly to buy all they can. The 75 are the stock left to swarm the following spring. Such hives are full of honey and pollen, and are capable of giving good swarms. This part is very humane, but not very remunerative to the owner. If the 75 have wintered safely, a good stock and strong apiary follow next spring. They never (but in a very few cases) take out a part of the honey. In consequence of such treatment they want no smokers, no veils, and, generally speaking, no bee-keeping utensils. The honey and wax merchants are experts in this kind of apiculture, and take the hives destined to be sulphured to death, and weigh them. They then deduct the possible weight of the empty hive, and pay for the wax and honey per pound. They scrape out comb, honey and dead bees, and put the whole into wooden tubs, taking as much as 150 lbs. of comb. The hives are then covered, and they thus go around from one apiary to another. When the wagon is well loaded they drive home. The comb is now broken