

CHAPTER VII.

The Cycle of the Bee-year in British Columbia.

Since bees pass the cold days of winter in a semi-dormant condition, flying freely only on fine sunny days when the thermometer is at least 48 degrees in the shade, one is tempted to consider that the bee-year will start with the carrying-in of the first pollen, which occurs in the coast regions of the Province towards the end of February—in Victoria as early as the 22nd, and in the Dry Belt a few weeks later; March 12th in the Okanagan. As the probable date draws nigh, even the oldest bee-keepers kindle with enthusiasm and watch for the first bee that is carrying the brilliant-hued pellets on her hind legs. Not only does he rejoice over the prospect of once more being active with a pleasant part of his life, but when he sees bee after bee alighting with her load he knows almost to a certainty that brood-raising has been started and all is well with the queen. If, however, he observes a hive where no pollen is being carried in, while others are busy, he is suspicious that the queen has died in the course of the winter. He makes note of all such colonies and at the first favourable opportunity, that is a day when the sun shines brightly, the air is quiet, and the temperature is comfortably warm, rapidly learns whether the colony is queen right or not. Opening the hive, he chooses a frame in the middle of the cluster, looks into the cells to discover the presence or absence of eggs or larvae. When these are found he investigates no further, but if they are wanting he will inspect the balance of the frames. Failing to find signs of brood, he will then look for the queen, an easy task at this time of the year. If she be located, all is satisfactory; if not, the case is very suspicious, but it does not do to assume she is actually missing. But if on examination a week later the same conditions exist, then the colony should be combined with one that has a queen. (See chapter 16.)

ESSENTIALS IN SPRING.

The most essential features of a hive when pollen begins to be carried in are the sure presence of a queen, lots of bees, and plenty of stores—that is, honey or its substitute, sugar syrup. The lack of a queen means certain death to the colony in a few weeks. A hive weak in bees will develop strength very slowly, or dwindle out of existence, while one without stores may die of starvation or do little more than hold its own during the spring months.

The food-supply is largely under the control of the bee-keeper, and at one time spring feeding with sugar syrup was strongly advocated, but in recent years it is considered that the best time to feed, when feeding happens to be necessary, for spring consumption is in the autumn of the previous year. So the modern bee-keeper, in September or October, begins to put his bees in shape for the honey-flow in July by making certain that there are at least 25 lb. of honey, or the equivalent in sugar syrup, in every colony.

A SIMPLE DIARY.

The bee-year from the apiarist's point of view begins, therefore, in September. But since we have made a little progress with the spring conditions we may as well continue. Every beginner in bee-keeping should keep a diary for the first year, at least as a guide for the future. It need not be in any way elaborate, just a sheet of note-paper lying convenient on which to make brief jottings like these:—

February 22—Willow blooms; pollen carried in.

March 13—A few dandelions; plentiful April 7.

March 15—First examination of hives; temperature, 65 degrees.

April 12—Early pears.

April 18—Early plums; pollen plentiful.

May 3—Nectar and pollen above immediate needs.