

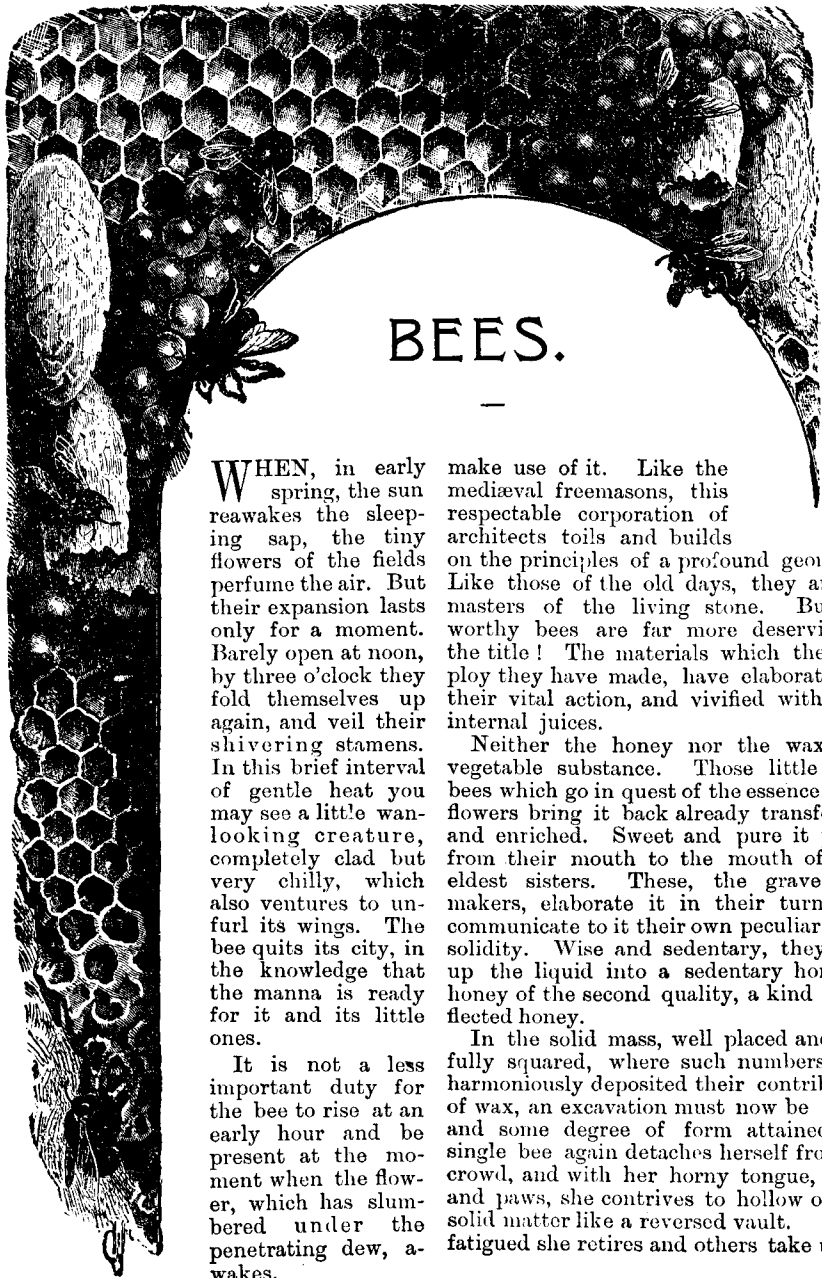
# PLEASANT HOURS

A PAPER FOR OUR YOUNG FOLK

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## BEES.

WHEN, in early spring, the sun reawakes the sleeping sap, the tiny flowers of the fields perfume the air. But their expansion lasts only for a moment. Barely open at noon, by three o'clock they fold themselves up again, and veil their shivering stamens. In this brief interval of gentle heat you may see a little wan-looking creature, completely clad but very chilly, which also ventures to unfurl its wings. The bee quits its city, in the knowledge that the manna is ready for it and its little ones.

It is not a less important duty for the bee to rise at an early hour and be present at the moment when the flower, which has slumbered under the penetrating dew, awakes.

But in the noonday heat will she remain inactive? The burning sun and the dry air have withered up the blossoms of the plain. But those of the woods, sheltered by the fresh cool shades, present their cups brimming over; those of the murmurous brooks, and silent and deep marshes, are then instinct with vitality. The forget-me-not dreams, and weeps tiny tears of nectar.

Let us observe the bees in their home. They share with the wasps, the ants, and all the sociable instincts the disinterested life of aunts and sisters who devote themselves entirely to an adoptive maternity.

But from these analogous peoples the bee differs in the necessity it is under, of creating a national idol, the love of which impels it to work.

Then, at bottom, the government will be democratic. No one commands. The city is not built or organized by the entire people, but by a special class, a kind of guild or corporation. While the mob of bees seeks the common nourishment abroad, certain much larger bees, the wax-makers, elaborate the wax, prepare it, shape it, and skilfully

make use of it. Like the mediæval freemasons, this respectable corporation of architects toils and builds on the principles of a profound geometry. Like those of the old days, they are the masters of the living stone. But our worthy bees are far more deserving of the title! The materials which they employ they have made, have elaborated by their vital action, and vivified with their internal juices.

Neither the honey nor the wax is a vegetable substance. Those little light bees which go in quest of the essence of the flowers bring it back already transformed and enriched. Sweet and pure it passes from their mouth to the mouth of their eldest sisters. These, the grave wax-makers, elaborate it in their turn, and communicate to it their own peculiar life—solidity. Wise and sedentary, they work up the liquid into a sedentary honey, a honey of the second quality, a kind of reflected honey.

In the solid mass, well placed and skilfully squared, where such numbers have harmoniously deposited their contribution of wax, an excavation must now be made, and some degree of form attained. A single bee again detaches herself from the crowd, and with her horny tongue, teeth, and paws, she contrives to hollow out the solid matter like a reversed vault. When fatigued she retires and others take up the

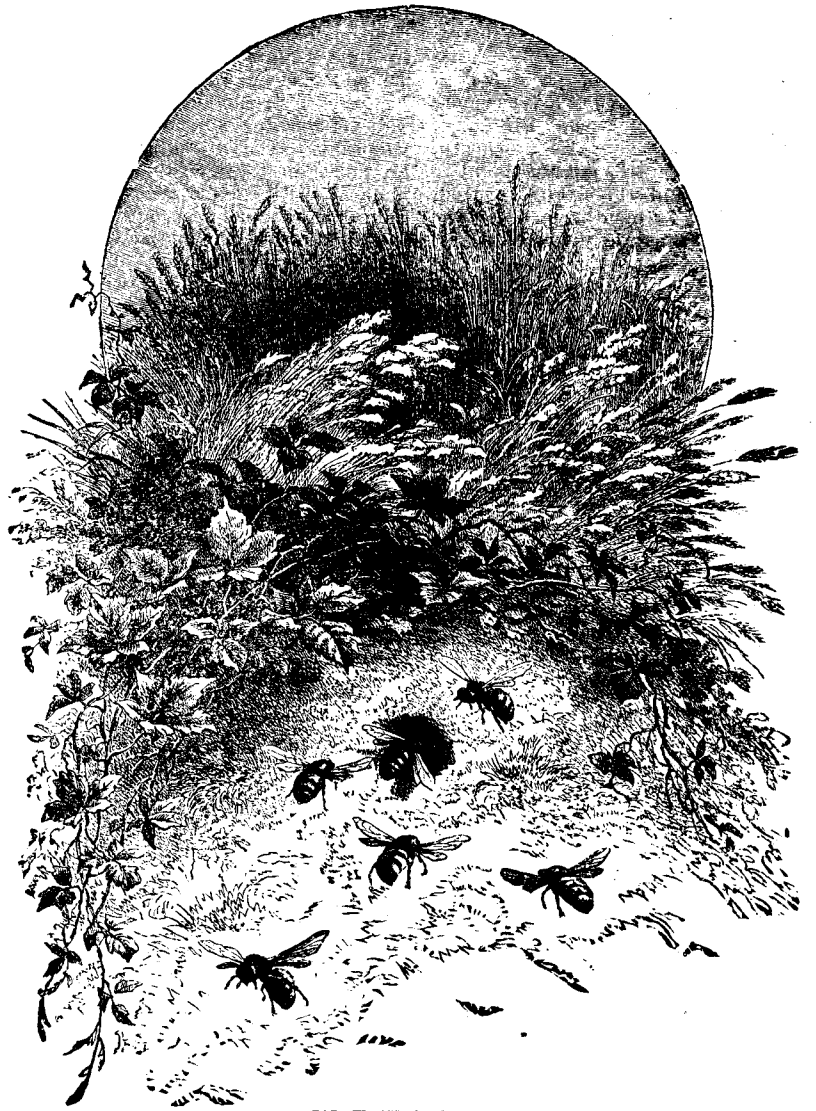
work of modelling. In couples they shape off and thin the walls. The only point to be remembered is a skilful management of their thickness. But how do they appre-

ciate this? Who or what warns them the moment a stroke too much would break an opening in the partition? They never take the trouble to make a tour of their work and examine it from the other side. Their eyes are useless to them; they judge of everything by their antennæ, which are their plumb-line and compass. They feel about, and by an infinitely delicate touch, recognize the elasticity of the wax, perhaps by the sound it renders, and determine whether it is safe to excavate it, or whether they must stop short and not push their mining operations further.

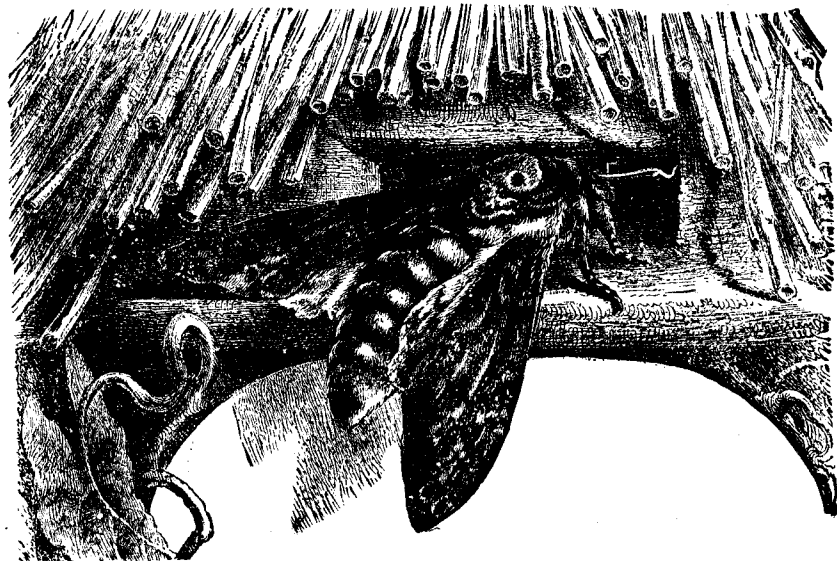
The building, as everybody knows, is destined to serve two ends. The cells are generally used in summer as cradles, in winter as magazines of pollen and honey—a granary of abundance for the republic. Each vessel is closed and sealed with a waxen lid, a *cloture* religiously respected by all the people who take for their subsistence only a single comb—and when that comb is finished, pass on to another, but always with extreme reserve and sobriety.

The combs are pierced in the centre by corridors or little tunnels which do away with the necessity of traversing two sides. Economists in everything, the bees are specially economical of time.

Secondly, the form of the cells is by no



IN THE FIELDS.



AN ENEMY—THE BEE MOTH.