

THE ENEMIES OF BEE CULTURE

(By Wm. L. Couper)

Probably the very first question the man who thinks of starting as a bee-keeper asks is, "How much can I make out of it?" Probably there is no question of apiarian management more difficult to answer. Locality, seasons, varying price of honey and supplies, method of management, all have their influence on the cash receipts per colony. On the total number of colonies that can be profitably handled: Most of the text books give facts and figures relating to the subject, but those which I have read are not very illuminating.

In considering this matter, one must not lose sight of the fact that there are two schools of apiarian economics, the motto of one being "Keep more bees," while the other pins its faith to the dictum, "Keep fewer bees, and keep them better," or, at all events, to the latter half of this adage. There would not be much gain in discussing the pros and cons of either method, as it is obvious that the success of either depends entirely on the man, one man having talent for running things on a large scale, while another has the genius for taking infinite pains. Either plan may, of course, be reduced to an absurdity. Nobody supposes that he can make a living by keeping one colony in the highest state of efficiency, any more than anybody thinks he can make one by starting more outyards than he can possibly attend to.

I venture to think there is need of more detailed statements of profit and loss in either system of management. Many people are tempted to start bee-keeping because the initial cost is so small and the returns, as reported in the trade journals, are, in many instances, so large. This holds good so long as only a few colonies are kept, and no special buildings required. But the cost of the plant of ten

increases far more rapidly than the profits. Building an extracting house, with its tanks and other conveniences, is by no means a small item, with lumber at its present price, and yet this often has to be done, when the profits of the apiary hardly seem to justify it.

Personally, I am very well satisfied with my bees as an investment, but I should like to see definite statements from bee-keepers of either school on the following subjects:

1. The average amount of honey per colony through several seasons.
2. The number of colonies that can be handled by one man.
3. The value of plant per one hundred colonies.
4. Working expenses, such as labor, feeding, etc.
5. Average price of honey.

Question No. 3 is perhaps misleading, as the plant necessary to run 100 colonies would in some respects be sufficient for two or three times that number, a point in favor of the "keep-more-bees" school. On the other hand, each colony with its supers represents so much money invested, and the man who believes in keeping fewer bees and keeping them better can point to the fact that his money is earning a larger interest.

In writing this I have purposely omitted my personal opinions on the subject, since my experience is insufficient to make them of value. My sole object has been to provoke discussion on a point very material to commercial bee-keeping, which I think has hardly received the attention due to it.

May I be permitted to thank Mr. McEvoy and Mr. Balmer for their helpful suggestions in response to my letter in a former issue.

[Here is an opportunity for some of our thoughtful readers to develop the financial side of bee-keeping. It ought to be possible to get down to some definite

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