

CHAPTER VI.

The Bee People.

From the dawn of history the greatest intellects have found a fascination in the study of the inmates of the hive, for here is a form of society which closely resembles that of human beings. Only in recent times has its actual organization been understood with all the marvellous activities that are carried on night and day. The subject is an entrancing one, but this is not the occasion to enlarge upon it; our business at present is to become familiar with such facts as will lead to success in our aim, which is the production of surplus honey.

The inmates of the hive are of three kinds—queen, worker, and drone. The queen is not the ruler of the colony, as was for centuries supposed, but is the mother of a big family. Her sole function is to lay eggs, her capacity being literally thousands every twenty-four hours. From October to February she lays very few, but with the advent of the first pollen from the willow in spring she resumes her activity, laying eggs as fast as the worker-bees can take care of them. About May 1st the colony becomes strong enough to permit her to develop her full gait, and this she will keep until the honey-flow in July deprives her of the use of the cells. In the fall, as the cells are emptied, she resumes her laying for a few weeks to provide bees for the winter, then enters upon her period of rest.

THE WORKERS.

The worker-bees are undeveloped females. They are hatched from a fertilized egg just like a queen, but at the end of the third day of the larval stage they are put upon a less nutritious diet which retards the development of the sex-organs, hence

Fig. 20.



Queen.

Drone.

Worker.

they are unfit to become mothers. Their business is to carry in nectar, pollen, and water, incubate the eggs, feed the larvae, do the scavenger-work of the community, ventilate the apartment; in fact, do anything useful that happens to be necessary at the time. In the period of flight they live about six weeks, their short career being due to their intense industry, but those hatched in September and October generally last until April, when their successors appear on the scene. Broadly speaking, the main effort of the community is to have as many producers as possible during the honey-flow, and as few consumers as will keep the community going during the period of dearth.

THE DRONES.

The drones are the male members of the colony. They are called into existence in late spring in preparation for the mating season, and are mercilessly exterminated