

Replacing Queens.

Conversations with Doolittle in Gleanings
in Bee Culture.

"Say, Mr. Doolittle, how long do queens live?"

"What led you to ask me that question, Mr. Brown?"

"We are told in the bee papers that, to reap the best results in honey, queens over two years old should not be allowed as mothers of colonies. I suppose from this that the writers think that from two to three years is the average life of a queen. What is your experience in this matter?"

"My best queens live to four, five, and, in some instances, six years old; but the average life of queens is about three and a half years. The length of a queen's life, other things being equal, depends upon the tax that is put upon her egg-laying powers, and under our modern management queens do not average so long-lived as they did in the days of box hives?"

"Would you think it best to change all queens that were three years old? I have some such that were just as good layers as ever last fall, and came through in my strongest colonies, and I was wondering whether I ought to change them this summer. What do you think?"

"I do not think that the question of age should be considered in the matter of changing queens, except so far as it may be taken as a sort of rule to judge of when they will be apt to fail. I would not replace a queen so long as she lays up to her full average, especially at this time of the year for during the month of June any queen that has even less than the average value can supply eggs which will be turned out into bees at the right time for the honey harvest ;

while if a general change is made, many colonies are likely to lose thousands of eggs at best, and, not only this, the young queen is often very liable to bring a lot of workers on the stage of action in time to become consumers rather than producers."

"Would it have been better to change in early spring?"

"No. A change at that time would have been worse yet, as it would have resulted in a loss of bees at just the time when each bee is of the greatest value to push forward the rearing of others for the honey harvest."

"When would you change queens then?"

"If queens must be changed I would advise waiting till the harvest of white honey is over, for the loss of eggs usually sustained through a change of queens will then be little or no loss, as they are generally hatched into larvæ at a time when said larvæ have to be fed out of honey stored in the hive, while the mature bees generally consume more of the stores already laid aside than they add to them."

"What is your opinion in this matter?"

"With one exception, I pay very little attention to the matter of changing queens, where the colonies are worked for honey instead of queen-rearing, for I find that nineteen colonies out of twenty will supersede their own queens as soon as they need changing; therefore, with the one exception it is a waste of time for me to be worrying about this matter, keeping track of the ages of all queens, etc., when the bees will look after the matter at the proper time."

"Then you think I better not undertake these things?"

"That would be my idea. The bees will attend to the changing, and