

Giant Indian Bees.

THE Department of Agriculture is about to send an expedition to India for the purpose of procuring certain giant bees which are wild in that country. They are the biggest species known in the world, and they build combs in the forest as large as ordinary households. These huge combs, says the *Washington Star*, hanging from the limbs of lofty trees or from projecting ledges of rock at a high altitude, give enormous quantities of wax. Bee hunting is a profession in India.

The bee hunters wear no clothing save breech-clouts. They have a superstitious fear of insects. Though dreading to encounter them on fair terms they are very skillful in attacking their nests by stratagem. Their usual method is to climb the tree from a high limb of which the comb depends, swinging below the hive a long stick with a bunch of ignited leaves on the end of it, until the bees are driven out, many of them falling with singed wings to the ground, but the majority ascending into the air above the comb and hovering into a cloud. This opportunity is taken by the seeker after spoil, to cut away the great comb, which he quickly lowers by means of a rope to the ground below. One gets a notion of the vast quantities of honey and wax collected in this manner from the stores of the latter material to be seen in the warehouses and shops of the cities, tons upon tons of it together. It is an article of extensive export from India.

The proposition is to fetch these bees to this country and domesticate them here if possible. If they could spread their charms in the semi-tropical forests of the United States they might be made to supply considerable crops of the finest and most valuable wax.

THE DRONES ARE OF ORDINARY SIZE.

Curiously enough, the drones of this species are no larger than the ordinary bees, and this fact affords reason for hoping that they will mate with the females of stock already acclimated here. These wonderful insects from India have longer tongues than are possessed by other bees, and the belief is entertained that they could secure from many kinds of flowers honey which now goes to waste. Dreadful stories are told in the country where they belong of their extraordinary ferocity and of attacks which they have made upon whole villages of people with fatal results, but the fact has been demonstrated that capable bee keepers can handle them easily and safely.

Considerable numbers of bumble bees have recently been imported from Europe in to Australia and New Zealand. Hitherto growers of

red clover in those countries have been obliged to obtain seed for planting each year from England, because this crop produces no seed, for lack of bumble bees to fertilize the blossoms. Bumble bees find in red clover their favorite diet, and without their aid in distributing pollen this plant would perish off the face of the earth. Finding it very expensive to import their red clover seed annually, the farmers of the countries mentioned decided to procure bumble bees for themselves. Accordingly a lot were taken while in the hibernating stage, during cold weather, packed in moss and carried over the ocean in the refrigerator compartment of a ship. They were set loose on arrival and already they have multiplied so numerous in that part of the world that it is feared that they will become a nuisance by consuming all the flower juices which the honey bees require for their own purposes. It seems to be the same way with every sort of animal that is introduced to Australia. Invariably the beast, bird or insect proceeds at once to flourish to such an extent as to upset the normal balance of creation.

BUMBLE BEES ARE ACTIVE WORKERS.

Bumble bees are generally supposed to be of no particular use in the world. It is not their fault. They are active and industrious honey gatherers, but there are never enough of them in one colony to make a store that is worth taking. When winter comes the queen bumble bee seeks a place in the ground for hiding safely during the cold months. She finds a spot beneath moss, or perhaps in a heap of leaves. There she hibernates comfortably, remaining fast asleep until spring arrives. The warm sun of approaching summer awakens her and she crawls out. Immediately she looks about her for a nest suitable to breed in. An old nest vacated by field mice serves her purpose admirably. Having settled upon quarters, she begins collecting pollen from flowers, storing it away in two pockets which she carries on her hind legs. Into the nest chosen she puts the pollen and goes for more, fetching load after load until she has formed a ball of pollen perhaps as much as an inch in diameter. In the ball of pollen she lays her eggs, and after a few days they are hatched, and bring forth little worm-like larvae.

The larvae hatched in the mass of pollen feed upon the nutritious material, consuming the portions nearest at hand, until each one has cleared a little room. Then it proceeds to spin a cocoon around itself, and after a little while it comes out of this chrysalis a full-fledged worker bee. Almost immediately these new fledged bees begin gathering pollen, which they