

LONG TONGUED BEES—Fad or Fallacy, Which?

By G. M. Doolittle

Of late years some of our bee-papers start off with some new idea, or some old one revived, and in a little while the heads in all beedom seem to get twisted out of the "straight and narrow path" and run off after an "apparent something," which a few years later, is dropped as if it never had an existence, with hundreds and thousands of hard-earned dollars wasted over the hobby or fad.

The fad now "on" seems to be "long tongued bees," the fad having run long enough, and the excitement become great enough to warrant asking \$10, \$15 and \$25 for queens, giving bees having a certain length of tongue-reach. And our good Editor York is compelled to fall into line with the announcement at the head of his advertisement, "Long-tongued bees are demanded now" Of course, the "fad" has caused the demand, and no one blames the editor for heading his advertisement in accord with that truth. But is the fad founded on truth or fallacy? That is the question that should be asked in all seriousness, before more money is wasted on the fad.

Long-tongued bees are either better workers, or they are not better. Then they may work on red clover where that abounds and be a great advantage there, without being any more industrious at gathering honey from apple-bloom, basswood or buckwheat, the nectar from which any bee could reach having a tongue not more than half as long as the shortest tongues measured. That being the case, long-tongued bees would be an advantage only to those residing where red clover and other long-tubed flowers abound. This brings me to look into this part of the matter, for

red clover has not blossomed to any extent in this locality for the past 13 years, owing to a "midge" or very small larva which works in the head just before it would blossom, thus reducing what used to be fields "red with clover blossoms" to fields having a dull-brown color, which is assumed at blossoming time from the workings of this pest in central New York. So, if these long-tongued bees are no better otherwise, their working on red clover is of no advantage to me. So I turn to the testimony.

On page 220 of March 15th Gleanings in Bee-Culture, I find these words:

"The movement for longer tongues is simply to get the red-clover crop of the North, which now is practically all wasted. The bees no one claims would be any better except on that account."

If the above is correct, then these long-tongued bees are of no special advantage to me, nor to two-thirds of the acreage of North America. And yet I find parties in the extreme Southern States and Texas, heading their advertisements, in that very same number of Gleanings, with "Long Tongued Queens" just as though such long tongues was the great desideratum for that Southern country, when according to the reading columns of the same paper no one should say they were any better. But such claims are being, and have been made. Let me quote a few of these claims:

"Heretofore I could only assume that the bees were superior, that they would store more honey, but I could give no reason why, except that the trait had been developed by years of selection and careful breeding; but now I can say why, or at least, give a reasonable reason why."

And what is that reason? "The bees have very long tongues." (Gleanings