

that asparagus, too, should not be pulled until the heads have grown quite three inches out of the ground. This is the practice, or at least it should be, in private, though not perhaps in market gardens. A head of asparagus that has not been removed until it has attained the height of three inches in the daylight, is a more economical one than that whose top we can do little more than suck when we sit down to table. But this latter alternative is the penalty for pulling it too early, or when its head has only just appeared above the ground. Probably when so pulled it will keep longer, but when we are gardening at home we pull it in order to cook and eat it; yes, and to eat a good half of each stalk too, and not merely to suck the end like a young gentleman fresh from his last term at school would perhaps similarly serve the agate end of his walking-stick.

But we must never forget that this is our first month of the year in which we generally attempt a real floral display in the open and hitherto almost deserted flowerbeds. Yet we have always advocated a compromise

between the modern bedding-out system and the old-fashioned flower-garden, in which little else but perennials and a few flowers raised from seed in the month of April and in the open were to be had. This latter is undeniably the most economical, the most natural, the least artificial, and the least troublesome system of gardening. Still, we take a great delight in supplementing it, at all events, by our stock of bedding-out plants from our greenhouse or from our pits and frames. But, first of all, take notice of those dear old-fashioned pansies, that ought now to be in their perfection of bloom, and mark any that are finer than the rest to save for seeds. Pick these flowers occasionally, as by so doing you strengthen your plant and prolong its blooming power. Some of us vary in our predilection for plucking flowers, in which, while some are stingy, others are generous, preferring to have them on the table or in the drawing-room for general display. As a rule, this last is the most advantageous, for of necessity you keep throwing the strength into the rest of the plant by pulling the flowers.

## BEEES AND THEIR FOLK-LORE.



FROM the very earliest times the bee has been the subject of special interest, being supposed to possess a certain amount of understanding or instinct unshared by the rest of the animal world. Indeed, it appears that our forefathers placed this favoured little being in the scale of creation immediately after man, attributing to it a portion of the "divine mind." Hence a degree of deference has generally been

scarcely be offered to beings endowed with only ordinary instinct. The ancients also believed that there existed a mysterious connection between bees and human souls; and there are various legends on record in which the soul is represented as issuing from the body in the form of a bee. As might be expected, therefore, numerous superstitions have clustered round this highly useful insect, and in many a country place it is regarded almost with feelings of veneration. This can only be accounted for on the supposition that through its extraordinary instinct it is able to take cognisance of things which otherwise it could not do. In the present paper, then, it is proposed to give a brief outline of the extensive folk-lore associated with the bee, showing in how many ways it has given rise to superstitious fancies and curious customs.

In allusion to their swarming we find various odd ideas, some of which may be traced back to a remote period. Thus a popular proverb reminds us of the relative value of a swarm in different months:—

"A swarm of bees in May  
Is worth a load of hay;  
A swarm of bees in June  
Is worth a silver spoon;  
A swarm of bees in July  
Is not worth a butterfly."

And old Tusser, in his "Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry," says:—

"Take heed to thy bees that are ready to swarm;  
The loss thereof is a crown's worth of harm."

In Sussex, it is considered as a sign of a death in a family if bees in the act of swarming make choice of a dead hedge-stake for their settling-place. A similar superstition prevails in Norfolk, should they swarm on rotten wood, or a dead tree—a notion thus alluded to by Gay:—

"Swarmed on a rotten stick, the bees I spied,  
Which erst I saw when Goody Dobson died."

In many places it is considered especially lucky when a strange swarm settles in one's garden, such a circumstance being thought to foretell either wealth or prosperity of some kind. In Suffolk, however, it is regarded just as unlucky, and the following occurrence is a curious illustration of the alarm which this piece of superstition occasionally produces:—

"Going to my father's house," says the writer, "I found the household in a state of excitement, as a stray swarm of bees had settled on the pump. A hive had been procured, and the coachman and I hived them securely. After this had been done, I was saying that they might think themselves fortunate in getting a

hive of bees so cheap ; but I found that this was not agreed to by all, for one man employed about the premises looked very grave and shook his head. On my asking him what was the matter, he told me in a solemn tone that people *did* say that if a swarm of bees came to a house, and were not claimed by their owner, there would be a death in the family within the year. As it turned out, there was a death in my house, though not in my father's, about seven months afterwards, and I have no doubt but that this was taken as a fulfilment of the portent."

In the "Report of the Devonshire Association" (1876, viii. 51) the following anecdote is related as having happened in the neighbourhood of North Bovey :—

"'All of 'em dead, sir—all the thirteen. What a pity it is !'

"'What's a pity, Mrs. —? Who's dead?'

"'The bees, to be sure, sir. Mrs. Blank, when she buried her husband, forgot to give the bees a bit of mourning, and now, sir, all the bees be dead, though the hives be pretty nigh full of honey. What a pity 'tis folks will be so forgetful !'

"Mrs. — continued to explain that whenever the owner or part-owner of a hive died, it was requisite to place little bits of black stuff on the hive ; otherwise the bees would follow the example of their owner.

"Mrs. —'s husband, who listened while this scrap of folk-lore was being communicated by his wife, now added—

"'My wife, sir, be always talking a lot of nonsense, sir ; but this about the bees is true, for I've see'd it myself.'"

This custom of putting the hives in mourning is very common, and is strictly adhered to, from an apprehension of its omission being attended with fatal consequences. At Cherry-Burton, on a death in the family, a scarf of black crape is applied to each hive on the occasion of the funeral, and pounded funeral biscuit soaked in wine is placed at the entrance to the hive.

"A neighbour of mine," says a writer, "bought a hive of bees at an auction of the goods of a farmer who had recently died. The bees seemed very sickly, and not likely to thrive, when my neighbour's servant bethought him that they had never been put in mourning for their late master. On this he got a piece of crape and tied it to a stick, which he fastened to the hive. After this the bees recovered, and when I saw them they were in a very flourishing state—a result which was unhesitatingly attributed to their having been put in mourning."

A curious superstitious custom formerly prevailed in Devonshire of turning round the bee-hives that belonged to the deceased—if he had any—at the moment the corpse was carried out of the house. Some years ago, at the funeral of a rich old farmer, a painful circumstance occurred. Just as the corpse was placed in the hearse, and the visitors (a large number) were arranged in order for the procession of the funeral, a person called out, "Turn the

bees !" A servant who had no knowledge of such a custom, instead of turning the hives round, lifted them up, and then laid them down on their sides. The bees, thus suddenly invaded, instantly attacked and fastened on the visitors. It was in vain they tried to escape, for the bees precipitately followed, and left their stings as marks of their indignation. A general confusion took place, and it was some time before the friends of the deceased could be rallied together to proceed to the interment.

Another writer says an old blacksmith in Cheshire lamented to him the ill-success that had attended his bee-keeping ever since the death of his wife, which he attributed to his having neglected to turn the hives round when that event happened !

In Germany the same superstitious fancies prevail, for not only is the sad message given to every bee-hive in the garden and every beast in the stall, but every sack of corn must be touched and everything in the house shaken, that they may know the master is gone.

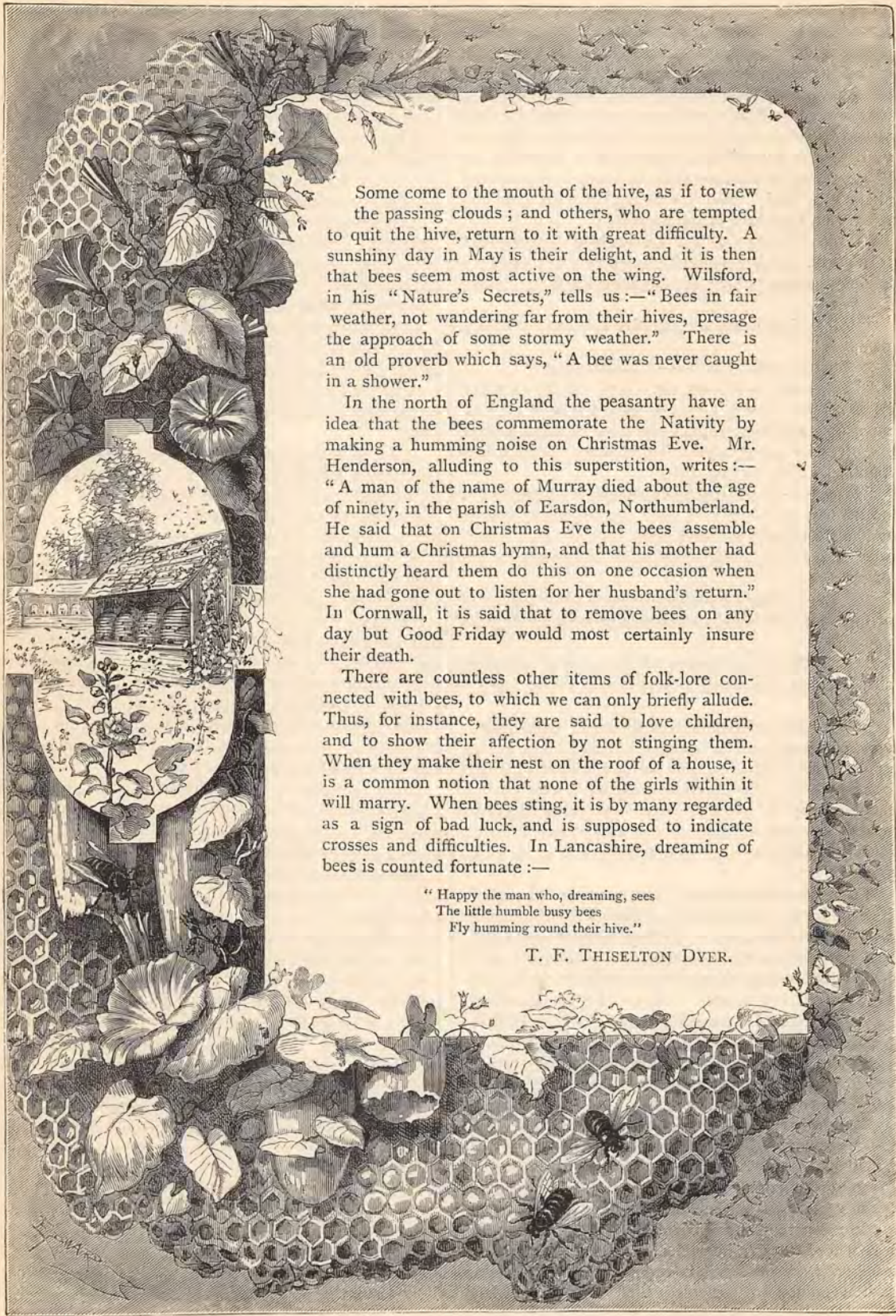
Again, in some localities bees are invited to funerals, and a formal invitation is even sent to them. At Bradfield, a primitive little village on the edge of the moors, in the parish of Ecclesfield, this custom has been kept up from time immemorial. Among other superstitions relating to a sympathy between bees and their owners, there is a popular belief in Cumberland that when the former die their owner will soon do likewise. There is also a vulgar notion that when bees remove or go away from their hives, the owner of them will soon die. In Northamptonshire the entrance of the wild or humble bee into a house is deemed a certain sign of death ; and a Welsh belief informs us that a short time previous to the death of the owner of bees, the bees themselves will die without any apparent cause.

Death, however, is not the only event in human life communicated to bees—that more joyous one, marriage, being also announced to them. Thus, in many country places it is said that not only do bees expect to be informed of every wedding, but to have their hives decorated with a wedding-festoon. In Lincolnshire it is even customary to present a piece of wedding-cake to the bees, for fear of their becoming irate and stinging every one within their reach. The same practice exists on the Continent ; and in Lower Brittany, whenever a marriage takes place, the bee-hives are adorned with a piece of red cloth. It is believed that if the bees are not allowed to participate in the feelings of the family on such an occasion, they will take offence and desert the place.

There is, too, a great deal of weather-lore associated with bees. Thus, when many enter a hive and none leave it, rain is at hand. Hence the rhyme :—

"If bees stay at home,  
Rain will soon come ;  
If they fly away,  
Fine will be the day."

Nothing, it has been remarked, can be more melancholy than the appearance of bees in wet weather.



Some come to the mouth of the hive, as if to view the passing clouds ; and others, who are tempted to quit the hive, return to it with great difficulty. A sunshiny day in May is their delight, and it is then that bees seem most active on the wing. Wilsford, in his "Nature's Secrets," tells us :—"Bees in fair weather, not wandering far from their hives, presage the approach of some stormy weather." There is an old proverb which says, "A bee was never caught in a shower."

In the north of England the peasantry have an idea that the bees commemorate the Nativity by making a humming noise on Christmas Eve. Mr. Henderson, alluding to this superstition, writes :—"A man of the name of Murray died about the age of ninety, in the parish of Earsdon, Northumberland. He said that on Christmas Eve the bees assemble and hum a Christmas hymn, and that his mother had distinctly heard them do this on one occasion when she had gone out to listen for her husband's return." In Cornwall, it is said that to remove bees on any day but Good Friday would most certainly insure their death.

There are countless other items of folk-lore connected with bees, to which we can only briefly allude. Thus, for instance, they are said to love children, and to show their affection by not stinging them. When they make their nest on the roof of a house, it is a common notion that none of the girls within it will marry. When bees sting, it is by many regarded as a sign of bad luck, and is supposed to indicate crosses and difficulties. In Lancashire, dreaming of bees is counted fortunate :—

"Happy the man who, dreaming, sees  
The little humble busy bees  
Fly humming round their hive."

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