

## THE PLEASURES AND PROFITS OF BEE-DRIVING.



“WHAT a quaint name that pretty ‘Lied’ of Mendelssohn’s has that Dora is playing!” said one of a number of ladies who had met for a working party in a pretty suburb of a Devonshire town.

“What, ‘The Spinning-wheel’? Yes, I always think that name so emblematic of that air,” observed Mrs. Seymour, the lady of the house.

“Indeed!” said Mrs. Lawrence, the first speaker. “I have always heard it called ‘The Bees’ Wedding,’ and I think the musical hum all through it so descriptive of the swarming bees.”

“Talking of bees,” said a third person, who had been too intent on counting the stitches of her work to speak hitherto, “I wonder what you would all say to *driving bees*. That has been my amusement lately.”

“We heard you had been very busy about your bees,” said little Mrs. Lawrence; “do give us your experiences.”

“This is the time to take the honey,” said Mrs. Dalzell; “and the ignorant people kill the bees. I drive them to save their lives. My brother is as wild about bees as I am, so, though he lives here in Plymouth, and I at Ivydale, ten miles away, yet we work together as much as we can. I bought a swarm of bees last year from a dealer to start with. They were not Ligurians, as he pretended, but they have done well. I keep them in one of the Irish combination hives, one of the latest improvements in bee-boxes, and I think it extremely good.”

“I should be afraid to meddle with them as you do,” said Mrs. Seymour.

“It is only a matter of courage first, and then habit,” said Mrs. Dalzell. “Only move quietly, and do not wave your hands about; they will seldom touch you.”

“But do you not get stung sometimes?”

“Very seldom; and if it happens, the juice of an onion rubbed on the place at once allays the irritation. I will tell you just what I did one afternoon. I started after an early dinner to the first of two farmhouses where I had arranged to drive the bees, as they wished to take the honey. I reached a farm where I had found only an old woman, the farmer’s wife, when I first called there. She had been rather doubtful at first, wondering, I suppose, to find a

lady doing such a thing: also she had been anxious to know how much I charged, and seemed still more surprised when she found it was free gratis, but that I wished to save the lives of the bees; in this she readily concurred.

“But now, on my second appearance, I found quite a party assembled to see the performance. They greeted me, and then we proceeded to the hives, and I began my work. I tied a veil over my wide-brimmed hat, and turning up the collar of my jacket inside, fastened it round my neck. Over the wrists of my thick gloves I tied my sleeves.”

“And what about the skirt of your dress? I suppose they never fly so low,” said Mrs. Lawrence.

“Indeed they do, my dear, and there I was at their mercy, as they could and did sting me above the tops of my boots; but I am getting hardened to such things. Well, I lighted some brown paper, and quietly lifting one side of the hive, let the smoke escape among the bees. At first there was a great buzzing, which presently died away. Then I lifted the hive, and reversing it, placed the clean bee skep I had brought over it, joining them on one side by sticking a skewer through both, thus making a sort of hinge, whilst I slightly opened them on the other side to see how matters progressed. The bees were not *stupefied* by the fumes of brown paper, but it appears to frighten them, and they become bewildered. I tapped constantly on the straw butt in which they were, and which you will remember was undermost, and that completed their consternation. Presently one or two, and then more, began to ascend into the clean hive, and soon they gave a tremendous hum like a universal shriek of fear, and went up in a swarm into their new quarters. I put the new butt on the stand where they had been reared, and left it there for half an hour for any stragglers to go in.

“In the meantime my brother had arrived on the scene, and truly I was glad; for at one time I had feared the hives seemed slipping from my grasp, and it was evident I should not get any help from the farm people.”

“But what is generally done with the bees?” said Mrs. Seymour.

“In September, after the bees have settled for the night, they are smoked with sulphur till they are quite stupefied, and then the butt is turned up and all the bees are shaken into a hole in the ground which has been previously dug for their reception, and covered up with earth. Of course they are all killed.”

“Besides the cruelty,” said Mrs. Dalzell, “think of the waste! I have five good swarms to start with next year, just by driving instead of killing them. After my brother came we got on more rapidly. He had brought two more butts, and altogether we hived five swarms that evening, going on from the scene of our first labours to another farm not far off. As it was getting late, I told Edward we must then go home; so

he took two of the bee-skeps, and I carried the other."

"But how did you carry them?" said Mrs. Lawrence.

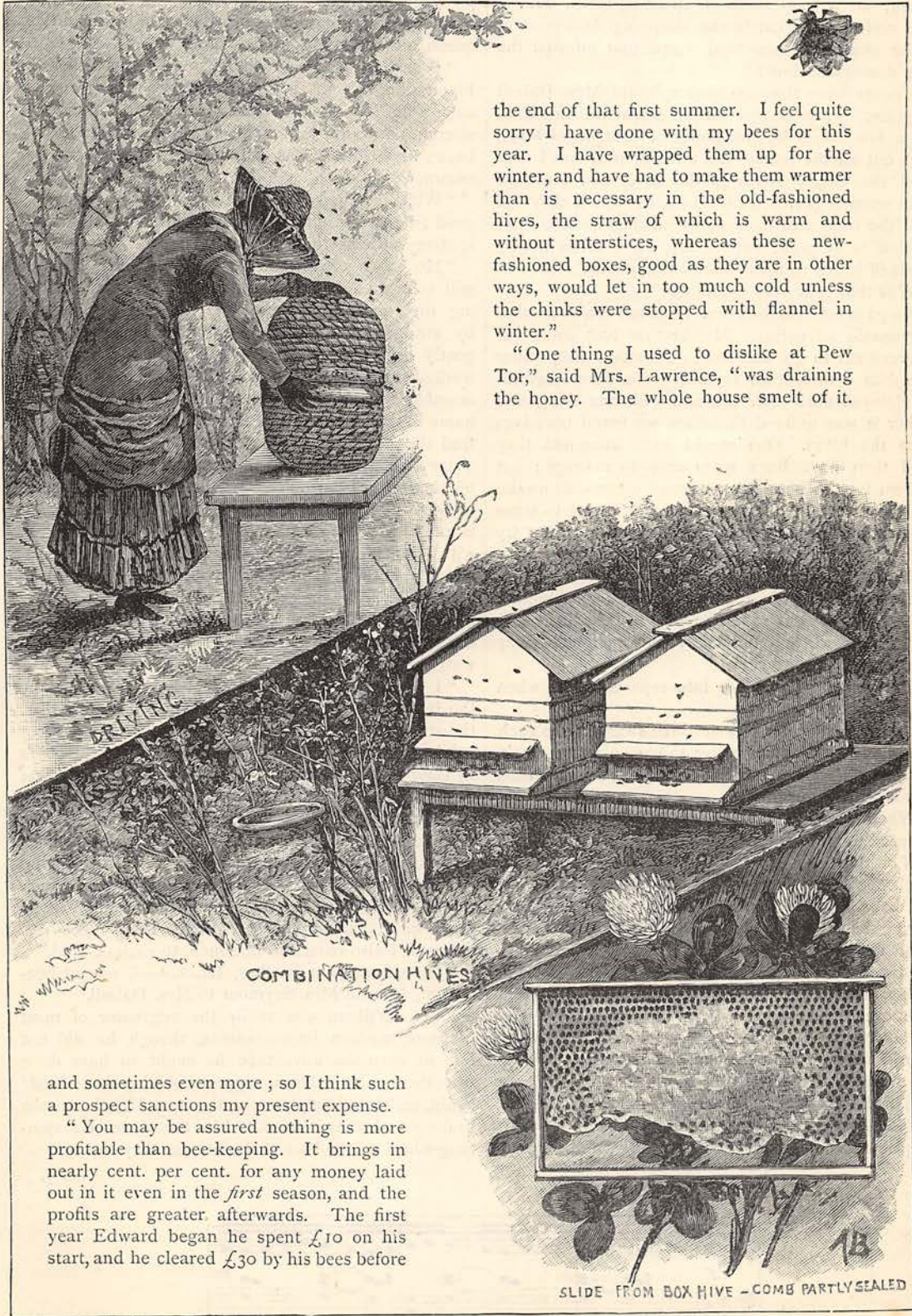
"As soon as we had bees enough in one hive, I tied a cloth over the open part of it, brought the ends to the top of the butt, and so made a handle by which to carry it. One or two



escaped, and I was stung slightly, but I do not call that anything, and it was worth the little inconvenience to have saved the lives of all those poor hard-working bees, who deserve something better than to be smothered as the *finale* of all their summer labours."

"But as they could not live in an empty box, what did you do with them?" said Mrs. Lawrence.

"There were sheets of printed wax already placed for them in their new abode—the Irish combination hive-box in which I placed them next day—and as at this season of the year they cannot make sufficient honey from flowers to keep them all the winter, I made syrup for them, and fed them. I used nearly seventy pounds of best lump sugar for those bees. This sounds extravagant, but if I have an ordinarily good summer, which we may expect after this wet one, those bees ought to give me from eight hundred to a thousand pounds of honey, which sells here, as you know, at 1s. 6d. a pound,



the end of that first summer. I feel quite sorry I have done with my bees for this year. I have wrapped them up for the winter, and have had to make them warmer than is necessary in the old-fashioned hives, the straw of which is warm and without interstices, whereas these new-fashioned boxes, good as they are in other ways, would let in too much cold unless the chinks were stopped with flannel in winter."

"One thing I used to dislike at Pew Tor," said Mrs. Lawrence, "was draining the honey. The whole house smelt of it.

and sometimes even more ; so I think such a prospect sanctions my present expense.

"You may be assured nothing is more profitable than bee-keeping. It brings in nearly cent. per cent. for any money laid out in it even in the *first* season, and the profits are greater afterwards. The first year Edward began he spent £10 on his start, and he cleared £30 by his bees before

SLIDE FROM BOX HIVE - COMB PARTLY SEALED

I had the crushed comb hanging for days in the kitchen, in a bag made of straining-cloth, with a basin under it to catch the dropping honey—and oh, the swarms of bees and wasps that infested the house during the time !”

“I never have that annoyance,” said Mrs. Dalzell tranquilly. “I paid 15s. for an extractor, and that, with a few twirls by the power of centrifugal force, draws out all the honey in a few minutes, and I then return the empty comb to the hive, and the bees can at once begin to fill it again, by which they are saved the time and expense of making fresh comb ; and that is of great importance, as it takes twenty pounds of honey to make one pound of wax.”

“Was that your only excursion ?”

“No ; I went several times. I will tell you one rather disagreeable adventure. My brother had come out by agreement to go with me to Coombe Farm, rather more than a mile from Ivydale. We were unavoidably delayed until after tea, and with one thing and another it was quite dark before we found ourselves before the hives. One would have imagined they would then have been more easy to manage ; but far from it—the bees never seemed more wide awake than they were in a few minutes, and, owing to some imperfection in the smoking (we were working by the light of a lantern), they flew about more than usual. I had to beat a retreat once, they stung my ankles so badly. We required our whole attention for the bees. It was so bewildering to hear them buzz in the darkness, and not know on which side they would make their attack.”

“Did you put your bees into separate hives when you got home ?”

“No ; I always put two or three swarms into each Irish hive, as it is much better to have a strong stock. It pays to have two or three full hives rather than many scanty stocks.”

“When I was at Pew Tor,” said Mrs. Lawrence, “we used to notice that five swarms out of seven would go off on Sunday morning just as we were starting for church.”

“I have heard other bee-keepers remark the same thing ; but I select my own time for swarming. When I wish for a swarm, I put on my bee-dress and go to the hive, which is like a large square box, open at the top and bottom, with grooves at the sides fitted with movable slides, which I can draw out at pleasure. On the top of this box of slides filled with bees and combs, I lay several doubles of blanket flannel to keep them warm, and the cover of the hive is placed over all. This blanket coverlid then I lift gently ; I take out one slide after another till I find the one on which is the queen bee. I then put the slide with the queen

and some more, with brood-comb, into an empty hive prepared for them. I put some clean slides into the bereaved hive, the inmates of which soon raise another queen, and work goes on as before.

“I have a great advantage over my brother in Plymouth ; though Ivydale itself lies in a wooded valley, the heights are close, from which the moor stretches away for miles, and I get the heather for my bees ; now Edward has to take his to the moor in the summer.”

“Well,” laughed Mrs. Lawrence, “that is rather too good ; he treats them like his children : has he a feeding-bottle for them ?”

“He has, my dear, and so have I for my bees. I will tell you how he moves them. When the working time came this spring he had his hives slung by strings in a spring-cart, and then they were gently driven to a cottage at Bickleigh, where they worked the moorland flowers for three or four months ; then they were brought back to their usual home in the nursery garden. When it is necessary to feed the bees, as I have done lately, with sugar and water boiled to syrup, I cut a square hole in the blanket coverlid, which exactly fits the feeder, a square of wood with a zinc plate in the centre, half of which is perforated. Connected with this is a bottle filled with syrup, which has also a perforated top, out of which the thick liquid slowly oozes, and would drop through the tiny holes of the zinc plate but for the hundreds of little tongues applied to the under side directly the syrup appears. It is most amusing to watch them.”

“I cannot understand,” said Mrs. Lawrence, “why the Irish hives should be so very much colder than the straw ones.”

“In the old straw hives, bees are left to build comb in their own way, which they do as close together as possible, and this increases the warmth ; but in the artificial life I have been describing, *our* convenience is more studied than that of the bees, and the slides are placed further apart for convenience in moving them. I bring the ends of the coverlid down and tuck round the sides of the hive, placing also small bags filled with chaff on the top and at the sides. The entrance I also reduce to one inch, to exclude cold.”

“How fond your brother, Dr. C—, was of bee-keeping !” said Mrs. Seymour to Mrs. Dalzell.

“Yes, William was really the originator of most of these modern improvements, though he did not live to reap the advantage he ought to have done from them. Now, Dora, suppose you play that ‘Lied’ again, and I will help your mother and Mrs. Lawrence to decide whether it is most like the whirr of a spinning-wheel or the buzz of the bees as they swarm.”

M. J.

