

The Fussy Queen Bee

by Clara Dillingham Pierson

In a sheltered corner of the farmyard, where the hedge kept off the cold winds and the trees shaded from hot summer sunshine, there were many hives of Bees. One could not say much for the Drones, but the others were the busiest of all the farmyard people, and they had so much to do that they did not often stop to visit with their neighbors.

In each hive, or home, there were many thousand Bees, and each had his own work. First of all, there was the Queen. You might think that being a Queen meant playing all the time, but that is not so, for to be a really good Queen, even in a Beehive, one must know a great deal and keep at work all the time. The Queen Bee is the mother of all the Bee Babies, and she spends her days in laying eggs. She is so very precious and important a person that the first duty of the rest is to take care of her.

The Drones are the stoutest and finest-looking of all the Bees, but they are lazy, very, very lazy. There are never many of them in a hive, and like most lazy people, they spend much of their time in telling the others how to work. They do not make wax or store honey, and as the Worker Bees do not wish them to eat what has been put away for winter, they do not live very long.

Most of the Bees are Workers. They are smaller than either the Queen Mother or the Drones, and they gather all the honey, make all the wax, build the comb, and feed the babies. They keep the hive clean, and when the weather is very warm, some of them fan the air with their wings to cool it. They guard the doorway of the hive, too, and turn away the robbers who sometimes come to steal their honey.

In these busy homes, nobody can live long just for himself. Everybody helps somebody else, and that makes life pleasant. The Queen Mother often lays as many as two thousand eggs in a day. Most of these are Worker eggs, and are laid in the small cells of the brood comb, which is the nursery of the hive. A few are Drone eggs and are laid in large cells. She never lays any Queen eggs, for she does not want more Queens growing up. It is a law among the Bees that there can be only one grown Queen living in each home.

The Workers, however, know that something might happen to their old Queen Mother, so, after she has gone away, they sometimes go into a cell where she has laid a Worker egg, and take down the waxen walls between it and the ones on either side to make a very large royal cell. They bite away the wax with their strong jaws and press the rough edges into shape with their feet. When this egg hatches, they do not feed the baby, or Larva, with tasteless bread made of flower-dust, honey, and water, as they would if they intended it to grow up a Worker or a Drone. Instead, they make what is called royal jelly, which is quite sour, and tuck this all around the Larva, who now looks like a little white worm.

The royal jelly makes her grow fast, and in five days she is so large as to nearly fill the cell. Then she stops eating, spins a cocoon, and lies in it for about two and a half days more. When she comes out of this, she is called a Pupa. Sixteen days after the laying of the egg, the young Queen is ready to come out of her cell. It takes twenty-one days for a Worker to become fully grown and twenty-five for a Drone.

In the hive by the cedar tree, the Queen Mother was growing restless and fussy. She knew that

the Workers were raising some young Queens, and she tried to get to the royal cells. She knew that if she could only do that, the young Queens would never live to come out. The Workers knew this, too, and whenever she came near there, they made her go away.

The Queen Larvæ and Pupæ were of different ages, and one of them was now ready to leave her cell. They could hear her crying to be let out, but they knew that if she and the Queen Mother should meet now, one of them would die. So instead of letting her out, they built a thick wall of wax over the door and left only an opening through which they could feed her. When she was hungry she ran her tongue out and they put honey on it.

She wondered why the Workers did not let her out, when she wanted so much to be free. She did not yet know that Queen Mothers do not get along well with young Queens.

The Workers talked it over by themselves. One of them was very tender-hearted. "It does seem too bad," said she, "to keep the poor young Queen shut up in her cell. I don't see how you can stand it to hear her piping so pitifully all the time. I am sure she must be beautiful. I never saw a finer tongue than the one she runs out for honey."

"Humph!" said a sensible old Worker, who had seen many Queens hatched and many swarms fly away, "you'd be a good deal more sorry if we did let her out now. It would not do at all."

The tender-hearted Worker did not answer this, but she talked it over with the Drones. "I declare," said she, wiping her eyes with her forefeet, "I can hardly gather a mouthful of honey for thinking of her."

"Suppose you hang yourself up and make wax then," said one Drone. "It is a rather sunshiny day, but you ought to be doing something, and if you cannot gather honey you might do that." This was just like a Drone. He never gathered honey or made wax, yet he could not bear to see a Worker lose any time.

The Worker did not hang herself up and make wax, however. She never did that except on cloudy days, and she was one of those Bees who seem to think that nothing will come out right unless they stop working to see about it. There was plenty waiting to be done, but she was too sad and anxious to do it. She might have known that since her friends were only minding the law, it was right to keep the new Queen in her cell.

The Queen Mother was restless and fussy. She could not think of her work, and half the time she did not know whether she was laying a Drone egg or a Worker egg. In spite of that, she did not make any mistake, or put one into the wrong kind of cell. "I cannot stay here with a young Queen," said she. "I will not stay here. I will take my friends with me and fly away."

Whenever she met a Worker, she struck her feelers on those of her friend, and then this friend knew exactly how she felt about it. In this way the news was passed around, and soon many of the Workers were as restless as their Queen Mother. They were so excited over it at times that the air of the hive grew very hot. After a while they would become quiet and gather honey once more. They whispered often to each other. "Do you know where we are going?" one said.

"Sh!" was the answer. "The guides are looking for a good place now."

"I wish the Queen Mother knew where we are going," said the first.

"How could she?" replied the second. "You know very well that she has not left the hive since she began to lay eggs. Here she comes now."

"Oh dear!" exclaimed the Queen Mother. "I can never stand this. I certainly cannot. To think I am not allowed to rule in my own hive! The Workers who are guarding the royal cells drive me away whenever I go near them. I will not stay any longer."

"Then," said a Drone, as though he had thought of it for the first time, "why don't you go away?"

"I shall," said she. "Will you go with me?"

"No," said the Drone. "I hate moving and furnishing a new house. Besides, somebody must stay here to take care of the Workers and the young Queen."

The Queen Mother walked away. "When we were both young," she said to herself, "he would have gone anywhere with me."

And the Drone said to himself, "Now, isn't that just like a Queen Mother! She has known all the time that there would be young Queens coming on, and that she would have to leave, yet here she is, making the biggest kind of fuss about it. She ought to remember that it is the law."

Indeed she should have remembered that it was the law, for everything is done by law in the hive, and no one person should find fault. The law looks after them all, and will not let any one have more than his rightful share.

That same afternoon there was a sudden quiet in their home. The Workers who had been outside returned and visited with the rest. While they were waiting, a few who were to be their guides came to the door of the hive, struck their wings together, and gave the signal for starting. Then all who were going with the Queen Mother hurried out of the door and flew with her in circles overhead. "Good-bye!" they called. "Raise all the young Queens you wish. We shall never come back. We are going far, far away, and we shall not tell you where. It is a lovely place, a very lovely place."

"Let them go," said the Drones who stayed behind. "Now, isn't it time to let out the young Queen?"

"Not yet," answered a Worker, who stood near the door. "Not one feeler shall she put outside her cell until that swarm is out of sight."

The tender-hearted Worker came up wiping her eyes. "Oh, that poor Queen Mother!" said she. "I am so sorry for her. I positively cannot gather honey to-day, I feel so badly about her going."

"Better keep on working," said her friend. "It's the best thing in the world for that sad feeling. Besides, you should try to keep strong."

"Oh, I will try to eat something from the comb," was the answer, "but I don't feel like working."

"Zzzt!" said the other Worker. "I think if you can eat, you can hunt your food outside, and not take honey we have laid up for winter or food that will be needed for the children."

The Drones chuckled. It was all right for them to be lazy, they thought, but they never could bear to see a Worker waste time. "Ah," cried one of them suddenly, "what is the new swarm doing now?"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the Queen Mother crawled into the hive again. "Such dreadful luck!" said she. "A cloud passed over the sun just as we were alighting on a tree to rest."

"I wouldn't have come back for that," said a Drone.

"No," said she, in her airiest way, "I dare say you wouldn't, but I would. I dare not go to a new home after a cloud has passed over the sun. I think it is a sign of bad luck. I should never expect a single egg to hatch if I went on. We shall try it again to-morrow."

All the others came back with her, and the hive was once more crowded and hot. "Oh dear!" said the tender-hearted Worker, "isn't it too bad to think they couldn't go?"

The next morning they started again and were quite as excited over it as before. The Queen Mother had fussed and fidgeted all the time, although she had laid nine hundred and seventy-three eggs while waiting, and that in spite of interruptions. "Being busy keeps me from thinking," said she, "and I must do something." This time the Queen Mother lighted on an apple-tree branch, and the others clung to her until all who had left the hive were in a great mass on the branch,—a mass as large as a small cabbage. They meant to rest a little while and then fly away to the new home chosen by their guides.

While they were hanging here, the farmer came under the tree, carrying a long pole with a wire basket fastened to the upper end. He shook the clustered Bees gently into it, and then changed them into an empty hive that stood beside their old home.

"Now," said the Workers who had stayed in the old hive, "we will let out the new Queen, for the Queen Mother will never return."

It did not take long to bite away the waxen wall and let her out. Then they gathered around and caressed her, and touched their feelers to her and waited upon her, and explained why they could not let her out sooner. She was still a soft gray color, like all young Bees when they first come from the cell, but this soon changed to the black worn by her people.

The Workers flew in and out, and brought news from the hive next door. They could not go there, for the law does not allow a Bee who lives in one home to visit in another, but they met their old friends in the air or when they were sipping honey. They found that the Queen Mother had quite given up the idea of living elsewhere and was as busy as ever. The farmer had put a piece of comb into the new hive so that she could begin housekeeping at once.

The new Queen was petted and kept at home until she was strong and used to moving about. That was not long. Then she said she wanted to see the world outside. "We will go with you," said the Drones, who were always glad of an excuse for flying away in pleasant weather. They said there was so much noise and hurrying around in the hive that they could never get any real rest there during the daytime.

So the young Queen flew far away and saw the beautiful world for the first time. Such a blue sky! Such green grass! Such fine trees covered with sweet-smelling blossoms! She loved it all as soon as she saw it. "Ah," she cried, "what a wonderful thing it is to live and see all this! I am so glad that I was hatched. But now I must hurry home, for there is so much to be done."

She was a fine young Queen, and the Bees were all proud of her. They let her do anything she wished as long as she kept away from the royal cells. She soon began to work as the old Queen Mother had done, and was very happy in her own way. She would have liked to open the royal cells and prevent more Queens from hatching, and when they told her it was the law which made them keep her away, she still wanted to bite into them.

"That poor young Queen Mother!" sighed the tender-hearted Worker. "I am so sorry for her when she is kept away from the royal cells. This is a sad, sad world!" But this isn't a sad world by any means. It is a beautiful, sunshiny, happy world, and neither Queen Bees nor anybody else should think it hard if they cannot do every single thing they wish. The law looks after great and small, and there is no use in pouting because we cannot do one certain thing, when there is any amount of delightful work and play awaiting us. And the young Queen Mother knew this.

Source:

Pierson, Clara Dillingham. "The Fussy Queen Bee." *Among the Farmyard People*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1899. 47 – 63. Electronic.