

A Swarm Leaves the Bee Tree

by Clara Dillingham Pierson

The old Bee tree was becoming very crowded and the Queen-Mother grew restless. There were many things to make her so. In the tree were thousands of cells made ready for her eggs, and she had been busy for days putting one in each. In the larger cells she laid eggs that would hatch out Drones, and in the smaller ones she laid Worker eggs. She never laid any Queen eggs. Perhaps she did not want any Queens among her children, for there can never be two Queens in one swarm, and when a new one is hatched, the Queen-Mother has to go away and find another home. That is a law among the Bees.

The Workers, however, knew that there must be young Queens growing up all the time. Supposing something should happen to the Queen-Mother, what would become of the swarm if there were nobody to lay eggs? So after she had laid several thousand Worker eggs, and it was time for the young ones to hatch, they decided to change some of the babies into young Queens. And this was easy enough. When they were out for honey, they filled the pockets on their hind legs with pollen, the yellow dust that is found in flowers. This was to be mixed with honey and water and made into bread for the babies, who were now awake, and looked like tiny white worms in the bottom of their cells. Then they made some that was almost like sour jelly, and put it in a few of the Worker cells for the tiny white worms, or Larvæ, to eat. The Larvæ that eat this jelly grow up to be Queens, and can lay eggs. Those that eat the common bread are either Drones or Workers, whichever their mother had planned them to be.

After the Larvæ were five or six days old, the Workers shut them up in their cells and stopped feeding them. That was because the Larvæ had other things to do than eat. They had to spin their cocoons, and lie in them until they were grown and ready to come out among the older Bees. When a Larva, or Bee baby, has finished its cocoon, and is lying inside, it is called a Pupa, and when a Pupa is full grown and has torn its way out of the cocoon and wax, it is called a Drone, or a Worker, or a Queen.

Now the Queen-Mother was restless. She could hear the young Queens piping in their cells, and she knew that they wanted to come out and drive her away. She wanted to get to them and stop their piping, but the Workers stood in her way and prevented her. They knew it would not be well for the Queen-Mother to meet her royal children, and when these children tried to come out the Workers covered the doors of their cells with another layer of wax, leaving little holes where they could put out their tongues and be fed.

This made the Queen-Mother more restless than ever. "If I cannot do as I wish to with my own children," she said, "I will leave the tree." And she began walking back and forth as fast as she could, and talked a great deal, and acted almost wild with impatience. The Workers saw how she felt, and part of them decided to go with her. When a Worker made up her mind to go with the Queen-Mother, she showed it by also acting wild and walking back and forth, and talking a great deal, sometimes fluttering her wings very fast. Then she would go for honey, because when Bees are about to swarm they fill their honey-pockets just as full as they can. At times the Queen-Mother would be quiet, and you might almost think that she had given up going. Then suddenly she would grow restless again, and all the Workers who were going with her would act as she did, and they would get so warm with excitement that the air in the tree became quite hot.

At last the Queen-Mother thought it time to start, and her followers came around her in the tree, and were very still for a minute. Several of the Workers had been flying in circles around the tree, and now they came to the doorway and called. Then all came out, and hovered in the air a few minutes before stopping to rest on a bush near by. When they rested, the first Bee held on to the bush, the next Bee held on to her, and that was the way they did until they were all clinging tightly together in a squirming, dark-brown mass.

Ah, then the Queen-Mother was happy! She felt that she was young again, and she thought, "How they love me, these dear Workers!" She stroked her body with her legs to make herself as fine as possible, and she noticed, with pleasure, how slender she was growing. "I had thought I should never fly again," she said, "yet this is delightful. I believe I will go off by myself for a little while."

So she flew off by herself and was talking rather airily to a Butterfly when two of the Workers came after her.

"You may return to the rest," she said in a queenly way, as she motioned to them with her feelers. "I will come by and by."

"No," said they, "you must come at once or we shall all go back to the Bee tree. You must stay with us. You must do your part as it should be done." And she had to go, for she knew in her heart that Queens have to obey the law as well as other people.

After she had hung with the Workers on the bush for some time, the ones who had gone ahead to find a new home for the swarm came back and gave the signal for the rest to follow. They went to an old log near the river-bank, and here they began the real work. Crawling through an opening at one end, they found a roomy place within, and commenced to clean house at once.

"If there is anything I do like," said a Worker, as she dropped a splinter of rotten wood outside the door, "it is house-cleaning."

"So do I," said her sister. "But what a fuss the Drones always make when we try to do anything of the sort! A pretty-looking home we'd have if they took care of it!"

"I'm glad none of them came with us to this place," said the first Worker. "I guess they knew they were not wanted."

"There, there!" said the Queen-Mother, coming up to where they were; "you must not talk in that way. It may be that you would rather do without Drones, and perhaps they would rather do without you; but I need you both and I will not have any quarreling." When she said this she walked away with her head in the air, and the Workers did not scold any more. They knew that she was right, and, after all, she was their Queen, even if she did have to obey the laws.

Next they got varnish from the buds of poplar trees and varnished over all the cracks and little holes in the walls of their home, leaving open only the place where they were to go in and out. They also covered with varnish a few heavy fragments of wood that lay on the floor of their home, and when this task was done it was all in order and ready for the furniture, that is, the comb.

You know how the comb looks, and you know how they get the wax from which to make it, but unless you are acquainted with the Bees, and have seen them at work, you have no idea what busy

creatures they are. The Queen-Mother, as soon as the cells were ready and she could begin laying eggs again, was as contented and happy as ever.

One day, when she was walking around a corner of the comb, she ran against a sad and discouraged-looking Worker. "Why, what is the matter?" said she, kindly. "Are you sick?"

"No," answered the Worker. "I'm not sick and I'm not tired, only I want to get through."

"Through with what?" asked the Queen.

"With work! It is clean house, varnish the walls, make wax, build combs, get honey, make bread and jelly, and feed the babies. And when they get old enough they'll have to clean house, varnish the walls, make wax, build combs, get honey, make bread and jelly, and feed the babies. I want to know when it is going to stop, and Bees can spend their time in play."

"Never," said the Queen-Mother; and she spoke very gently, for she saw that the Worker was crazy. "It will never stop. If you had nothing to do but play all your life you would soon want to die, and you ought to, for there is no place in this world for idlers. You know that after a while the Drones die because they do nothing, and it is right they should."

"Don't you ever get tired of your eggs?" asked the Worker.

"No," answered the Queen-Mother, "I don't. You see, I have so much to think about, and happy thoughts make tasks light. And then, you know, it is not always the same kind of egg, and that makes a pleasant change for me. I will give you a motto to remember: 'As long as a Bee is well, work is pleasant when done faithfully.'"

"Perhaps that is the matter with me," said the Worker, raising her drooping head. "I have been careless lately when I thought nobody was looking. I will try your way."

When she had gone, the Queen-Mother smiled to herself and said: "Poor child! When work is no longer a pleasure, life is indeed sad. But any Larva should know better than to work carelessly when she is not watched."

Source:

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