

Reminiscences by A D Arcy

I began beekeeping when a mere lad, in the days of the box hive, the frame hive not then being in general use. I had a fair amount of success, as success with box hives went, and secured a quantity of honey and wax each season, both of which found a ready sale. I could never tolerate the sulphur pit, my plan was to select those containing the most honey and transfer them to a new box by shaking the bees from the combs as I cut them from the old box. By doing this, before the honey flow had entirely closed they would generally winter all right and require very little feeding.

Each year saw a steady increase until I reached a total of about thirty. I then became seized with a desire for more information about the busy little bee, and enquired from my bookseller if he had any works dealing with the subject. I secured one, "Hopkins' Original Manual", and at once set to work to devour its contents. I soon saw that I was only wasting time with the box hives, as no doubt, the frame hives were the correct things for me. Being in receipt of only a small wage, the question of finance was a rather stiff hurdle for me to negotiate. The only thing I could not do was to get Dad interested, and get him to stand same. I quoted extracts from the Manual, taking care to select only those parts containing the most optimistic views. I also pointed out to Dad that all the proceeds from the box hives had gone to swell his Banking Account; the result of my efforts was that I received permission to order what supplies I considered necessary, and when they arrived I felt much the same as the average lad feels when a Circus arrives in the village.

I lost no time in opening up the packages and explained to the household how beautifully the different parts of the hives were fitted and how simple it was to just nail them and the frames together; they all agreed that everything was beautiful, and Dad realised that he had at least got something for his money.

The only discordant note was struck by my brother Jack, a few years my senior, and who hated bees as much as I loved them. He considered the whole thing a waste of good money, and that the bees should be contented with their present boxes which were good enough for the beastly things; however as the goods had arrived, I felt that I could afford to treat such remarks with contempt. I unpacked the section boxes and put one together and explained how nice it would be to be able to go to a hive and pick out a full one when desired. This was the only part that appealed to Jack; his face wore an expectant look, and he ventured the opinion that, that part of the business would be all right.

The next part of the program was to get all the hives put together and painted. I managed to work Jack the right way, and secured his assistance, and during the winter months we got everything ready. The hives were all set out in position, nicely numbered and spaced in rows with mathematical precision, the ground having been nicely levelled and sown in grass that could be cut with the lawnmower when required. The following Spring the honey flow started very early so I lost no time in getting the 30 box hives transferred. I doubled them up where necessary so that I had 20 good strong colonies; they set to work with a will and soon had the combs drawn out and in some cases were starting on the supers. In the meantime I had learned the great advantage the Italian bees possessed over the blacks, so it was arranged that I should procure six queens which I introduced without mishap, and then bred sufficient queens from them to Italianise the remainder. I was quite successful and naturally very pleased with my achievement.

The next step was to procure an extractor and uncapping can etc., and as the honey crop seemed assured everything in the garden was lovely. I placed three supers on each hive, reserving one for sections, as I thought

if I secured some good toothsome sections it might change Jack's view of things, and I might be able to make more use of him/ Things however, did not turn out as I had anticipated, as the season turned out to be very choppy and patchy, and the bees instead of packing the supers full of honey, turned their attention to swarming. I was rather disappointed at the turn events had taken, but of course, did not care to say much about it. I had led the household to believe that with the advent of the new hives and Italian bees, I would have complete control of swarming, and that they would do just as they were required to do. Jack by this time was getting rather sour, as those beautiful sections that he had been looking forward to were long overdue, in fact, they had been entirely neglected, except that the bees had gnawed away the starters I had placed in them. Dad said very little, as no doubt he did not wish to discourage me; he appeared a bit anxious about his banking account, as this was about the time we expected to harvest the honey crop.

When the season closed I found there was very little surplus to extract, some colonies could spare a super full, others again had very little more than sufficient to carry them on until the following Spring, besides I had about a dozen swarms which I did not reckon on at the start of the season, and they could have done with whatever the others had to spare. However I felt I must extract enough atleast for our own use, otherwise I would be in deep disgrace, as I had led the household to believe that now when I got going with my new system I would have honey to burn, so to speak.

I examined the hives again and decided to extract about 20 or 30 combs, and chose a nice fine Sunday morning for the job, missing my devotions for once, although as I discovered afterwards I would have been much better employed attending Divine Service than where I was. I got the extractor and uncapping can ready, and then the happy thought struck me, that it would be much better to take them down to where the bees were, than to bring the combs up to the shed, no sooner said than done; I took a few cases down to stand them on, and was soon ready to start.

It was a beautiful calm bright morning, such as makes one feel glad to be alive, the silence only broken by the lazy hum of the bees, as they soared around looking for anything that might be worth picking up. After feasting on the beautiful outlook for a while I made a start, choosing only those combs that were well built out and nice and easy to uncap. The extractor worked very nicely, only that it jumped about a bit, as I had omitted to anchor it down, but it steadied up as soon as it got a bit of weight in. I was getting along very nicely and had extracted about half a dozen combs, taking two from each hive and returning them to the supers for the bees to clean out. I reckoned they would appreciate that and it would keep them busy as they had little else to do just then. I noticed by this time there were quite a number nosing around the extractor and feasting on the loose honey; but I remarked to myself that they would do no harm and when they had taken away a few loads they would be satisfied and not likely to return, so I kept on with the game. I had placed a clean tin covered with a piece of cheesecloth for a strainer under the honey gate of the extractor and let the honey strain into the tin. The bees were not long in finding this out, and got to work on it, but I did not mind the presence of a few as it betokened a kind of friendship which I rather appreciated. As time went on however, they seemed to multiply very rapidly and were becoming almost a nuisance, what with the incessant noise and bumping against them, they were getting on my nerves a bit. However I would have to see it through now, I consoled myself that they would not get much worse. I went off for a couple more frames and on returning had to almost hack my way through them to get to the extractor.

When I put the combs in the extractor the reel refused to revolve; I had at last reached the limit: the space between the reel and sides of the extractor had become blocked with bees stuck up with honey, and of course powerless to free themselves. In despair I grabbed the combs and bumped them back to the hives followed by the roaring surging mass of bees that seemed as though they were ready to devour anything that came in their way. There was certainly no time to lose; I must get out of this as soon as possible. I seemed to have been working in a circle so to speak, getting nowhere, for as fast as I extracted the honey the bees were carting it back again. What honey managed to get through the strainer into the tins was of course safe, but the trouble was to get it through quick enough, it had developed into a race between the strainer and the bees, and the latter were winning. I must enlist the services of Jack and get him to help me to carry the extractor and its contents up to the shed and leave it there until things quietened down. I found him leisurely stretched out on his lounge enjoying a quiet smoke, and he rather reluctantly consented to assist me.

I fastened a veil and a pair of good gloves on him and assured him he was quite safe from anything in the way of stings; he however was not very sure about that, in fact he reckoned he was never safe no matter what he had on so long as there was a bee about. When we arrived at the scene of operations things were worse than ever, the beautiful serene morning of a few hours previously had been converted into a regular cyclone. Jack did not understand matters and I did not feel inclined to explain; he wanted to know if I was crushing the bees to get the honey out of them, if so he reckoned that other thing (referring to my new hatch wax press) I had up there would be better than that, at least it would settle the bees better than the extractor would. I advised him to hurry up and get hold of the extractor and get out of this as soon as possible, but we had not gone far when Jack let go his hold and hit out for the house with all possible speed. I at once realised what the trouble was, he was wearing his new flannel cricket pants and fancy socks and slippers, in my haste I forgot to tie the bottom of his pants and as the ground was fairly covered with bees that had got stuck up with the honey and were crawling all over the place, they lost no time in making for Jack's pants and socks, thinking no doubt that they were there for them to wipe their sticky legs and wings thereon. A great many crawled up inside as well as out; this action of theirs of course un-noticed by Jack. One of them happened to get a bit of a squeeze, which he resented in the usual manner. Jack intended to make a straight line for home, but I must say he steered a very erratic course. He would run a few steps, then smack his pants vigorously and jump several feet in the air and shoot off at a tangent; he seemed like one possessed of devils and trying with more or less success to dodge some invisible obstruction. Being of a rather humorous disposition and never failing to appreciate anything funny when I saw it, even though it were surrounded by grim tragedy, I could not resist the temptation to laugh vigorously. (which under the circumstances I must say was quite excusable) The strain of merriment caught Jack's ear, which did not improve matters as he failed to see where the laugh came in. After a lot of ducking and diving he at last gained the doorway and entered without knocking, and as he disappeared inside I could not help feeling sorry for him, also for myself, for I realised that any hope I entertained of getting any assistance from him in the future had now vanished. Events were moving fast in the apiary and the bees were practically in possession of everything and appeared likely to devour the extractor. I however, managed with a great effort to get the extractor back on its stand again, placed a tin under the tap and let it run. I was just about tired of the whole business and would be glad to get away from the incessant noise and bluster. I went inside to see how dinner was progressing, as it was long overdue, but I found

things in a somewhat chaotic state. Jack was lying on the couch, apparently in great agony, and when his eyes fell on me the effect was much the same as that produced by holding out a red rag to a bull. He gazed at me with a demonic stare and had he expressed his feelings in the words of the celestial he would have greeted me with a loud "WHAFFOR"? He declared that the whole thing was a put up job and that it was a miserable cowardly thing to do. I tried to convince him that it was an accident but to no purpose, and could not but smile at the attitude he had taken up. The Mater, like all good samaritans, took sides with the afflicted one and said it was no time for hilarity, as Jack's condition was far too serious to be made light of. They had removed all the stings from his legs and applied the bluebag rather liberally, his pants and socks coming in for more than their share. The Mater did not like the look of that swelling, it looked as though dropsy had set in; someone else thought it looked like erysipelas. I assured them it was not serious and would disappear when the sun went down, an assurance however that convinced no-one, but instead all sorts of dire calamities were predicted. By this time a hasty dinner had been prepared and partaken of, although nobody seemed anxious for anything in that line, Jack's wants in particular being very easily satisfied. This much over, I crept away to a secluded spot to rest my shattered nerves as I had had quite sufficient excitement and turmoil for one day.

When the shades of evening arrived, I made my way along to see how things were looking in "bee-land" and found they had cleaned up everything portable and settled down once more. I removed the gear back to the shed and then looked to see how much honey I had for all my trouble and found I had barely 2 kerosene tins full; this I removed to the pantry after showing the household what beautiful stuff it was, ever so much better than the box hive stuff. Nobody however seemed to be very enthusiastic over it, Jack refusing to even look at it, he considered it was far too costly no matter how good it might be. There was nothing more now to be done among the bees but to make them snug for the winter. Having done this I began to think what further supplies I would require for the following season, although I would have to wait for a more favourable opportunity to mention the matter to Dad for he had not yet recovered from the shock he received when he got the account for the last lot; he said he would never have thought that bee materials would have cost all that money, but I assured him it would be alright, as the proceeds from one good season would wipe out all the liabilities.

During the winter months I had a look around to see what books I could find to increase my knowledge of bee-ology and stumbled on a work by Doolittle; most of it being new to me I got very interested in it, especially in that part dealing with clipped queens. After reading it over carefully several times I became quite convinced that it was just the thing: in fact it was "Beekeeping made easy." I lost no time in explaining to the household what a great boon my newly found scheme was and how it gave me complete control over the bees, no fear of losing any swarms, in fact if one wished, they could do away with swarming altogether. Jack reckoned the whole thing was all bosh, if it was better for them to have their wings clipped they would be born like that, and he always understood that it was wrong to go against nature, and that I must have a very exaggerated opinion of my ability if I thought I could improve on nature's work. As for trying to civilise or cultivate bees, that, he said, was impossible as they had proved themselves to be absolutely beyond control, even when viewed in the most favourable light they were only things fit for some crank to fool with. I decided not to discuss the matter further, as so far all my arguments were based on theory, whereas Jack had all the concrete facts in his favour. However Spring was not long coming round, and as soon as was opportune, I got to work and clipped all my queens; when finished I gave a sigh of relief as



I reckoned there would be no more trouble with that lot. When setting out for work in the morning I left word that there was no need to watch for swarms, even if any did come off it did not matter as they could not possibly abscond. One day when nearly finished dinner, someone exclaimed "your bees are swarming" I quietly finished my dinner, strolled down to where the commotion was; glancing around I observed a colony with but few flying bees, and soon discovered that it had swarmed. I next hunted for the queen and found her in front of the hive surrounded by a few bees! I caged her then removed the hive from its stand and placed in its stead one filled with sheets of foundation and hung the cage containing the queen in the new hive; in a few minutes the bees began to return and enter their new home in great force. In the evening I again examined it and found them all snug, so I released the queen, and left them to it! I was naturally very elated at the success of my latest venture and had a lot to say on the subject that evening. The household with the exception of Jack were very pleased with my success.

I would soon be requiring some new fittings to accommodate the increase and get ready for the honey flow, so I thought now was the time to mention the matter to Dad. I got out my pocket book and did some calculating. I had so many hives with so many supers each, and each super would hold so much, by the time I had finished, it amounted to tons. This I assured Dad was the very lowest estimate and that it would be quite possible to double that amount. He reckoned it was not an extravagant estimate now that I had got everything in such good working order, and he gave me permission to order what supplies I thought necessary, so everything in the garden was lovely.

A few days later, just as I got seated to dinner, someone remarked that another swarm was in the air; it seemed to be a very large one and to be all over the place. I thought I had better go and manipulate the hives at once as I had done on the previous occasion, so that things would be all ready when the swarm returned. I left instructions for my dinner to be kept warm and that I would be back in a moment. As I made my way down among the bees I could not help but notice what an enormous swarm it was so I decided to prepare a crate of sections for them to fill up. I soon located the hive that had swarmed and hunted for the queen but after having searched for some time and failing to locate her I glanced along the line a few stands away and noticed another hive with but a few flying bees, and on further examination found it had also swarmed. I found this queen without difficulty and manipulated the hive as usual and looked to see if the swarm was returning as I thought it was about time they were beginning to make tracks back, but they were nowhere in sight. I then resumed my search for the other queen when I was startled by the sound of the one o'clock whistle so I bolted up to get my hat and off to work, as I considered being late for work was almost a crime, and of course had to leave my dinner for some more convenient time.

On arrival home from work of course the first thing was to see if the swarms had returned, but to my disgust things were just as I left them. I had a look through the hive where I failed to find the queen as I was at a loss to account for swarms going away like that and leaving their queens behind. I soon discovered what had caused all the trouble, there were plenty of queen cells there, including one from which a queen had just hatched, but there were no eggs to be seen so I concluded the queen had gone some days. The book did not mention anything about that sort of thing, but I was not long in discovering what had happened. The two swarms were in the air at the same time and had joined forces, and the virgin queen that was now in charge led them off without settling, as is very often the case. I felt very annoyed and a bit disgusted and went off to see about some tea,

and as I had practically no dinner that day, I felt what one would call slightly peckish. I sat down on my own, as all the others had finished some time. I had very little to say about swarms or clipped queens that evening, in fact I did not want to talk bee business at all. Dad strolled in and enquired if I had caught the big swarm alright; I replied that they had not returned so far. Dad supposed that they would though; I hoped so, and that was as far as I cared to discuss the subject.

A few days later on arriving home at midday I at once strolled down beewards and on my way stumbled against a nice swarm hanging on an apple tree. They were very unsettled and scrambled over each other in a very discontented manner. I soon discovered the queen quite close to the alighting board, promptly caged her, and arranged the hive ready for the return of the bees, which they did and commenced to enter the hive placed on their old stand. That pleased me very much as it was quite according to the book. However, my joy was only shortlived for on looking around I discovered to my dismay that only a small number were entering their proper hive but instead they were flocking into the hive on either side and also the one in front. I immediately seized the smoker and rushed from one to the other and deluged them with smoke, thinking to divert them to their proper hive but my efforts only heightened the confusion and they were entering any hive that was handy, and in fact the whole apiary was thoroughly disorganised. Just then, away went the one o'clock whistle, late again for work and another dinnerless day!

On returning that evening I had a look to see how many bees had returned to their queen and found only a mere handful, so decided to return the old broodnest; on looking through same to my dismay discovered the combs were rather badly infected with foul brood. (On going through the hives the following Spring, I discovered three of those where the bees had entered were similarly infected) The following Sunday morning being beautiful and fine, found me as usual among my pets; towards midday a swarm started to emerge and I was rather pleased as I could now watch exactly what did happen.

When about half of the bees were out, her ladyship made her appearance, hopping and rolling and turning somersaults in a very undignified manner; making vain efforts to accompany the swarm. The bees took very little notice of her, three or four only remaining with her and as she hopped along they made frantic efforts to urge her to fly; they would try to pick her up with their legs, also shove her along and roll her over; I tried her out to see what would become of her and found she made her way to the hive in front, about 8 feet away, and climbed up the alighting board and was about to enter when I stopped her little game, otherwise there would have been another little mystery to solve. I was just about full up with this clipped business, and anyone could have had the queens for the taking of them away.

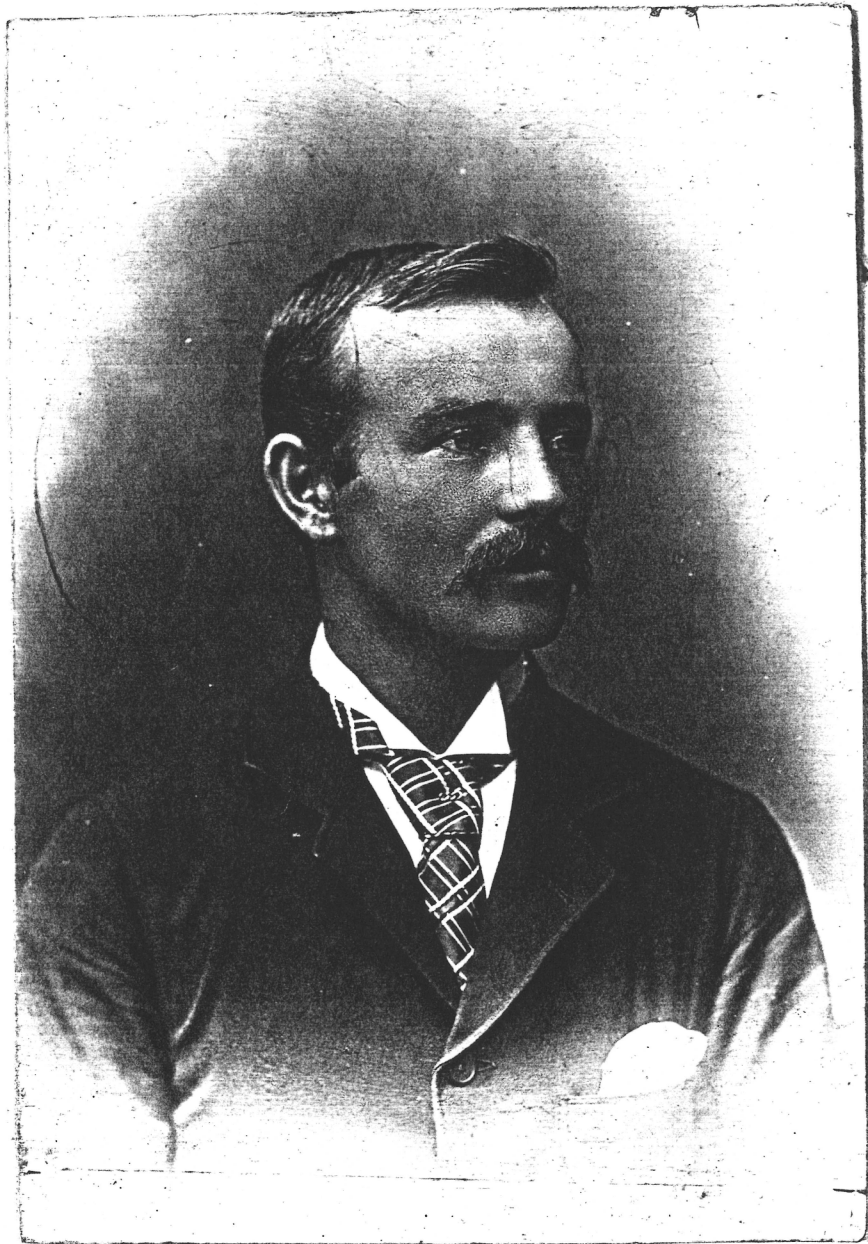
By this time I had very little to say about bees or queens; in fact one would hardly have known that I kept bees at all and any information had to be drawn from me. Jack wanted to know how my new yankee notions were getting on. He opined that they were a failure. I admitted things had not turned out quite according to my plans but I expected better results a little later when the bees understood better what was required of them. Jack maintained as he always had done, that it was impossible to cultivate them in any way whatever, they had proved themselves absolutely devoid of sense or reasoning power, for instance they would sting without any provocation whatever, and then go away and die forthwith, which was a

most absurd thing to do; again they would work like trojans for a few months and fill a hive with honey, enough to last them under ordinary circumstances for 2 or 3 years, then without any apparent cause they would swarm and clear away and leave it, he knew of no other living creature to do anything so foolish. they were very expensive things to keep for a hobby and had brought many a man to the verge of bankruptcy before today. Dad began to think there was a certain amount of horse sense in Jack's argument, especially the latter part of it, in fact that very day he had received a note from his banker requesting him to call at once and interview him as his account had got somewhat out of hand and would he please try and coax it back again onto the narrow track. He was in a bit of a quandary but he decided to let things go on now until the end of the season, and if there was no improvement, he would certainly have to shut down on this expenditure and probably sell the bees and everything in connection with them, providing he could get anyone foolish enough to buy them.

For the next month or so the bees simply repeated their pranks of the previous few weeks and clipped queens were at a discount as far as I was concerned (in fact I always do a little smile now when I receive an order for a batch of queens with instructions to "please clip queen's wings") I cannot say whether it is on account of the fun I had with them myself or whether it is in anticipation of the fun the other fellow is going to have! Soon after this the honey flow set in in real earnest and to use an "Americanism" IT WAS SOME FLOW!

The hives were full to overflowing in a very short time and although the extractor was kept going whenever possible, the bees still seemed to keep ahead of us, and it was quite a common thing for them to lie sprawled on the grass in front of the hives, as there was no room inside. We collected all the kerosine tins in the neighbourhood and cleaned them out and filled them with honey; next the pantry was raided and all the jam jars etc. were commandeered and filled, in fact anything that would hold a bit of honey was brought into use; the trouble was to know where to put it all and the hives were still full. Dad was pleased with the favourable turn events had taken as his banking account would soon be in a flourishing condition. He wore a pleased and confident look as one who had suddenly risen to affluence and which to appreciate correctly one would require to imagine the look on some big Australian squatter's face, who has just received word from his stations out back that the drought had broken up, tanks all full and still raining; that just about correctly described our position.

We had comb honey in abundance, in fact, the difficulty was to find storage room. Jack now looked upon the bees in quite a different light and reckoned the only bad point they possessed was their sting. I told him he ought to forgive and forget that little incident that happened during our first experience at extracting. He said he could forgive, in fact he had already done so, as the first time he had put his tooth into one of those beautiful sections had brought forgiveness, but to ask him to forget, well that was asking too much. It was, he said, a case of "My heart is good but my legs won't let me, won't let me."





ALFRED JAMES DWARCY

BORN 1871

MARRIED 1897 to ALICE.

DIED 1918 HEBLEY

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- Head Stone - possibly grand-  
mother died 1912.

- wife died 1936 ~~wife~~ (Ethel Ellice)

Older living beekeepers no memory of  
him. Trying to find out about wife