

THE MOTHER HIVE

If the stock had not been old and overcrowded, the Wax-moth would never have entered; but where bees are too thick on the comb there must be sickness or parasites. The heat of the hive had risen with the June honey-flow, and though the farmers worked, until their wings ached, to keep people cool, everybody suffered.

A young bee crawled up the greasy trampled alighting-board. "Excuse me," she began, "but it's my first honey-flight. Could you kindly tell me if this is my--"

--own hive?" the Guard snapped. "Yes! Buzz in, and be foul-brooded to you! Next!"

"Shame!" cried half a dozen old workers with worn wings and nerves, and there was a scuffle and a hum.

The little grey Wax-moth, pressed close in a crack in the alighting-board, had waited this chance all day. She scuttled in like a ghost, and, knowing the senior bees would turn her out at once, dodged into a brood-frame, where youngsters who had not yet seen the winds blow or the flowers nod discussed life. Here she was safe, for young bees will tolerate any sort of stranger. Behind her came the bee who had been slanged by the Guard.

"What is the world like, Melissa?" said a companion. "Cruel! I brought in a full load of first-class stuff, and the Guard told me to go and be foul-brooded!" She sat down in the cool draught across the combs.

"If you'd only heard," said the Wax-moth silkily, "the insolence of the Guard's tone when she cursed our sister. It aroused the Entire Community." She laid an egg. She had stolen in for that purpose.

"There was a bit of a fuss on the Gate," Melissa chuckled. "You were there, Miss?" She did not know how to address the slim stranger.

"Don't call me 'Miss.' I'm a sister to all in affliction--just a working-sister. My heart bled for you beneath your burden." The Wax-moth caressed Melissa with her soft feelers and laid another egg.

"You mustn't lay here," cried Melissa. "You aren't a Queen."

"My dear child, I give you my most solemn word of honour those aren't eggs. Those are my principles, and I am ready to die for them." She raised her voice a little above the rustle and tramp round her. "If you'd like to kill me, pray do."

"Don't be unkind, Melissa," said a young bee, impressed by the chaste folds of the Wax-moth's wing, which hid her ceaseless egg-dropping.

"I haven't done anything," Melissa answered. "She's doing it all."

"Ah, don't let your conscience reproach you later, but when you've killed me, write me, at least, as one that loved her fellow-worker."

Laying at every sob, the Wax-moth backed into a crowd of young bees, and left Melissa bewildered and annoyed. So she lifted up her little voice in the darkness and cried, "Stores!" till a gang of cell-fillers hailed her, and she left her load with them.

"I'm afraid I foul-brooded you just now," said a voice over her shoulder. "I'd been on the Gate for three hours, and one would foul-brood the Queen herself after that. No offence meant."

"None taken," Melissa answered cheerily. "I shall be on Guard myself, some day. What's next to do?"

"There's a rumour of Death's Head Moths about. Send a gang of youngsters to the Gate, and tell them to narrow it in with a couple of stout scrap-wax pillars. It'll make the Hive hot, but we can't have Death's Headers in the middle of our honey-flow."

"My Only Wings! I should think not!" Melissa had all a sound bee's hereditary hatred against the big, squeaking, feathery Thief of the Hives. "Tumble out!" she called across the youngsters' quarters. "All you who aren't feeding babies, show a leg. Scrap-wax pillars for the Ga-ate!" She chanted the order at length.

"That's nonsense," a downy, day-old bee answered. "In the first place, I never heard of a Death's Header coming into a hive. People don't do such things. In the second, building pillars to keep 'em out is purely a Cypriote trick, unworthy of British bees. In the third, if you trust a Death's Head, he will trust you. Pillar-building shows lack of confidence. Our dear sister in grey says so."

"Yes. Pillars are un-English and provocative, and a waste of wax that is needed for higher and more practical ends," said the Wax-moth from an empty store-cell.

"The safety of the Hive is the highest thing I've ever heard of. You mustn't teach us to refuse work," Melissa began.

"You misunderstand me, as usual, love. Work's the essence of life; but to expend precious unreturning vitality and real labour against imaginary danger, that is heartbreakingly absurd! If I can only teach a--a little toleration--a little ordinary kindness here toward that absurd old bogey you call the Death's Header, I shan't have lived in vain."

"She hasn't lived in vain, the darling!" cried twenty bees together.

"You should see her saintly life, Melissa! She just devotes herself to spreading her principles, and--and--she looks lovely!"

An old, baldish bee came up the comb.

"Pillar-workers for the Gate! Get out and chew scraps. Buzz off!" she said. The Wax-moth slipped aside.

The young bees trooped down the frame, whispering. "What's the matter with 'em?" said the oldster. "Why do they call each other 'ducky' and 'darling'? Must be the weather." She sniffed suspiciously. "Horrid stuffy smell here. Like stale quilts. Not Wax-moth, I hope, Melissa?"

"Not to my knowledge," said Melissa, who, of course, only knew the Wax-moth as a lady with principles, and had never thought to report her presence. She had always imagined Wax-moths to be like blood-red dragon-flies.

"You had better fan out this corner for a little," said the old bee and passed on. Melissa dropped her head at once, took firm hold with her fore-feet, and fanned obediently at the regulation stroke three hundred beats to the second. Fanning tries a bee's temper, because she must always keep in the same place where she never seems to be doing any good, and, all the while, she is wearing out her only wings. When a bee cannot fly, a bee must not live; and a bee knows it. The Wax-moth crept forth, and caressed Melissa again.

"I see," she murmured, "that at heart you are one of Us."

"I work with the Hive," Melissa answered briefly.

"It's the same thing. We and the Hive are one."

"Then why are your feelers different from ours? Don't cuddle so."

"Don't be provincial, Carissima. You can't have all the world alike--yet."

"But why do you lay eggs?" Melissa insisted. "You lay 'em like a Queen--only you drop them in patches all over the place. I've watched you."

"Ah, Brighteyes, so you've pierced my little subterfuge? Yes, they are eggs. By and by they'll spread our principles. Aren't you glad?"

"You gave me your most solemn word of honour that they were not eggs."

"That was my little subterfuge, dearest--for the sake of the Cause. Now I must reach the young." The Wax-moth tripped towards the fourth brood-frame where the young bees were busy feeding the babies.

It takes some time for a sound bee to realize a malignant and continuous lie. "She's very sweet and feathery," was all that Melissa thought, "but her talk sounds like ivy honey tastes. I'd better get to my field-work again."

She found the Gate in a sulky uproar. The youngsters told off to the pillars had refused to chew scrap-wax because it made their jaws ache, and were clamouring for virgin stuff.

"Anything to finish the job!" said the badgered Guards. "Hang up, some of you, and make wax for these slack-jawed sisters."

Before a bee can make wax she must fill herself with honey. Then she climbs to safe foothold and hangs, while other gorged bees hang on to her in a cluster. There they wait in silence till the wax comes. The scales are either taken out of the maker's pockets by the workers, or tinkle down on the workers while they wait. The workers chew them (they are useless unchewed) into the all-supporting, all-embracing Wax of the Hive.

But now, no sooner was the wax-cluster in position than the workers below broke out again.

"Come down!" they cried. "Come down and work! Come on, you Levantine parasites! Don't think to enjoy yourselves up there while we're sweating down here!"

The cluster shivered, as from hooked fore-foot to hooked hind-foot it telegraphed uneasiness. At last a worker sprang up, grabbed the lowest waxmaker, and swung, kicking above her companions.

"I can make wax too!" she bawled. "Give me a full gorge and I'll make tons of it."

"Make it, then," said the bee she had grappled. The spoken word snapped the current through the cluster. It shook and glistened like a cat's fur in the dark. "Unhook!" it murmured. "No wax for any one to-day."

"You lazy thieves! Hang up at once and produce our wax," said the bees below.

"Impossible! The sweat's gone. To make your wax we must have stillness, warmth, and food. Unhook! Unhook!"

They broke up as they murmured, and disappeared among the other bees, from whom, of course, they were undistinguishable.

"Seems as if we'd have to chew scrap-wax for these pillars, after all," said a worker.

"Not by a whole comb," cried the young bee who had broken the cluster.

"Listen here! I've studied the question more than twenty minutes. It's as simple as falling off a daisy. You've heard of Cheshire, Root and Langstroth?"

They had not, but they shouted "Good old Langstroth!" just the same.

"Those three know all that there is to be known about making hives. One or t'other of 'em must have made ours, and if they've made it, they're bound to look after it. Ours is a 'Guaranteed Patent Hive.' You can see it on the label behind."

"Good old guarantee! Hurrah for the label behind!" roared the bees.

"Well, such being the case, I say that when we find they've betrayed us, we can exact from them a terrible vengeance."

"Good old vengeance! Good old Root! 'Nuff said! Chuck it!" The crowd cheered and broke away as Melissa dived through.

"D'you know where Langstroth, Root and Cheshire, live if you happen to want em? she asked of the proud panting orator.

"Gum me if I know they ever lived at all! But aren't they beautiful names to buzz about? Did you see how it worked up the sisterhood?"

"Yes; but it didn't defend the Gate," she replied.

"Ah, perhaps that's true, but think how delicate my position is, sister. I've a magnificent appetite, and I don't like working. It's bad for the mind. My instinct tells me that I can act as a restraining influence on others. They would have been worse, but for me."

But Melissa had already risen clear, and was heading for a breadth of virgin white clover, which to an overtired bee is as soothing as plain knitting to a woman.

"I think I'll take this load to the nurseries," she said, when she had finished. "It was always quiet there in my day," and she topped off with two little pats of pollen for the babies.

She was met on the fourth brood-comb by a rush of excited sisters all buzzing together.

"One at a time! Let me put down my load. Now, what is it Sacharissa?" she said.

"Grey Sister--that fluffy one, I mean--she came and said we ought to be out in the sunshine gathering honey, because life was short. She said any old bee could attend to our babies, and some day old bees would. That isn't true, Melissa, is it? No old bees can take us away from our babies, can they?"

"Of course not. You feed the babies while your heads are soft. When your heads harden, you go on to field-work. Any one knows that."

"We told her so! We told her so; but she only waved her feelers, and said we could all lay eggs like Queens if we chose. And I'm afraid

lots of the weaker sisters believe her, and are trying to do it. So unsettling!"

Sacharissa sped to a sealed worker-cell whose lid pulsed, as the bee within began to cut its way out.

"Come along, precious!" she murmured, and thinned the frail top from the other side. A pale, damp, creased thing hoisted itself feebly on to the comb. Sacharissa's note changed at once. "No time to waste! Go up the frame and preen yourself!" she said. "Report for nursing-duty in my ward to-morrow evening at six. Stop a minute. What's the matter with your third right leg?"

The young bee held it out in silence--unmistakably a drone leg incapable of packing pollen.

"Thank you. You needn't report till the day after to-morrow." Sacharissa turned to her companion. "That's the fifth oddity hatched in my ward since noon. I don't like it."

"There's always a certain number of 'em," said Melissa. "You can't stop a few working sisters from laying, now and then, when they overfeed themselves. They only raise dwarf drones."

"But we're hatching out drones with workers' stomachs; workers with drones' stomachs; and albinos and mixed-leggers who can't pack

pollen--like that poor little beast yonder. I don't mind dwarf drones any more than you do (they all die in July), but this steady hatch of oddities frightens me, Melissa!"

"How narrow of you! They are all so delightfully clever and unusual and interesting," piped the Wax-moth from a crack above them. "Come here, you dear, downy duck, and tell us all about your feelings."

"I wish she'd go!" Sacharissa lowered her voice. "She meets these--er--oddities as they dry out, and cuddles 'em in corners."

"I suppose the truth is that we're over-stocked and too well fed to swarm," said Melissa.

"That is the truth," said the Queen's voice behind them. They had not heard the heavy royal footfall which sets empty cells vibrating. Sacharissa offered her food at once. She ate and dragged her weary body forward. "Can you suggest a remedy?" she said.

"New principles!" cried the Wax-moth from her crevice. "We'll apply them quietly later."

"Suppose we sent out a swarm?" Melissa suggested. "It's a little late, but it might ease us off."

"It would save us, but--I know the Hive! You shall see for yourself."

The old Queen cried the Swarming Cry, which to a bee of good blood should be what the trumpet was to Job's war-horse. In spite of her immense age (three, years), it rang between the canon-like frames as a pibroch rings in a mountain pass; the fanners changed their note, and repeated it up in every gallery; and the broad-winged drones, burly and eager, ended it on one nerve-thrilling outbreak of bugles: "La Reine le veult! Swarm! Swar-rm! Swar-r-rm!"

But the roar which should follow the Call was wanting. They heard a broken grumble like the murmur of a falling tide.

"Swarm? What for? Catch me leaving a good bar-frame Hive, with fixed foundations, for a rotten, old oak out in the open where it may rain any minute! We're all right! It's a 'Patent Guaranteed Hive.' Why do they want to turn us out? Swarming be gummed! Swarming was invented to cheat a worker out of her proper comforts. Come on off to bed!"

The noise died out as the bees settled in empty cells for the night.

"You hear?" said the Queen. "I know the Hive!"

"Quite between ourselves, I taught them that," cried the Wax-moth.

"Wait till my principles develop, and you'll see the light from a new quarter."

"You speak truth for once," the Queen said suddenly, for she recognized the Wax-moth. "That Light will break into the top of the Hive. A Hot Smoke will follow it, and your children will not be able to hide in any crevice."

"Is it possible?" Melissa whispered. "I-we have sometimes heard a legend like it."

"It is no legend," the old Queen answered. "I had it from my mother, and she had it from hers. After the Wax-moth has grown strong, a Shadow will fall across the gate; a Voice will speak from behind a Veil; there will be Light, and Hot Smoke, and earthquakes, and those who live will see everything that they have done, all together in one place, burned up in one great fire." The old Queen was trying to tell what she had been told of the Bee Master's dealings with an infected hive in the apiary, two or three seasons ago; and, of course, from her point of view the affair was as important as the Day of Judgment.

"And then?" asked horrified Sacharissa.

"Then, I have heard that a little light will burn in a great darkness, and perhaps the world will begin again. Myself, I think not."

"Tut! Tut!" the Wax-moth cried. "You good, fat people always prophesy ruin if things don't go exactly your way. But I grant you there will be changes."

There were. When her eggs hatched, the wax was riddled with little tunnels, coated with the dirty clothes of the caterpillars. Flannelly lines ran through the honey-stores, the pollen-larders, the foundations, and, worst of all, through the babies in their cradles, till the Sweeper Guards spent half their time tossing out useless little corpses. The lines ended in a maze of sticky webbing on the face of the comb. The caterpillars could not stop spinning as they walked, and as they walked everywhere, they smarmed and garmed everything. Even where it did not hamper the bees' feet, the stale, sour smell of the stuff put them off their work; though some of the bees who had taken to egg laying said it encouraged them to be mothers and maintain a vital interest in life.

When the caterpillars became moths, they made friends with the ever-increasing Oddities--albinos, mixed-leggers, single-eyed composites, faceless drones, halfqueens and laying sisters; and the ever-dwindling band of the old stock worked themselves bald and fray-winged to feed their queer charges. Most of the Oddities would not, and many, on account of their malformations, could not, go through a day's field-work; but the Wax-moths, who were always busy on the brood-comb, found pleasant home occupations for them. One albino, for instance, divided the number of pounds of honey in stock by the number of bees in the Hive, and proved that if every bee only gathered honey for seven and three quarter minutes a day, she would have the rest of the time to herself, and could accompany the drones on their mating flights. The drones were not at all pleased.

Another, an eyeless drone with no feelers, said that all brood-cells should be perfect circles, so as not to interfere with the grub or the workers. He proved that the old six-sided cell was solely due to the workers building against each other on opposite sides of the wall, and that if there were no interference, there would be no angles. Some bees tried the new plan for a while, and found it cost eight times more wax than the old six sided specification; and, as they never allowed a cluster to hang up and make wax in peace, real wax was scarce. However, they eked out their task with varnish stolen from new coffins at funerals, and it made them rather sick. Then they took to cadging round sugar-factories and breweries, because it was easiest to get their material from those places, and the mixture of glucose and beer naturally fermented in store and blew the store-cells out of shape, besides smelling abominably. Some of the sound bees warned them that ill-gotten gains never prosper, but the Oddities at once surrounded them and balled them to death. That was a punishment they were almost as fond of as they were of eating, and they expected the sound bees to feed them. Curiously enough the age-old instinct of loyalty and devotion towards the Hive made the sound bees do this, though their reason told them they ought to slip away and unite with some other healthy stock in the apiary.

"What, about seven and three-quarter minutes' work now?" said Melissa one day as she came in. "I've been at it for five hours, and I've only half a load."

"Oh, the Hive subsists on the Hival Honey which the Hive produces," said a blind Oddity squatting in a store-cell.

"But honey is gathered from flowers outside two miles away sometimes," cried Melissa.

"Pardon me," said the blind thing, sucking hard. "But this is the Hive, is it not?"

"It was. Worse luck, it is."

"And the Hival Honey is here, is it not?" It opened a fresh store-cell to prove it.

"Ye-es, but it won't be long at this rate," said Melissa.

"The rates have nothing to do with it. This Hive produces the Hival Honey. You people never seem to grasp the economic simplicity that underlies all life."

"Oh, me!" said poor Melissa, "haven't you ever been beyond the Gate?"

"Certainly not. A fool's eyes are in the ends of the earth. Mine are in my head." It gorged till it bloated.

Melissa took refuge in her poorly paid field-work and told Sacharissa the story.

"Hut!" said that wise bee, fretting with an old maid of a thistle. "Tell us something new. The Hive's full of such as him--it, I mean."

"What's the end to be? All the honey going out and none coming in. Things can't last this way!" said Melissa.

"Who cares?" said Sacharissa. "I know now how drones feel the day before they're killed. A short life and a merry one for me."

"If it only were merry! But think of those awful, solemn, lop-sided Oddities waiting for us at home crawling and clambering and preaching--and dirtying things in the dark."

"I don't mind that so much as their silly songs, after we've fed 'em, all about 'work among the merry, merry blossoms," said Sacharissa from the deeps of a stale Canterbury bell.

"I do. How's our Queen?" said Melissa.

"Cheerfully hopeless, as usual. But she lays an egg now and then."

"Does she so?" Melissa backed out of the next bell with a jerk. "Suppose now, we sound workers tried to raise a Princess in some clean corner?"

"You'd be put to it to find one. The Hive's all Wax-moth and muckings. But--well?"

"A Princess might help us in the time of the Voice behind the Veil that the Queen talks of. And anything is better than working for Oddities that chirrup about work that they can't do, and waste what we bring home."

"Who cares?" said Sacharissa. "I'm with you, for the fun of it. The Oddities would ball us to death, if they knew. Come home, and we'll begin."

There is no room to tell how the experienced Melissa found a far-off frame so messed and mishandled by abandoned cell-building experiments that, for very shame, the bees never went there. How in that ruin she blocked out a Royal Cell of sound wax, but disguised by rubbish till it looked like a kopje among deserted kopjes. How she prevailed upon the hopeless Queen to make one last effort and lay a worthy egg. How the Queen obeyed and died. How her spent carcass was flung out on the rubbish heap, and how a multitude of laying sisters went about dropping drone-eggs where they listed, and said there was no more need of Queens. How, covered by this confusion, Sacharissa educated certain young bees to educate certain new-born bees in the almost lost art of making Royal Jelly. How the nectar for it was won out of hours in the teeth of chill winds. How the hidden egg hatched true--no drone, but Blood Royal. How

it was capped, and how desperately they worked to feed and double-feed the now swarming Oddities, lest any break in the food-supplies should set them to instituting inquiries, which, with songs about work, was their favourite amusement. How in an auspicious hour, on a moonless night, the Princess came forth a Princess indeed, and how Melissa smuggled her into a dark empty honey-magazine, to bide her time; and how the drones, knowing she was there, went about singing the deep disreputable love-songs of the old days--to the scandal of the laying sisters, who do not think well of drones. These things are, written in the Book of Queens, which is laid up in the hollow of the Great Ash Ygdrasil.

After a few days the weather changed again and became glorious. Even the Oddities would now join the crowd that hung out on the alighting-board, and would sing of work among the merry, merry blossoms till an untrained ear might have received it for the hum of a working hive. Yet, in truth, their store-honey had been eaten long ago. They lived from day to day on the efforts of the few sound bees, while the Wax-moth fretted and consumed again their already ruined wax. But the sound bees never mentioned these matters. They knew, if they did, the Oddities would hold a meeting and ball them to death.

"Now you see what we have done," said the Wax-moths. "We have created New Material, a New Convention, a New Type, as we said we would."

"And new possibilities for us," said the laying sisters gratefully. "You

have given us a new life's work, vital and paramount."

"More than that," chanted the Oddities in the sunshine; "you have created a new heaven and a new earth. Heaven, cloudless and accessible" (it was a perfect August evening) "and Earth teeming with the merry, merry blossoms, waiting only our honest toil to turn them all to good. The--er--Aster, and the Crocus, and the--er--Ladies' Smock in her season, the Chrysanthemum after her kind, and the Guelder Rose bringing forth abundantly withal."

"Oh, Holy Hymettus!" said Melissa, awestruck. "I knew they didn't know how honey was made, but they've forgotten the Order of the Flowers! What will become of them?"

A Shadow fell across the alighting-board as the Bee Master and his son came by. The Oddities crawled in and a Voice behind a Veil said: "I've neglected the old Hive too long. Give me the smoker."

Melissa heard and darted through the gate. "Come, oh come!" she cried.

"It is the destruction the Old Queen foretold. Princess, come!"

"Really, you are too archaic for words," said an Oddity in an alley-way.

"A cloud, I admit, may have crossed the sun; but why hysterics? Above all, why Princesses so late in the day? Are you aware it's the Hival Tea-time? Let's sing grace."

Melissa clawed past him with all six legs. Sacharissa had run to what was left of the fertile brood-comb. "Down and out!" she called across the brown breadth of it. "Nurses, guards, fanners, sweepers--out!"

"Never mind the babies. They're better dead.--Out, before the Light and the Hot Smoke!"

The Princess's first clear fearless call (Melissa had found her) rose and drummed through all the frames. "La Reine le veult! Swarm! Swar-rm! Swar-r-rm!"

The Hive shook beneath the shattering thunder of a stuck-down quilt being torn back.

"Don't be alarmed, dears," said the Wax-moths. "That's our work. Look up, and you'll see the dawn of the New Day."

Light broke in the top of the hive as the Queen had, prophesied--naked light on the boiling, bewildered bees.

Sacharissa rounded up her rearguard, which dropped headlong off the frame, and joined the Princess's detachment thrusting toward the Gate. Now panic was in full blast, and each sound bee found herself embraced by at least three Oddities. The first instinct of a frightened bee is to break into the stores and gorge herself with honey; but there were no stores left, so the Oddities fought the sound bees.

"You must feed us, or we shall die!" they cried, holding and clutching and slipping, while the silent scared earwigs and little spiders twisted between their legs. "Think of the Hive, traitors! The Holy Hive!"

"You should have thought before!" cried the sound bees., "Stay and see the dawn of your New Day."

They reached the Gate at last over the soft bodies of many to whom they had ministered.

"On! Out! Up!" roared Melissa in the Princess's ear. "For the Hive's sake! To the Old Oak!"

The Princess left the alighting-board, circled once, flung herself at the lowest branch of the Old Oak, and her little loyal swarm--you could have covered it with a pint mug--followed, hooked, and hung.

"Hold close!" Melissa gasped. "The old legends have come true! Look!"

The Hive was half hidden by smoke, and Figures moved through the smoke. They heard a frame crack stickily, saw it heaved high and twirled round between enormous hands--a blotched, bulged, and perished horror of grey wax, corrupt brood, and small drone-cells, all covered with crawling Oddities, strange to the sun.

"Why, this isn't a hive! This is a museum of curiosities," said the Voice behind the Veil. It was only the Bee Master talking to his son.

"Can you blame 'em, father?" said a second voice. "It's rotten with Wax-moth. See here!"

Another frame came up. A finger poked through it, and it broke away in rustling flakes of ashy rottenness.

"Number Four Frame! That was your mother's pet comb once," whispered Melissa to the Princess. "Many's the good egg I've watched her lay there."

"Aren't you confusing pod hoc with propter hoc?" said the Bee Master.

"Wax-moth only succeed when weak bees let them in." A third frame crackled and rose into the light. "All this is full of laying workers' brood. That never happens till the stock's weakened. Phew!"

He beat it on his knee like a tambourine, and it also crumbled to pieces.

The little swarm shivered as they watched the dwarf drone-grubs squirm feebly on the grass. Many sound bees had nursed on that frame, well knowing their work was useless; but the actual sight of even useless work destroyed disheartens a good worker.

"No, they have some recuperative power left," said the second voice.

"Here's a Queen cell!"

"But it's tucked away among--What on earth has come to the little wretches? They seem to have lost the instinct of cell-building." The father held up the frame where the bees had experimented in circular cell-work. It looked like the pitted head, of a decaying toadstool.

"Not altogether," the son corrected. "There's one line, at least, of perfectly good cells."

"My work," said Sacharissa to herself. "I'm glad Man does me justice before--"

That frame, too, was smashed out and thrown atop of the others and the foul earwiggy quilts.

As frame after frame followed it, the swarm beheld the upheaval, exposure, and destruction of all that had been well or ill done in every cranny of their Hive for generations past. There was black comb so old that they had forgotten where it hung; orange, buff, and ochre-varnished store-comb, built as bees were used to build before the days of artificial foundations; and there was a little, white, frail new work.

There were sheets on sheets of level, even brood-comb that had held in its time unnumbered thousands of unnamed workers; patches of obsolete drone-comb, broad and high-shouldered, showing to what marks the male

grub was expected to grow; and two-inch deep honey-magazines, empty, but still magnificent, the whole gummed and glued into twisted scrap-work, awry on the wires; half-cells, beginnings abandoned, or grandiose, weak-walled, composite cells pieced out with rubbish and capped with dirt.

Good or bad, every inch of it was so riddled by the tunnels of the Wax-moth that it broke in clouds of dust as it was flung on the heap.

"Oh, see!" cried Sacharissa. "The Great Burning that Our Queen foretold. Who can bear to look?"

A flame crawled up the pile of rubbish, and they smelt singeing wax.

The Figures stooped, lifted the Hive and shook it upside down over the pyre. A cascade of Oddities, chips of broken comb, scale, fluff, and grubs slid out, crackled, sizzled, popped a little, and then the flames roared up and consumed all that fuel.

"We must disinfect," said a Voice. "Get me a sulphur-candle, please."

The shell of the Hive was returned to its place, a light was set in its sticky emptiness, tier by tier the Figures built it up, closed the entrance, and went away. The swarm watched the light leaking through the cracks all the long night. At dawn one Wax-moth came by, fluttering impudently.

"There has been a miscalculation about the New Day, my dears," she began; "one can't expect people to be perfect all at once. That was our mistake."

"No, the mistake was entirely ours," said the Princess.

"Pardon me," said the Wax-moth. "When you think of the enormous upheaval--call it good or bad--which our influence brought about, you will admit that we, and we alone--"

"You?" said the Princess. "Our stock was not strong. So you came--as any other disease might have come. Hang close, all my people."

When the sun rose, Veiled Figures came down, and saw their swarm at the bough's end waiting patiently within sight of the old Hive--a handful, but prepared to go on.

THE BEES AND THE FLIES

A FARMER of the Augustan age
Perused in Virgil's golden page,
The story of the secret won