



THE BEE-HIVE



FATHER. Come hither, George, I want to show you these bees at work. How busy they are! Is it not an interesting sight?

GEORGE. Yes, father, I like to see them; for though they are not so

pretty as wasps, they are not so spiteful and mischievous.

F. It is a great matter to be free from such bad qualities as spitefulness and mischief, but that is not all the praise of the bee; it sets us an example of many good and excellent qualities. You have not, I hope, forgotten Dr. Watts' beautiful little poem,

How doth the little busy bee,
Improve each shining hour.

G. No, father, I can say it quite perfectly now; and mother says she taught it me before I was two years old.

F. That which is earliest planted is likely to be most deeply rooted. You learned to repeat the words then; now, you are old enough to observe the thing; and as you do so, you will discover in your little poem a beauty

and meaning which you had not before perceived.

First, let us examine the curious and well-contrived frame of this little creature, and adore the wisdom and power of God in its creation. We wonder at the mighty elephant, and the majestic lion, when we occasionally see them; but the Creator's hand is no less visible in the little bee, or ant, or spider, which we see every day, and are too apt to pass by without a thought.

Look at its delicate wings, with strong fibres around and across, to strengthen the fine lacework of which they are formed.

Observe how curiously the eyes, which are very large, are covered over with a thick horny shield to defend them from injury; and, as if to supply any defect of sight which this

might occasion, they are provided with a pair of horns or feelers, which they can put out or draw in at pleasure; these they commonly thrust out before them, and with them tenderly feel any object they approach, and judge of its nature and properties.

The tongue of the bee is much longer than its mouth will contain, and so is doubled up and reaches a good way under its breast. This is necessary to enable her to suck out the honey which in many flowers is placed at the end of a long narrow tube, as in the honeysuckle, which flower, I suppose, takes its name from the sweet food which it abundantly furnishes to these industrious little creatures.

The bee is thickly covered with hairs; these, most likely, are designed for warmth, for the bee itself is

a tender little creature; and great warmth also is necessary in bringing forward its young, over which the parent bee sits—much in the same manner as a hen on her eggs—and which by her natural warmth she cherishes, until they come out of their little cells, perfect bees.

Observe, too, each bee is furnished with a bottle or bag, in which to carry its honey, which, by muscles fitly adapted for the purpose, she empties into the honey-comb; in this also they often fetch water with which to mix up food for their young, in attending to which they are very diligent and careful. So much for the natural formation of the bee, which should lead you to adore the Creator's power and wisdom, as manifested in the smallest as well as the noblest of his works.

I must now tell you a few things which have been remarked concerning the habits of the bee, and of which we may say, as Solomon says of the ant, "Go to the bee, thou sluggard," or spendthrift; "consider her ways, and be wise."

1. Bees are very industrious. See how busy they are; some coming loaded into the hive, to lay up the store they have obtained; others going out in search of more: not a flower in the garden that affords honey but they visit it; and when none grow near at hand, they will even travel miles to obtain their sweet food.

Besides, they have a great deal of work to do in the hive:

For skilfully they build their cells,
And neatly spread their wax.

Yes, these curious combs, neatly di-

vided into cells with six sides, which serve as dwellings for their young, and as storehouses for their wax and honey, are produced entirely by their own industry and application.

Their teeth are the only instruments with which they shape these buildings so neatly and exactly; but they spare no pains in their work, and are so diligent that a stock of bees swarmed into an empty hive will, in the course of a day, construct cells enough to contain three thousand bees. If every man, woman, boy, and girl in the world were as industrious, there certainly would not be half so much poverty and misery as there are.

2. They are in regular and orderly subjection to one called the queen bee, and they labor very well together, and divide their work in the best and most



agreeable way. With all their bustle we see no confusion.

When they begin to work in the hive, they separate into four companies, one of which roves in the fields in search of materials, another is employed in laying out the bottoms and partitions of the cells, a third in making the inside smooth from the corners and angles, and the fourth company brings in food for the rest, or relieves

those who return with their respective burdens.

But they are not kept constantly to one employment; they often change the tasks assigned them: those who have been at work are permitted to go abroad for food, while those who have already been in the fields take their place at home.

They seem even to have signs by which they understand each other; for when any one wants food it bends down its trunk towards another bee, which opens its honey-bag, and lets fall some drops into the other's mouth opened to receive it. Even a hive of bees may remind us of what the psalmist said: "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" How much more a well-regulated, obedient, and harmonious family of children!

3. Bees are very persevering; they do not work hard one day and live in idleness the next; or when they go out in search of food, play about half the time, and come home with half a load of honey. If they did so, they would soon be turned out of the hive; for it is a constant rule with them, that those who will not work shall not eat; and they seem to find their joy in their work. Oh, if we did but take pleasure in our duty, how much better and more easily would it be performed; how much complaint of hardship on the part of scholars and servants would be spared, and of negligence and idleness on the part of those who instruct and employ them.

4. Bees are remarkable for their neatness and cleanliness; it is by their extreme neatness and exactness that they are able to get so much work

done in so short a time, and so many accommodations in so small a compass. They have no room to throw about their honey here, and their wax there, as some slovenly people do their work; nor can they afford to suffer such valuable things to be wasted, nor spare their time to be always clearing away after the idle and careless; so they take care not to scatter any of their materials while they work, and their house is always a pattern of neatness and order. Oh, if it were possible for some children to be changed into bees, and carry into the hive their present lazy, dirty, slovenly habits, I am sure the whole family would unite in turning them out without ceremony.

5. Bees are very careful for futurity. In the summer-time, when the weather is fine, and the flowers plen-

tiful, they do not consume all they earn, but eat what is sufficient, and lay up the rest in store for winter. In this respect they furnish a lesson to man; for there are many persons not deficient either in industry or ingenuity, who yet are often exposed to misery and inconvenience which might have been avoided, had they had the self-denial and forethought in the day of abundance to lay up something in store for the day of want.

Remember this, and never let plenty tempt you to waste and extravagance; for they will both bring on want, and make it harder when it comes: and whatever you forget, be sure to remember that your soul has wants as well as your body; and unless you believe in Christ and lay up treasure in heaven, you must be poor for ever.

6. There is one thing more I must mention of the character of the bee, namely, its usefulness to man. Nothing is made in vain; but I do not recollect any creature except the bee that is useful to man of its own voluntary industry and frugality. The horse must be driven, and the sheep must be sheared; the bee alone seems to find its pleasure in laboring and in preserving the produce of its labor. However, I do not say this very positively; I may be mistaken; but this I am sure of, that a rational and immortal creature cannot know a greater earthly happiness than that of being useful to his fellow-creatures, according to the will of God; and as it is a happiness which is not denied to the youngest or meanest, let it be our constant endeavor to enjoy it.

By our daily exertions, our good

example, and our humble prayers, let us do some good to the world in which we live; let us add some honey to the hive of human happiness, which will afford grateful reflections to our own minds, and spread the honorable savor of a good name, perhaps even after we are dead.

And let us remember, that we must not try to do this in our own strength. We must entreat God to bestow upon us his Holy Spirit, who will teach us to be holy, useful, and industrious in this world, and fit us for another and a better world. And remember, that your prayer can only be heard for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ, who died to save sinners. O believe in him. Read John 3:14-18, and examine Psalm 19th to find out what is sweeter than honey and the honey-comb.

