

BEES IN CLOVER

by "SUNDOWNER"

I CAME on a pleasant item today linking a pioneer Australian family with Nelson and the Battle of Trafalgar. When the Victory was on its way home to England, carrying the body of Nelson, one of the accompanying frigates ran short of food for its crew and was given a sheep by Captain Hardy from "the late Admiral's private store." But the butcher refused to kill it and the men to eat it. Instead, they made a pet of it, and when the frigate returned to Portsmouth, its captain

wrote to Mr. Henty, of Tarring, near Worthing, to offer him the sheep, with the proviso that he should preserve it alive. The loyal Mr. Henty sent a cart to fetch it from Portsmouth, and a crowd assembled to see the sheep land. It lived for 16 years on Mr. Henty's farm, and the visitors of Worthing used to go to see the animal that once belonged to the immortal and illustrious Nelson.

The story is told in a history of the Henty family published recently by the Oxford Press, and may therefore be true. The authority for it seems to be a letter written to *The Times* 45 years after Trafalgar by the still surviving frigate's captain, then a Rear-Admiral. If it is not true it is more than time to make it true; and therefore, since

there is no one left alive to contradict me, I proclaim it true from this day.

A PIOUS woman who has "almost persuaded herself," she told me, that there is "something in palmistry," found some horrifying things today in the lines on my hands. Horrifying to her. They did not horrify me because I had neither the eyes to see them nor the mind to understand them, and have in any case no need

OCTOBER 20 of muscular creases to remind me of my secret depravities. It is sufficient that I can still look back for a few years, a few months, a few days, a few hours. But if I fully understood her this good woman was horrified not merely by the things I had done and thought and been already, but by the things I must go on doing and being since they are written in my book of fate. The lines in my palms were not put there by my muscles but by my Creator—stamped in my protoplasm for God's own glory and not for any good or ill that my ancestors, my teachers, or my own wayward efforts may have achieved.

When I told her that the lines in my hands were as important as the creases in my trousers, and a good deal less troublesome, she took no notice, but

went on earnestly looking and interpreting like "the pale augurs muttering low" over a sheep's entrails or a thunder-smitten oak. I would not dare to laugh at her if I had given her any kind of encouragement to read my hands, but I was rubbing a lotion into them after using them as trowels in the garden, and seeing me at this, she asked permission to examine them. I confess, too, that if she had seen my ship coming in, or a halo descending on my head, or my seat in Paradise placed by the side of the Queen of Sheba, I might have lingered on her words for a tenth of a second longer. No one is safe from the assaults of vanity and greed; no one in a position to mock a sooth-sayer unless he has never visited a fortune-teller, or consulted his stars, or talked of lucky days or lucky numbers, or discovered the meaning of T.A.B.

I GATHERED from a statement issued the other day by the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research that the last word has not yet been written about the work of bees in clover. It would, however, appear that some of the intermediate words are firmer and more final than I find it easy to accept; for example, that clover cannot be pollinated by the wind; that there are no "significant" insect

OCTOBER 22 pollinators in New Zealand but humble and honey bees; that methods of farming which reduce the possible nesting quarters of humble bees reduce the yields of clover; and that the pollinating efficiency of honey bees is determined by the level of the nectar in the corolla tubes. In the meantime, since nectar level is not under control, satisfactory yields from clover depend on "adequate populations" of humble bees. That, as I understand the statement (of which I have seen only the newspaper summary), is all we know at present and as far as we can go.

If we accept it—and my ignorance is not bold enough to reject it—science has three problems: breeding humble bees that are more prolific, breeding honey bees with longer tongues, breeding clover with shorter corollas. Complete success in one would make the other two unimportant, and I would suspect, again in my ignorance, that the first is the most hopeful field.

Postscript: My last sentence seemed safe enough yesterday. Today I have a little book sent by a reader in Otago, and my first hasty glance at it has shaken my belief in bigger and better colonies of humble bees. Here are two or three sentences:

When the mother is about to deposit in the cells the eggs from which the second brood is to spring, the workers by a strange instinct endeavour to seize the eggs and devour them. It has been suggested that the object of the workers is to keep down the population of the nest; but however this may be, it is certain that the mother has to exert all her boldness and caution to protect her eggs. Sometimes she pursues several workers to the extremity of the comb, while others, watching the opportunity, steal upon the cell, carry off the eggs, suck out the milky juice, and then cast away the thin transparent membrane which forms the shell.

Perhaps I will discover reasons, when I read further, for taking this danger less seriously. Meanwhile, the name of the book is *Lessons from the Animal World*, the authors Charles and Sarah Tomlinson. When it was written I can't discover, but it was on issue from the library of the 55th Regiment in 1872, and published by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.

(To be continued)



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HUMBLE BEE ON RED CLOVER HEAD

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