

Personal Recollections of the Rev. L. L. Langstroth

Some Pleasing Sidelights Thrown on the "Father of American Bee-keeping."

My acquaintance with Mr. Langstroth began before the war, as he located in Oxford in the '50's. I was not interested in bee-keeping, and knew little or nothing about the man; but soon after his arrival he called on me at the farm. I found him to be one of the most interesting persons I ever met--a splendid talker, one who caught your attention and held your interest, not only by the wonderful number of facts he presented, but more by the enthusiasm he showed. It made but little difference what subject was broached, Mr. Langstroth seemed to have mastered it. But his specialty was his love of nature and the interest he took in everything connected with country life. He was one of the most companionable men I ever met, and I was at once drawn to him, and an intimacy began which lasted until his death.

I recall that, during the first call he made, an older brother was present who was a student at Miami University; and knowing that Mr. Langstroth as was a preacher he supposed he knew little or nothing about farming; and so we walked over the farm he began enlightening Mr. Langstroth by displaying his own knowledge of farm life and work. Mr. L. was a good listener as well as a good talker, and he encouraged my brother until he had delivered quite a dissertation on farm life. During the talk we found that Mr. L. seemed to possess knowledge of every thing connected with the growth of plants, insects, etc., and that his knowledge was as much greater than ours as the sun is greater than a tallow candle. Later, after getting acquainted with Mr. L., my brother often referred to the time when he undertook to instruct him on points on which Mr. Langstroth knew ten times as much as he did.

I think I have never met another man whose common conversation was so instructive as Mr. Langstroth's, or who had such vast resources. Added to this was a happy and impressive way of imparting instruction, and his conversation never sounded "preachy"; but by adroit questions he would draw you into discussions and

enable you to show your very best side.

Mr. Langstroth was a deeply religious man, and his piety was of the cheerful sort. I have rarely met a man who impressed me so much in the belief of the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. We attended the same church, and Mr. L. usually met me at the church-door at the close of the meeting for a brief conversation on weather conditions and crop notes; and whenever we had suffered from drouth, and a timely rain had fallen, he would extend his hand to me and begin with that beautiful quotation from the 65th Psalm, "Thou visitest the earth and waterest it;" and that psalm has been a favorite of mine ever since, and I always think of Mr. Langstroth when I read it; and it has been my practice for many years (when a timely rain has fallen) to read it at family worship.

Mr. Langstroth was naturally of a most happy disposition, but he had an infirmity which almost amounted to insanity. It was a disposition to melancholia; and often for six months together he would shut himself in his room, refuse to see callers, and seem utterly wretched. He told me that he spent his time playing "solitaire," and he believed that was all that kept him from insanity. He would suddenly come out from the influence of these spells as bright and happy as ever; and he said to me he believed he enjoyed more happiness than the average man; for when he was free from this infirmity he was supremely happy.

Mr. Langstroth was a most eloquent preacher, and a speaker who would hold his audience perfectly. He took an active part in the business affairs of the church; and I recall once when there had been a feeling of depression in our business meeting he made an address in which he used the following illustration to show that our church was no worse off than others, and that the churches of today were very much freer from jealousy and troubles which hinder their work than in the former days. His story was as follows:

An old farmer in Kentucky, who lived on a farm where they were obliged to grub the sassafras sprouts every spring from the cornfields (they called the "sassafig" in the vernacular), finally became so discouraged he determined to

emigrate to Missouri. He could not sell his farm, but made some arrangement to have it cared for by a neighbor, loaded his effects on a wagon, and started on his long journey. According to the custom of the locality, the neighbors gathered to the number of a score or more to ride out on horseback with him as far as they could and get back that day; but as they passed the postoffice the postmaster handed him a letter. In those days of 25-cent postage the receipt of a letter was an event in the neighborhood, and he stood up in his wagon to read it aloud to his neighbors. It contained bad news. The frost had ruined the wheat crop; the corn was a failure; his sons had shaken with ague until they had lost courage; and the letter closed with the following words: "And, father, sassafras grows here too." The old man turned to his neighbors and said, "I've been fitin' sassafras all my life in old Kaintuck, and I'm not goin' to a new country to begin the battle over again." And he turned his team around and drove back home.

Mr. Langstroth was intensely patriotic, and rendered valuable service with tongue and pen, as well as sending his only son to the front. In the pulpit, on the streets, and through the press his influence was known and felt for the encouragement of the soldiers and the help of the widows and orphans. I was never more impressed by a sermon and the recitation of a poem than one Sunday morning when Mr. Langstroth was greatly depressed, and came into the pulpit and began the service by reading from the psalm in which occurs the verse, "Thou executest righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." Without lifting his eyes from the Bible, or changing his tone, he broke forth in the "Battle-song of the Republic,

Mine eyes have seen the glory
Of the coming of the Lord.

He recited the whole poem in such an impressive manner as to fix the incident indelibly in the minds of his hearers.

One Sunday morning he preached a sermon from the text, "Who can

find a virtuous woman? for her price is above rubies?" He became so interested in his subject, and so enthusiastic, too, that he lost all track of time, and held his audience spellbound, until finally on looking at his watch he found he had been preaching an hour and a half, while those of us who had listened had not realized the lapse of time.

I knew Mr. Langstroth ~~more~~ as a minister and a friend than as a bee-keeper; but his name will go down to posterity as the inventor of the movable-frame hive which revolutionized bee-keeping, and made the success of later days a possibility. When I was a boy, if we wanted honey we killed the bees with brimstone and removed the honey. By Mr. Langstroth's plan the honey could be removed in the best condition, and the bees saved. He was an indefatigable worker along this line, and you could see him as soon as daylight broke in the long summer days out in his apiary working, and he kept it up until late at night. He spent whole days studying and investigating the habits of bees, and probably added more to the knowledge of bee-keeping, and to making it profitable, than any other man of his time. He had no fear of bees at all, and claimed he had been inoculated with bee-poison until he was immune. His talent and valuable work were appreciated by the leading bee-keepers of the United States, and his presence at their conventions was always welcome, and they voted him some substantial rewards for his investigations. His book, "Langstroth on the Honey-bee," was, at the time of its publication, far in advance of anything that had ever been published on the subject of bee-keeping.

Mr. Langstroth lived to a good old age, dying Sunday, Oct. 6, 1895. He was still active in mind and body, and was conducting a communion service in a church in Dayton. He began the service, and suddenly stopped and said, "I beg pardon. I shall have to sit down." He sat down in his chair, and died immediately.

I look back over my acquaintance and intimacy with Mr. Langstroth

as something to be grateful for, and feel that I, although not a bee-keeper, owe him a personal debt of gratitude for the inspiration I received and for what I learned from him.

(The above brings back so vividly my recollections of father Langstroth that it almost seems as if I could see and hear him talk while reading it over. I can heartily indorse every point in the description made by friend Brown. I have told you in the introduction to the A B C book with what joy and enthusiasm I read the pages of Langstroth on the Honey-bee, in 1865. I very soon pushed inquiries that resulted in finding Mr. L. still living; and then commenced a pleasant correspondence that was kept up more or less until his death. There was something in his makeup that constantly reminded one of some of the great benefactors of our age--Benjamin Franklin, for instance. His life was so unselfish that he might have lacked the necessities of life were it not for the many able and willing friends that he was constantly making right and left. May the Lord be praised for those like father Langstroth, who not only make this world a better one while they live, but the memory of whose works will help to make the world better after they are dead and gone.--A. I. R.)

After note by A. I. Root

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