

The Bee-Keeper of Oxford

By  
Jennie Brooks

This morning as the sun streamed across the linen and old blue china of my breakfast table, I added to my "corn pone" the deliciousness of clover honey from a nearby farm.

Thus, to "companion me" in place of one William Shakespeare or any-other-body propped against the sugar-bowl, there came across the years charming memories of this "Keeper of Bees" when I cut from the movable frame the waxen square dripping pure liquid gold.

'Twasn't just breakfast, 'twas a feast of smiling delight, and appreciation of the kindly presence and whimsical fun of the dear "Bee Man of Oxford," who was, above all else, a home-body to us and who will always so remain as long as a bee is here to hum.

What I am wondering, later, is if those who read all the delightful things that drift to me by way of magazines, from the pen of the "Bee-lover of Hingham," would not like to know a little of another bee lover who was "Father Langstroth" to every chick, child, bee, bird, or neighbor that came near him in this village of his adoption? He lived here, yes, but does the public who are interested in bees know that he was ours particularly? That tradition yet hangs about the old home? And that it will ever be "Langstroth Cottage"?

At the top of the winding stairway he trod so often in a niche hangs the picture of this beneficent, lovely, kindly old man, Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth. On the steps of the old front porch, I am musingly scribbling these lines to the hum of hundreds of bees afloat on gauzy wings among the flowers of the old garden, and in the faint haze I almost expect to see Father Langstroth's spiritualized presence drifting placidly through the flickering leaves of his lindens. But how sorry he would be! Two years ago a ripping tornado of two minutes

duration laid low four of the magnificent trees he planted fifty years ago on the old "State Road" yet there are some left and in that we comfort us.

Here Father Langstroth lived the greater part of his beautiful life in consonance with the creatures he so well cared for and loved I only need to close my eyes to see him at the moment, a huge, portly stooping figure in black bee bonnet hung about with a long calico curtain softly, slowly slouching through the garden between the blossoms, and around his hives, the sun shining goldenly, the bees airily dancing above his head as, the world forgot, whole-heartedly he peers into their wise ways, studying, planning, evolving, finally the movable frame for the comb that has not been bettered in so long a time.

Flowers there are now in his garden planted by other hands and, north of this old house, half an acre of bloom where bees take toll, but no such spread of honest flowers as the clover-blossom field once surrounding this place with pink ~~buckwheat~~ and white or the spread of the common buckwheat that Father Langstroth planted for the delectation of his tenants. Along this "Dixie Highway" (lately so named) ran at that time up hill and down dale the Colerain Pike of stagecoach days, a main traveled trail through forests of beeches, buckeyes, locusts, and sycamores, crossing a sparkling creek rejoicing in a toll gate, shuddering under the ghostly patrol of a Civil War tollgate man, mysteriously murdered! Along this road Father Langstroth planted the lindens, "loved of the bees," he said, and surely no tropical blossom fills the air with more delicate perfume than that of the swinging bunches of linden flowers.

In linden blossom time we sniff the air--the lindens are in bloom! and we say half in jest, half in earnest, "Father Langstroth must know how wonderful are his trees, must be somewhere about in a great content with what his hand hath wrought!" I think he is, though I am not a spiritualist. Of his old cone-shaped hives there are none about, but it needs not these to recall him to any who have known him, poet, Christian, philosopher, friend.

Born in Philadelphia in 1836, and later graduated from Yale, he became a preacher in the Congregational Church, and then a teacher in a school for women. His health failing under the confinement, he gave up this work and passed many years in Mexico in out door wanderings. Later on, after so much freedom among wide spaces, mountains, plains, deserts, he found the whirl and hurry of city life unbearable, and in some way, he drifted with his family to the (then) classic village of Oxford, a town truly "set upon a hill" in the midst of a fair country of rolling green uplands.

"A ne'er do weel" he may have been, as he allowed, in school days, but ~~me~~ to that truancy he owes days of rare discovery, days of serene delight, that illumined the sorrowful invalided years after of an old man.

The lindens he planted could not have been of any wonderful growth when Mr. Langstroth left them, but he had tasted of their honey and pronounced it good. "Yet," he said, "white clover honey tastes clearly of the blossom and is finest of all! Then comes red clover; then apple blossom honey from my own orchard; locust honey from the trees of the campus; then linden, in point of flavor; last of all, buckwheat, not so dainty and not pure gold in the comb."

"Father Langstroth," peace-loving, unselfish, always eagerly looking for a chance to help any one in any way; with a gay smile of greeting, a strong hand-clasp which said, "It's a good world, I am here in it to help"; an ineffable tenderness to those in sorrow. He was gentle to little children and adored by them.

Those old Galvanistic days were days of "scare" to little folks, but who could be afraid of Father Langstroth when he came to our house to pray! His approach set our little legs capering with glee for, with him between us and our deserts we felt safe even on our knees with closed eyes while we speculated, peeping between our fingers, what treasure of bird-feather, or bit of bark, glistening pebble or shell would come for us from those capacious pockets of his linen duster!

Of the blind wonder of the golden-brown cocoon he made a Resurrection fairy tale, of "Tusitala" has not outdone him in beautiful story telling. He was wont to say, "By the way they take my stories, I judge of their characters. One

child dwells upon the beauty of the story. Another implores me if danger threatens, a third will wonder what's food for fairies. One, with scant sympathy for a man killed by a bear, once asked howmuch the other man got for the skin!"

Sixty acres of wooded campus across the "pike" from his home called his bees in the springtime to their honey cups, for the woods at that time were strewn with wild flowers and ferns, bloodroots first, though I have never seen a bee in a blood-root blossom, too early perhaps, too cold days for bees to be out; but blue bells, adders-tongue, violets, and on through the list of wild flowers to the asters and golden rod of autumn. An acre of his own land he transformed into a formal garden. Narrow walks divided the box-bordered beds in which every plant was beloved by the bee. Through all his busy work with bees and blossoms, heavy burdens weighed his heart.

An invalid wife, a crippled daughter, and a curious brain affection that induced in him a melancholy borderin gon insanity. He himself attributed it to the bee poison from stings, but it was rather a form of acute brain inflammation recurring from time to time.

Days of pain, days of agony, days of deep despair and these he passed entirely alone burdening no one when he who gave so freely to tohers could not endure the sight of a human face. During this period he retired to his own room, shutting himself away from his own family, incredibly fasting, and devoting his entire time to the solving of knotty problems in chess, poring over the board by day and night until, the cloud finally lifting, he would toss aside the mimic warriors and slowly, shyly stagger forth to take his place in his family. Today I recall the ever-dreaded shadow beginning to drift over him. His face would grow sodden and grave, his step slower, no greeting would come from across the hedge to us children. There were no happy wanderings for us at his heels through the honey garden, and no playing in the old shed, sweet with carpenter chips, or watching delightedly a happy old man, with eager face, bending over a frame, and pinching into an angle of it a tiny bunch of wax. Whe he was sick the wholebright day changed for us, the flowers were less beautiful and a queer feeling we could not understand was in our little light hearts.

~~Remaint For~~ ~~8 months~~ the bees buzzed dismay at his long absence: most loved in health, they became a terror to him in illness, as he was obsessed with the illusion that they were wholly responsible for his condition.

Three hundred years of New England has give me a proper reverence for certain customs and superstitions, and many time, belie ve me, I have witnessed some one of my own people in Massachusetts, at a death in the family, solemnly walking to and fro draping crape on the hives of the bees that stood on the hillside under the blossoming apple trees, monotonously repeating, Stay at home, oh bees! Stay at home, stay at home \_\_\_\_\_ is dead and gone away!" and until the rites were over for the beloved one our bees were their symbol of mourning. A bee is, you know, a symbol of the soul.

Did any one in all the world I wonder, when Father Langstroth passed the heavenly gates, did any one think of "telling the bees?"

The laws of Mohammed admitted the bees as symbols of immortality, to the joys of heaven. In that lovely country of Paradise, Father Langstroth surely knows the scent of the clover, the sweet breezes from the lindens and the soft singing of the bees which would make Heaven home to him.

His months of discontent were mostly of fall and winter. Summer time was a time of full flowing life to him of great happiness in the out of doors. Occasionally when ill he would come to me (a girl in those days) for a game of chess, for he himself had taught me that game of Kings, and if it happened that I by pure luck checkmated him, he would rock with laughter. But such days were rare, for once out of the shadow he abhorred the ga me.

Each s ummer after he moved to Dayton he returned to the village to visit his friend, Dr. McFarland, with whom he had always shared his joy in any new discovery. Every first morning after he came, he arose at dewy dawn and journeymed

out along the "pike" under his lindens, down past his desolate garden across the little creek, and on the hillside burying ground to keep tryst with the old wife sleeping there.

Back again he trudged to breakfast with his friends rosy, radiant, happy, his face alight with joy. Came a Sabbath morning in Dayton, Ohio, a morning of brilliant sunlight streaming through jeweled windows, Father Langstroth in a pulpit, preaching the Word, preparatory to administering the hole sacrament.

"The love of God which"--he hesitated, waited a moment, sat down, his head fell forward, and the translation of a most lovely soul was accomplished.

One who witnessed his quiet passing said later "As he fell back a ray of sunshine glanced through a window and rested directly across his serene face."

Graduated at Yale in 1831  
Congregation minister and teacher  
Became interested in bees in 1838.  
Father of American apiculture.

Revolutionized beekeeping throughout the world by his invention of the movable-frame hive in 1851- Author of "Langstroth on the Hive and Honeybee," published in 1853, which was the first scientific and practical book on bee culture published in the U. S. Engaged in the propagation of Italian queen bees in 1858 at Oxford, Ohio. Died while preaching a sermon in the Wayne Avenue Presbyterian church, Dayton, Ohio. Born at Philadelphia, Pa., Dec. 25, 1810. Died at Dayton, Ohio, Oct. 6, 1895

#### To My Wife In Heaven

Wife of my youth, in dreams of Thee,  
What happy hours return!  
Thy trusting hand I hold in mine;  
Welcome, sweet marriage morn!  
To God we vow--with glad "I will,"  
And soft responsive voice,  
The twain are one, in wedded bonds,  
And I, with Thee, rejoice.

Beloved wife, what blessed words!

Now, thou art all mine own  
Closer, that plighted hand I clasp;  
Ah no! I wake alone.  
Silent, those lips whose law of love,  
So gently swayed my will,  
When trusting in thee, heart to heart,  
We were united still.

Weeping lasts but a night, Dear Wife!  
Joy cometh with the light;  
" But for a moment"darkened days!  
Then, where there is "no night,"  
Both shall be "present with the Lord,"  
Partings and grievings past;  
Soul knit to soul by heavenly bands,  
While lengthening ages last.