

THE WILD HONEY OF THE NORTHERN TRANSVAAL

Some of This is Produced by the
"Moka" Bee, a Species of *Trigona*.

BY F. W. L. SLADEN.

An extremely interesting article, by Mr. E. N. Marais, on the bees and honey found in the Northern Transvaal, appeared in the June issue of the *Agricultural Journal of the Union of South Africa* (pages 790-795).

The native honey-bee produces two kinds of honey, one golden yellow, the other pure white. The white honey solidifies to the consistency of vaseline almost as soon as it is expressed from the comb, and it is known among the Boers as "sheeptail fat honey." It is collected and kept in bags of dinker or steenbok skin, removed from the animal without a belly incision, and similar in all points to the wine-skins of Spain and Portugal. The "sheeptail fat honey" has a flavor and fragrance peculiarly its own, and it improves through being kept in the bags for several years. To find the bees and their honey the bee-hunters depend absolutely on the guidance of the honey-bird. The bees are generally in hollow trees, occasionally in ant-bear holes or hollow ant-hills. Those located in the latter places are often robbed at night by the ratel.

Still more interesting is the account given of the "Moka" bee and its honey. Here at last is a bee that is not *Apis* at all, producing honey as a commercial article. It belongs to the tropical genus *Trigona*, the so-called stingless or mosquito bees. They are smaller than *Apis mellifica* and cannot sting. Various species of mosquito bees are found in Central and South America and also in India and Australia, but the nests are usually small and contain comparatively little honey, so that it is hardly worth while hunting

for them, though the natives of Ceylon, who eat the brood as well as the honey, do so.

The Moka bee of the Northern Transvaal is, however, an exception. One colony of these bees produced four pints of pure honey, and Mr. Marais says he has known others from which two gallons were obtained, though so large a quantity was rare and an average of two or three bottlefuls from each nest usually satisfies the hunter. In flavor the Moka honey differs widely from common honey, and Mr. Marais thinks there is nobody who will not give it the preference, for in addition to the ordinary taste and fragrance of honey, it has "a slight and very pleasant acid flavor, which completely does away with the cloying sweetness of common honeys."

There are two varieties—evidently distinct species—of Moka bees, one extremely small, the other considerably larger.

The larger Moka bee, which is closely allied to, if not identical with, *Trigona clypeata Friese*, builds only in the ground, selecting the hardest soil to be found, and sinking in it a vertical shaft of about the diameter of a lead pencil to a depth of from two to five feet. At the bottom of this shaft a hollow is excavated and here the honey is stored.

"The honey is stored quite apart from the comb in little wax bags about the size of a large thimble. These are cemented together with wax until a cluster has been formed about the size of an orange, when they are again covered with an outer skin of wax. The shape of the entire bag is that of a Roman wine-amphora without the handles. As soon as one such bag has been finished, another is commenced, until there are a series of them, with the necks all converging towards the shaft and the bottoms widening out with the hollows. Between these bags the comb is made similar to that of the

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