

THE POISONED HONEY QUESTION.

Mr. J. W. DUFFUS writes on this subject as follows:—I have read with much interest the correspondence which has lately appeared in the WEEKLY NEWS re poisoned honey, and in particular a letter signed "D. H. Lusk." He, I think, throws more light upon the subject than any or all of the rest. There have been so many cases of poisoning in the Bay of Plenty of late from eating honey that almost everyone is afraid to use it. Several letters have appeared in the papers during the last few weeks from Mr. Mulvany and other bee-keepers, in which they endeavour to prove that it is a mistake to suppose that there is poison either in the honey or wax, and that the ill effects are caused only from the natives eating too largely of black, dirty bee bread, brood comb, &c. Now, in this I am quite sure they are incorrect, and am quite satisfied that there is not only a poison in the honey or comb (which of the two I cannot say), but a very strong poison indeed, as the following case which came under my own observation will show:—About five years ago four natives who lived close to me went one Sunday morning to a neighbouring settlement, and while there took from a bee box a small piece of white comb. This they put into a pannikin, which made it about one-third filled. It was eaten by the four men. Soon afterwards they were all seized with violent pains and convulsions. Their friends took them to the sea, dipped them frequently, and all recovered. One of them (Solomon Paul, of Maungatapu), who had taken more than the others, was weak and ill for several weeks, and for a day or two was scarcely able to walk. He told me that the honey had a bitter taste, and they were aware that it was not the right time of the year to eat it, and did so with fear. I had not before heard of any case of poisoning from eating honey, so took particular interest in the matter, and at the time sent a letter to the Bay of Plenty Times giving the above particulars. The settlement at which this happened was Ohinekahu, near Maungatawa, on the Tauranga Harbour, and, as there is no forest within a distance of about four miles, and as wharangi only grows in the forest, it seems pretty certain

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NEW ZEALAND HERALD, VOLUME
XXVI, ISSUE 9395, 17 JUNE 1889,
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that the poison could not be attributed to honey from that plant. The universal opinion of the natives here is that it comes from a small plant which they call waoriki, of which there are two kinds — one poisonous and the other not. These plants grow in swamps, and are only found near the sea. I forward a sample of each kind. Neither is in blossom at present. The one with the berries is the non-poisonous kind. They use the berries, they tell me, as a blister. In reference to Mr. De Thierry's letter, I may say that I have never heard the natives say that the poison came from the karo plant. One of your correspondents speaks as if only natives are affected by the honey. That is certainly not the case, as only a few weeks ago no fewer than five of the Malgon family, at Te Puke, were in convulsions all night, although they had eaten only a small amount of honey at tea. As several deaths have lately taken place from eating honey, and as scarcely a week passes without fresh cases being reported, I need not apologise for writing at such length. The natives say that waoriki frequently causes the death of their cattle and horses, and only a few weeks ago the Huria party nearly lost a valuable plough horse through putting it to feed in a swamp paddock in which this plant is found.