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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

HAIL IN SOUTH AFRICA

Probably no country in the world is more subject to hailstorms than South Africa, where they occur in all months of the year. On an average there are 105 days per annum on which hail falls at some place in Cape Province and 106 days in the Transvaal, while the latter province has had as many as 133 hailstorms in a single year.

A hailstorm of exceptional severity occurred at Pretoria in the late afternoon of Christmas Day, 1923. "The hail," says an official report of this event, "might have been mistaken for a shower of snowballs but for the deafening noise of impact on roofs and ground, the stripping of foliage and large branches from trees, the snapping of telephone wires as though they were threads, the smashing of windows and the perforation of tiled roofs like so much paper. This continued until 6:25 p.m., when the hail gave place to a heavy rainfall, which completed the havoc. The water, pouring through the roofs, either found its way through the ceilings, or, by accumulation, caused their collapse."

In a neighboring district two head of cattle and many fowls were killed, crops were completely destroyed, and mature trees were stripped of all foliage and bared to their bark. The horn of a cow struck by a hailstone was broken off at the root, 22-gauge corrugated iron sheets were pierced, and yet - as usual - no human life was lost. The fact that hail does not kill several human beings every year in various parts of the world is one of the most remarkable facts connected with weather.

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