

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 14, 1928

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EUROPEAN DUSTFALLS

The heavy shower of dust that fell over Poland and adjacent countries last April has been traced to the effects of winds in blowing up the dry soil of southern Russia north of the Black Sea; but in a majority of the striking events of this character recorded in Europe the dust has come from the Sahara desert. It is sometimes called "sirocco dust". Two other remarkable cases during the present century were those of March 9 to 12, 1901, and Feb. 22 to 23, 1903.

In the middle ages these dusty showers were regarded with great terror; especially when rain falling at the same time was reddened by the dust and was mistaken for blood. Toward the middle of the nineteenth century the well-known German naturalist C. G. Ehrenberg advanced the curious hypothesis that there existed permanently in the upper atmosphere a mass of suspended microorganisms, mainly diatoms, and that dustfalls occurred whenever this upper stratum was so distorted as to come in contact with the earth. He was led to this opinion by finding in samples of fallen dust living diatoms belonging to species supposed to be peculiar to remote parts of the world; especially South America. He therefore felt bound to assume that they came from an aerial ocean of life that was continually being replenished by organisms lifted by air currents in different regions of the earth.

The Saharan origin of most European dustfalls is now proved not merely by analyses of the dust but especially by actually tracing the course of the dust-bearing winds by means of weather maps.

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