

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SHOWERS OF "MANNA"

"Manna" is a word of many meanings. With respect to the alleged "showers" of manna sometimes reported in America and elsewhere, W. L. McAtee, of the U. S. Biological Survey, writes:

"The substance manna consists of lichens of the genus Lecanora, but in none of the numerous recorded instances of manna 'rains' is there any direct evidence that the substance really fell from the sky. These lichens form small round bodies, which are easily blown over the surface of the ground and accumulate in depressions. They are very buoyant, also, and hence easily drifted into masses during the run-off of rain water. Manna 'rains' have not occurred except in countries where these lichens are common, and as for statements of their falling down upon roofs or upon people, or for any other proofs that they really rained down, I have seen none."

The substance usually identified with the manna of the Bible is still well known in the Sinai Peninsula, where the manner of its production has recently been studied by an expedition from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. It has long been known that this substance is the secretion of small Coccidae (scale insects), which exude from their bodies a clear juice that falls to the ground in drops. These harden into sugary grains, which the Arabs gather for use as food and medicine.

Lastly, the common manna of commerce is a secretion of the manna ash, cultivated in Sicily, and several so-called mannas are obtained from other plants in various parts of the world.

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