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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 10, 1929.

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SMOKE HAZE IN AFRICA

Everything that affects atmospheric "visibility" (as the degree of transparency of the atmosphere is rather absurdly called nowadays by aeronauts and meteorologists) has acquired new interest of late because of its importance in connection with aerial navigation. It is therefore timely to say something about the smoke haze that often prevails over vast areas of the African continent. In a recent discussion of the prospects of civil aviation in East Africa, F. Tyms says:

"The smoke from grass fires has often been cited as a cause of low visibility which would interfere with flying. While it does interfere with such operations as air photography, there is no evidence that the smoke is ever so dense or widespread as to make ordinary flying difficult. Grass and sometimes bush is burnt by the natives toward the middle of the dry season, so that the cattle may feed on the young growth which springs up after the fire. In southern Tanganyika the season is July and August. In Kenya it is January and February. In some parts of Uganda grass fires occur in the dry season between the two rains; i.e., in July. In the Sudan large fires occur in the sudd swamps in January and February. In all cases burnt and burning particles of grass are carried with the smoke to a height of many thousands of feet."

African grass fires and the smoke they cause have been described by scores of explorers. Many years ago Dr. von Danckelmann estimated that annually between May and October fully 20 per cent. of the continental area between the equator and the tropic of Capricorn was burned over.

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