

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
August 20, 1930.

A Science Service Feature

Mailed August 13, 1930

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ARID CLIMATES

It is common to think of an arid region as one having merely a deficient rainfall, but it is the prevailing dryness of the air that gives to such regions some of their most striking characteristics. The typical vegetation of a dry climate is conspicuously adapted to preventing harmful loss of water by evaporation; leaves are often small or lacking, or they have thick tissues for storing water, protected by a leathery cuticle.

Rivers flowing into arid regions wither away under the effects of evaporation. As water vapor is a great absorber of radiation, this gas serves to temper the ardor of the sun's rays and to check the loss of heat from the earth by night, and its deficiency, in a dry climate, results in a large diurnal range of temperature. In the southern Sahara, which is a veritable furnace in the daytime, it is not uncommon to find water at the surface of the ground frozen in the early morning.

Lastly, dry air contains few microorganisms and thus acts as an antiseptic whence it happens that jerked beef keeps indefinitely in the southwestern United States and that the Egyptian and Peruvian mummies have been preserved through the centuries.

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21st and B Sts.,
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