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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 8, 1930

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FOG ASTHMA

The malady that recently caused much suffering and many deaths among the residents of the Meuse valley, in Belgium, during the prevalence of a dense fog was apparently a repetition of what has frequently occurred before in the same valley, though heretofore the victims have been mainly cattle and other domestic animals while human beings, as a rule, have been only slightly affected. It is known to Belgian veterinarians as "fog asthma."

As long ago as January, 1897, there was an outbreak of this complaint in the region about Huy, somewhat farther up the valley than the scene of the recent visitation, during a very dense fog that lasted three days. There were milder outbreaks during the next few years and a severe one in 1902, which led the government to undertake an investigation. Arrangements were made to collect samples of fog for chemical and bacteriological examination, but there were no more cases for several years, so that nothing came of this undertaking.

The worst outbreak before the one of this month was in January, 1911, when there was much mortality among cattle and a few human beings died. A study made by M. Felix Bertyn, of the Belgian meteorological service, showed that the epidemics of this malady, though occurring during widespread fogs, have been limited to small areas. It appears, therefore, that the complaint is due to some substance of local origin mixed with the fog, rather than to the fog itself.

Further investigation of fog asthma in Belgium may throw light upon the nature and effects of the "pogonip"; the icy fog of the Rocky Mountains, popularly reputed to be the cause of many deaths.

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