

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
February 20, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 13, 1931

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THE RAIN-TREE

The famous rain-tree of the island of Ferro, smallest of the Canaries, is described in a sixteenth century work by the Franciscan friar Juan de Abreu de Galindo. He tells us that the island contained only three small springs and the principal source of water was a big tree, which he calls the Garse, or Til, while several other writers name it the Garoe. This tree grew at the top of a steep cliff, which terminated a narrow valley or ravine facing the sea and exposed to the prevailing easterly winds. Every morning, says the friar, a cloud or mist from the sea drifted to the upper end of the valley, "where it is stopped and checked by the front of the rock which terminates the valley, and then rests upon the thick leaves and wide-spreading branches of the tree, from whence it distills in drops during the remainder of the day."

The process is one known to modern science as "fog-drip." On the north side of the tree were two large cisterns to catch and store the water. One of these supplied drinking water for the natives; the other was used for watering cattle, washing, etc. Later writers tell us that the tree was blown down in a storm in the year 1612.

One of the stories relating to this tree is that when the island was first visited by the Spaniards the natives covered it with dried grass so that the invaders would not know of its existence and, thinking the island devoid of water, would not wish to remain. However, a native girl fell in love with a Spaniard and revealed the secret.

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