

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 16, 1931

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DESERT DOWNPOURS

In the great trade wind deserts of subtropical latitudes the intense heating of the sand or the sudden arrival of an exceptionally cold air current overhead sometimes results in a violent convectional upset in the atmosphere that yields torrential local showers, usually of brief duration. Helwan, 12 miles south of Cairo, in the Egyptian Sahara, has an average rainfall of only an inch and a half a year, but on one occasion, in April, 1909, 1.8 inches fell in a single shower. Torrents of water rushed down the wadis and much damage was done to buildings and crops.

D. G. Hogarth witnessed a tremendous downpour in the Arabian desert that lasted four hours. "The result," he writes, "was to lay silt five feet deep over the whole plain on which I was living and completely alter the physical geography of the valley." At Doorbaji, in the desert of Sind, where the mean annual rainfall is 5 inches, as much as 34 inches once fell in the course of two days.

In the French Sahara army regulations forbid troops to camp overnight in the bottoms of dry wadis, as, in the past, camps in these depressions have been washed away by torrents due to sudden downpours.

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