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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LOCAL AIR PHANTOMS

No optical phenomenon of the atmosphere is monopolized by any particular place or country, but there are several cases in which local names have been given to such phenomena. "Fata morgana" was originally the local name of a complex variety of mirage occasionally seen at the Strait of Messina, but it is now the generic name for mirages of this character wherever observed. Similarly, "specter of the Brocken," originally applied to the shadowy figures seen on mists close to the summit of the Brocken, in Germany, is now the name of similar appearances seen from mountains, aircraft and other locations anywhere in the world.

On the other hand, the name "lavandaia" -- the Italian word for "washer-woman" -- applied for some unexplained reason to fata morgana in Apulia, has not spread in this application to other regions. Another Italian name for fata morgana that has remained local is "mutata" (plural "mutate"), used in the province of Lecce.

A French journal has lately published an account of a phenomenon akin to fata morgana observed in a certain district of the island of Crete. Toward sunrise, chiefly in the month of May, shadowy figures are seen moving over a plain near the seashore. The peasants call them "drossulites" ("men of the dew") and say they are the ghosts of some Greek volunteers who were cut to pieces by Turkish troops during an insurrection in 1828. The more prosaic scientific explanation is that they are the result of irregular refraction of light by a stream of cold air draining down from the adjacent mountains.

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