

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE HARMATTAN

The harmattan is a very dry wind, which prevails in western Africa during the dry season (November to March). During this season the air over the Sahara Desert cools rapidly, owing to its clearness and lack of moisture, which favor loss of heat by radiation, so that it tends to flow outward to the coast, especially southwestward to the Gulf of Guinea, and replace the warmer and lighter air there. Being both dry and relatively cool, it affords a welcome relief from the monotonous damp heat of the tropics, and on account of its health-giving qualities it is known locally as "the doctor"; a term applied on other tropical coasts to the sea breeze. Its bad feature is that it brings from the interior a great quantity of fine dust, which penetrates into houses by every crevice. This dust is often so prevalent as to form a thick haze, which impedes navigation on the rivers. Microscopic examination indicates that harmattan dust is mainly of desert origin, but some of it consists of ash from the great grass fires set by the natives.

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21st and Constitution Ave.
Washington, D. C.