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January 27, 1932

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed January 20, 1932

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THE COMING OF THE FOEHN

No feature of Alpine climate is more celebrated than the warm, dry wind called the "foehn," which owes its warmth and dryness to the compression it undergoes in blowing down the lee side of the mountains after having blown upward on the other side - a process more fully described in all books on meteorology. A resident of Innsbruck, where this wind blows, on an average, 43 days in the year and often continuously for several days, says it is so important there that no other wind counts in comparison. "Es geht wieder der Wind!" is the laconic greeting of the Innsbruck shopkeeper who is serving you while foehn gusts are striving to blow in his windows and clouds of dust are obscuring the passers-by. Before and during the prevalence of this wind many people suffer with headache, lassitude and depression, an effect that some authorities attribute to the electrical state of the air, others to the rapid small fluctuations of barometric pressure that are coincident with the wind. The signs of a coming foehn are well known in the Alps:

"The atmosphere becomes pure and limpid, distant hills are a marvelous transparent blue. Soft diaphanous clouds begin to gather in the southern sky. At a lower level, round the summits of the mountains, a few fleecy clouds collect, and at times these develop with incredible swiftness into an opaque wall, blotting the southern horizon from view." (This cloud formation is known as the "foehn wall.")

"But the most characteristic feature of this wind is the sudden rise in the temperature that accompanies it. If it is summer, the atmosphere becomes stifflingly hot; if winter, the keen frosty air turns mild and close. The foehn blows at times with considerable force, sweeping northwards from the Brenner valley as a warm, dry, sometimes burning wind, raising clouds of dust in its onrush."

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