

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HAIL TALES FROM INDIA

India is the home of big hailstorms and of big tales concerning them. Many of these storms have cost from half a dozen to a dozen human lives, one is supposed to have killed 84 people, and another is known to have killed more than 250. It appears, also, that Indian hailstones assume remarkable sizes, but it is not necessary to take too seriously the records of four cases that Dr. George Buist, F.R.S., reported to the British Association in 1855.

"One," he says, "near Seringapatam, in the end of the eighteenth century, is said to have been the size of an elephant. It took three days to melt. In 1826 a mass of ice nearly a cubic yard in size fell in Khandesh. In April, 1838, a mass of hailstones, 20 feet in its largest diameter, fell at Dharwar. On May 22, 1838, after a violent hailstorm 80 miles south of Bangalore, an immense block of ice consisting of hailstones cemented together was found in a dry well."

Dr. Buist recognized the fact that in all four of these cases the icy masses must have been aggregations of numerous hailstones frozen together, but he seems to have believed that in some cases the coalescence of the stones might have occurred in the midst of a vortex or whirlwind before the hailstones reached the ground. This idea can hardly be entertained at the present time. It is safe to say that, if blocks of ice of the sizes reported were actually found after hailstorms, they were formed by the freezing together of hailstones lying closely packed together on the earth.

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