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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 8, 1933

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THE HARMATTAN

One of Africa's most famous winds, the harmattan, is described as follows
by P.C. Wren, author of "Beau Geste":

"That terrible wind that carries the Saharan dust a hundred miles to sea,
not so much as a sandstorm but as a mist or fog of dust as fine as flour, filling
the eyes, the lungs, the pores of the skin, the nose and throat; getting into the
locks of rifles, the works of watches and cameras, defiling water, food and every-
thing else; rendering life a burden and a curse."

But it appears that this wind has its good points as well as its bad. The
"Meteorological Glossary" of the British Meteorological Office describes it thus:

"A very dry wind which is prevalent in western Africa during the dry
season (November to March). During these months (the winter of the northern hemi-
sphere) the air over the desert of Sahara cools rapidly, owing to its clearness and
lack of moisture, so that it tends to flow outwards to the coast, especially south-
westwards to the Gulf of Guinea, and replace the lighter air there. Being here both
dry and relatively cool, it forms a welcome relief from the steady damp heat of the
tropics, and from its health-giving powers it is known locally as the Doctor, in
spite of the fact that it carries with it from the desert great quantities of im-
palpable dust, which penetrates into houses by every crack. This dust is often
carried in sufficient quantity to form a thick haze, which impedes navigation on the
rivers."

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