A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 29, 1933

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MUD-SLIDES IN THE ANDES

Early in the morning of March 26, 1933, following several days of torrential rains, a huge mud-slide in the upper regions of the Andes, in Peru, practically destroyed the village of Charat, taking about 120 lives. According to C.W. Sutton, an engineer in the employ of the Peruvian government, although this case was more disastrous than usual, events of similar character are not at all uncommon in the Peruvian Andes, where they are known as "huaicos." Writing in the Engineering News-Record he says:

"A huaico is a flow of a considerable mass of mud. It may bear, and of course usually does bear, rocks, rock fragments and sometimes immense boulders weighing as much as 100 tons or more. It may be caused by a sudden rain in hills bordering a dry gulch, which catches and carries off the thin powdery overburden, or the mass or masses of overburden may slide into a flowing stream in such quantities as to absorb the water of the stream and create a flowing plastic mass.

"The huaico may move down a valley within the confines of the natural stream channels without exceeding previous flood levels; in this event the damage it does is confined to the choking of irrigation intakes and drainage outlets, the turning over of bridge piers and the like. Damage is more serious, however, when it moves above the ordinary flood level as it often does in small valleys of restricted water-way. Huaicos are frequently ejected from the steep alluvial fan of some relatively small dry watershed at the base of the Andes; these fans form the cultivated or inhabited sections of the Pacific coastal plain, so that in this case damage is often severe."

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