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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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FRANKLIN'S DUST WHIRL

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Authority on Meteorology.

When I see a dust whirl doing a dervish dance along a dry road I am reminded of the one described by Benjamin Franklin in a letter to Peter Colinson.

"Being in Maryland," he says, "riding with Colonel Tasker and some other gentlemen to his country seat ... we saw in the vale below us a small whirlwind beginning in the road and shewing itself by the dust it raised and contained. It appeared in the form of a sugar-loaf, spinning on its point, moving up the hill towards us and enlarging as it came forward. When it passed by us its smaller part near the ground appeared no bigger than a common barrel, but widening upward it seemed, at forty or fifty feet high, to be twenty or thirty feet in diameter. The rest of the company stood looking after it, but, my curiosity being stronger, I followed it, riding close by its side, and observed its licking up in its progress all the dust that was under its smaller part. As it is a common opinion that a shot fired through a waterspout will break it, I tried to break this little whirlwind by striking my whip frequently through it, but without any effect."

The whirl turned from the road into adjacent woods, and Franklin noted that it encountered and enveloped the trunks of large trees without being broken up, so that he no longer wondered that he had failed to dissipate it with his whip. "The whirl must have become an unusually big one for that region, as Franklin tells us it "was visible by means of the leaves contained in it for a very great height above the trees." He adds:

"Upon my asking Colonel Tasker if such whirlwinds were common in Maryland, he answered pleasantly, 'No, not at all common, but we got this on purpose to treat Mr. Franklin.' And a very high treat it was."

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