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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LONDON PARTICULAR

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A variety of Madeira wine once specially imported for the London market was known as "London Particular." Thanks to Dickens, this name is familiar today, not as that of a wine but as the humorous appellation of the dense smoke-fogs for which London is world-renowned. During the present winter three or four of these fogs have turned day into night in the metropolis. The heaviest of the season, so far, was that of New Year's Day.

Such fogs in London are confined to the colder months of the year, with a maximum frequency in November. The ideal conditions for their occurrence are a spell of cold calm weather, with a marked temperature-inversion; i.e., an increase of temperature upward, in place of the more usual decrease. The inversion checks upward movements of air, so that the fog and smoke are not dissipated vertically, and the lack of wind prevents them from being carried away horizontally. In extreme cases all the smoke from London chimneys is kept within 300 feet of the ground, so that from the heights of Hampstead one can look down upon its upper surface. Last winter an airplane pilot described the pall over London at midday as resembling a huge black mushroom completely shrouding the city.

Low temperature also favors the occurrence of these smoke-fogs by increasing the consumption of coal. There are certain conditions, dependent chiefly on the vertical distribution of temperature, under which a smoky fog forms a canopy at a height of a few hundred feet or more above the ground, while the lower air remains clear. This state of affairs is described as "high fog," and is well-known in London, where such a fog may plunge the city into darkness during the daytime, though the horizontal visibility of lights and lighted objects is hardly impaired.

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