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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AVALANCHE DANGERS

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Within the past few weeks many lives have been lost in avalanche disasters in the Apennines and elsewhere in the Old World, notwithstanding the scores of millions of dollars that have been spent in building protective barriers, snowsheds and other structures designed to safeguard humanity against the "thunderbolt of snow." Complete protection is impossible, because while avalanches do tend to follow beaten tracks, they also frequently occur at points supposed to be immune from them. An American writer, Enos A. Mills, writing of snowslides in the Rockies, has applied the term "century slides" to those that occur at places where they would hardly happen oftener than once in a century. He says of such a slide:

"It may be produced by a record-breaking snow or by snowdrifts formed in new places by winds from an unusual quarter; but commonly the mass is of material slowly accumulated. This may contain the remnant snows and the wreckage spoils of a hundred years or more. Ten thousand snows have added to its slowly growing pile; tons of rock-dust have been swept into it by the winds; gravel has been deposited in it by water; and gravity has conducted to it the crumbling rocks from above. At last, largely ice, it breaks away.

"In the spring of 1901 one of these slides broke loose and came down the slope of Gray's Peak. The mass shot down a steep slope, struck the woods and swept to the bottom about 4,000 feet below, mowing down every tree in a pathway about 300 feet wide. About a hundred thousand trees were piled in wild, broken wreckage in the gorge below."

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