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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHEN THE AVALANCHE HALTS

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Authority on Meteorology.

In an account of the death-dealing avalanches that occurred last month in Italy and Corsica a French writer, Louis Pelletier, mentions an interesting and little known fact about the mechanism of sliding snowfields when composed of damp snow. As the great masses hurtle down the mountain slopes, he says, they develop internal turbulent movements that produce innumerable snowballs ranging in diameter from an inch or so to a couple of yards.

At the bottom of the slope the movement is checked so suddenly that these snowballs become compressed into a mass of solid ice. Men who have been swept down the mountains by avalanches say that during the descent they were able to move their limbs freely, as if in swimming, while lying on or in the snow. An instant before the mass halted a loud crunching noise was heard and they then found themselves painfully squeezed by the snow, which, in changing to ice, imprisoned them so that they were unable to stir hand or foot. This state of complete immobility lasted until the heat of their bodies gradually melted the ice about them.

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