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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE BIRTH OF A WHIRLWIND

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In a current scientific journal a German writer, Hans Maurer, describes a sand whirlwind of unusual origin that he observed one afternoon last May in a German village. About thirty young girls were engaged in gymnastics on the sandy athletic grounds of the school. Their teacher made them run "counterclockwise" in a circle about fifteen yards in diameter. After they had gone around about four times they stood still, whereupon a little whirl of sand was seen to run along the inner edge of the circle. It was about four inches in diameter at the ground and conical in shape. It grew rapidly in height and thickness and after running about one-third of the way around the circle, in the same direction in which the children had run, it had become a thick and completely opaque column of sand about five yards high. Its direction of rotation was also counterclockwise. The column crossed the low fence of the athletic ground, ran a short distance over the village street but soon thinned out to an almost cylindrical tube eight to twelve inches in diameter. The whole performance lasted about two minutes.

The sunshine was quite hot at the time. Evidently the air over the sandy athletic ground became strongly heated and so unstable that the circular movement of the children was sufficient to upset its equilibrium and produce the vortex of air and sand.

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