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CROSS-WORD-PUZZLE METEOROLOGY

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Authority on Meteorology

A series of cross-word puzzles that ran recently in a widely circulated New York newspaper had the curious result of making familiar to a large fraction of the general public certain meteorological terms of which the majority of professional meteorologists had never heard.

One of these is "oe," which a recent dictionary defines as "a violent whirlwind off the Faroe Islands." The same work indicates that the word is of Norse origin. There is, however, an old book descriptive of the Faroes by Lucas J. Debes, published at Copenhagen in 1673, of which an English translation appeared in 1676, in which there is given a long account of "a kind of whirlwind called Typhon, which in the Dutch tongue is named Oes." Debes uses the form "oes" as a singular noun, and evidently applies it to the tornado and the waterspout.

Another rare term that has suddenly become a household word by a similar process is "qobar." (Note that there is no "u" after the "q".) This Ethiopic name for a dry fog or heat-haze in the upper Nile region was introduced to science in the middle of the last century by A. d'abbadie. Alternative spellings are "gobar" and "kobar."

A third word in the puzzles is "ora", the local Italian name for the day breeze that blows up-valley on Lake Garda. Cross-word puzzlers may be interested to learn that more than twenty other local names of winds are peculiar to the same lake and its vicinity; also that several queer names besides "qobar" are applied locally to dry fog in the region of the upper Nile!

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