

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed Feb. 13, 1935

"SEREIN"

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In English dictionaries we find the word "serein" defined as a fine rain which sometimes falls from a clear sky shortly after sunset. The word is French, but has become the international designation in meteorological works for this alleged phenomenon, which is always described as quite rare. Has the phenomenon a real existence?

The fact that a stereotyped description of it has been passed on from one meteorological writer to another since the latter part of the 18th century is by no means conclusive evidence on this point, for science has perpetuated many myths by the process of reiteration. Prof. Gustav Hellmann, in a publication of the Prussian Meteorological Institute, sees in the conception of the "serein" merely the survival of the old-fashioned belief that evening dew falls from the (clear) sky, and he finds that the "serein" of early French writers was identical with that "evening dampness" which was supposed to be injurious to human health.

It still remains possible that rain may sometimes fall from a clear sky, though this is not likely to be a phenomenon peculiar to the early evening. Some cases can be explained as due to the oblique falling of raindrops, carried horizontally by the wind, when the clouds from which they came have passed away.

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