

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 2, 1935

PEIPING DUST

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In winter and spring, winds from the dry interior of Asia make life miserable for the inhabitants of Peiping. It is this same dust from the Chinese plains that often forms a haze over the Gulf of Pechili and the Yellow Sea thick enough to hold up navigation.

"No one," writes R. F. Johnston, "except perhaps a traveler in the Desert of Gobi or over the sand dunes of Khotan, can form any conception of the penetrating power of Peking dust. Parched throats, husky voices, bloodshot eyes are the price that must be paid for the pleasure of a walk through the streets of Peking during a dust-storm; even one's own residence is no sanctuary, for double window-sashes and padded doors are alike powerless to withstand the scourge."

In his fascinating discourse on ships, shoes and sealing-wax entitled "While Rome Burns," Alexander Woollcott says of Peiping:

"It is, they say, the dustiest city in the world. That is true at all times, but especially so when a southwesterly wind is scooping up the light, unresisting surface of the Gobi Desert, carrying it for a while, and then, as if tired of it, dropping it negligently on the Manchu palaces. Wherefore, when you arrive at a restaurant for dinner, or drop in on some Chinese household for a game of poker, you are at once proffered a wicker basket in which reposes for your refreshment a face-cloth, warm, moist, perfumed. In Peking -- or in Tokyo, for that matter -- you reach for a face-cloth instead of a sweet."

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