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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A QUEER SAND WHIRL

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology

Whirling columns of sand and dust -- known in different parts of the world as "devils," "twisters," "sand-augers," etc.-- vary greatly in size and shape. Some are really too broad and bushy to be described aptly as "columns"; some, on the other hand, are of rope-like slenderness, being only a few feet in diameter but hundreds or even thousands of feet high. An odd specimen recently encountered on a perfectly calm day in the desert near Cairo, Egypt, is described in the English weekly Nature by J. L. Capes. He writes:

"Hearing a swishing sound behind me, I turned and observed a large revolving ring of sand less than a foot high approaching me slowly. It stopped a few feet away and the ring, containing sand and small pieces of vegetable debris in a sheet less than one inch thick, revolved rapidly round a circle of about 12 feet in diameter while the axis remained stationary. It then moved slowly round me after remaining in one spot for at least 30 seconds, and slowly died down. It would be interesting to know whether others acquainted with the desert have come across similar examples of a broad, flat eddy."

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2101 Constitution Ave.  
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