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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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GLACIER AVALANCHES

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The ordinary avalanche is a descending mass of snow, but occasionally part of a glacier lying along a steep slope becomes detached and discharges a great mass of ice into the valley below. A celebrated case in the Alps was the avalanche of the Altels Glacier in the Bernese Oberland on September 11, 1895, where a similar fall of ice had occurred in 1782. This glacier is usually frozen to its steeply inclined bed, but during the warm summer of 1895 the adhesion lessened until finally a large part broke off and rushed down the Spitalmatte toward the Gemmi Pass, causing much destruction. A large forest area was blown down by the avalanche wind.

The ice fell through a vertical height of 4,700 feet at an average speed of two miles a minute. It swept over the valley and up the Üschinen-Grat on the other side with such force that, although the top is 1,500 feet in height from the valley, powdered ice fell on the farther side of it. The avalanche was also seen from the Kander-Thal, where rain fell from a clear sky. This rain was probably due to the melting of small particles of ice-dust that had been precipitated into the atmosphere. At the scene of the disaster "winter had apparently come in the midst of summer," the whole pasture being covered with a mass of snow and ice. The amount of ice brought down by this avalanche was so great that most of it was still unmelted a year later. It was estimated at the time that sufficient material fell to have buried the City of London to a depth of six feet.

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