

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MANNA

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Authority on Meteorology

Reported showers of miscellaneous substances from the sky include a good many cases in which the material is described as "manna." A recent book by Ellison Hawks mentions a case that occurred on a farm 18 miles from Vryheid, in Natal, in 1932. A similar fall, he says, occurred in 1856 at the time of the battle at Tugela River between Cetewayo and his brother Umbulazi. The circumstances of the 1932 fall were related by Theunis Botha, a cousin of the great Boer leader, who awoke one morning in April to find a patch of waste land about 700 yards in length and 20 yards in width covered with a white substance resembling snow. Natives ate it, and stowed it in baskets, regarding it as heavenly compensation for the destruction of their cattle by drought. Mr. Botha took some of the substance to Vryheid for examination. The samples looked like popcorn, the color being dead white and the substance slightly tough to the touch.

The manna of the Bible, still found and eaten in the Sinai peninsula, is a secretion of scale insects living on tamarisk bushes. It is ejected in liquid drops, which, in a dry atmosphere, harden into sugary grains. The substance found in South Africa, however, probably consisted of small grayish lumps of a lichen, *Lecanora* (or *Spaerothallia*) *esculenta*, considerable quantities of which are often caught up by ascending air currents in both northern and southwestern Africa and subsequently dropped on the ground.

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