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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE FOEHN IN VERSE

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Authority on Meteorology

The onset of that most famous of Alpine winds, the foehn, is admirably described by Arthur Dougherty in a poem published the other day in the New York Times. Under the title, "The Foehn," appear in parentheses, as an attempt at translation, the words "The Storm." This is presumably an editorial interpolation, and an unfortunate one, since the term "foehn" is not applied to storms in general but to a particular type of mountain wind, which is excessively dry and unseasonably warm, besides being boisterous. It comes from the Latin "favonius," the west wind, though the Alpine foehn blows from various directions. Meteorologists have adopted the term as the generic name of similar winds in any part of the world, including the chinook of our own Rocky Mountain slopes.

The coming of the wind is heralded by the appearance over the mountain crests of a long strip of cloud known as the "foehn wall." The poet thus pictures it:

"Oh, see yonder crest,
Now hooded in gray!
The sun cannot show the lost huntsman his way."

The parching breath of this wind dries all woodwork until it is like tinder, and has been responsible for many disastrous "foehn fires" in the Alpine villages. Hence all domestic fires must be extinguished when the wind is at hand, and in some districts even the lighting of a cigarette is prohibited. Mr. Dougherty writes:

"The foehn's on the lake,
'Tis past yonder shore,
So put out your hearth-fires and watch till 'tis o'er."

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