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SNOW GARLANDS

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One of the rarest of winter spectacles, which has long been a conundrum to the weatherman, is the "snow garland." A strip of snow lying along a tree branch, a window sill, or the top of a fence, slips down in the middle and hangs festoon fashion, supported only at its ends. What holds it together? An explanation formerly offered was that the snow crystals in such cases must be of such shapes that they cling to one another like so many prickly burrs.

A more plausible explanation was suggested a few months ago by Dr. W. J. Humphreys, of the Weather Bureau. The snow is always damp when these garlands form, and he thinks the crystals are held together by the surface tension of a water film. The process may be illustrated by the following experiments:

Take a lot of little bits of unglazed paper, roll them together in the size and shape of a cigarette and try to suspend the collection from its two ends without other support. Immediately it falls apart like the proverbial rope of sand. Roll them together again and then put enough water on them to make them wet through and through but not drippy. Now they are held together by the surface tension of water films and will hang nicely in a festoon supported at the two ends only. And as it is with the bits of paper so it is also with snow crystals. They fall apart when dry and cling together when wet.

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