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Heating the air! About half of the sun's rays that reach the earth come through the atmosphere. The other half are reflected away to space or absorbed by the air on the way down. A good part, then, of the sun's rays are absorbed at the earth's surface. They penetrate water to quite a depth and are absorbed. What is absorbed at the land surface penetrates still deeper by conduction, but not far and very slowly. The warmed surfaces of land and water warm the air next to them by conduction and also by emitting long-waved radiations which are more readily absorbed by the air than the shorter-waved incoming radiation. The heated surface air is then distributed both upwards and laterally by vertical currents and wind.
