

to discard anything except obvious non-duplicates. The Wisconsin observers show much promise, and with additional experience should become an excellent source of careful and precise observations.

Some heights have already been computed by S. Bunch for the Leonid observations made in his Kentucky-Tennessee region. The Florida data are being handled by J. H. Kusner in Gainesville. Computations are now being undertaken here for the remaining Kentucky-Tennessee data, and for observations from Colorado and Ohio. The results will be published in these notes as soon as possible.

Flower Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania,
Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, 1934 April 23.

Meteorite or Whirlwind in Spain

By C. C. WYLIE

The story of a meteor setting fire to a house in Spain appeared in Associated Press stories of date February 22, 1934. The dwelling destroyed was near La Rinconada, not far from Seville, Spain. The press report stated that a hum like an airplane was heard, that a cloud of smoke was seen, and that an explosion was heard. It appeared possible, though not probable, that a meteorite had struck the house and indirectly caused the fire. We, therefore, wrote to the Observatory at Madrid, Spain, and to the American Vice Consul at Seville.

Dr. V. F. Ascarza of the observatory and Mr. John B. Ocheltree, American Vice Consul at Seville, both replied promptly. Dr. Ascarza stated briefly that the information received rendered improbable the story of an important meteoric fall at La Rinconada.

Mr. Ocheltree, the American Vice Consul, reported that the dwelling destroyed was not a house, but a thatched hut. (Probably the hut was of grass or straw.) The day was clear. The ruins had been carefully searched for the supposed meteorite, and a stone weighing 29 grams, apparently of iron oxide, was found at a depth of 50 centimeters. Mr. Ocheltree also sent a clipping from a Spanish newspaper, which gave the story as related by Francisco Mejias, the owner of the hut. This story follows:

"It must have been a little after noon on the seventeenth of February. My wife had gone to Seville with some of the children. The oldest boy was watering the animals and I was in the hut with my son, Pedro. We were seated around the cot ready to eat. (The family apparently used the cot as a table also.) Suddenly I heard a strange noise. My son thought it was an airplane flying low and went out of the hut. Almost immediately I heard him say 'Papa, look!' I went out of the hut, and found myself within a black cloud. I was overcome and fell to the ground. My cap was violently torn from me and lost.

"The dust cloud made a black column which extended, strange to say, in a direction against the strong wind which was then blowing. It seemed to rapidly take fire.

"Of the hut only the posts remained. The furnishings were totally destroyed by the fire. The cup of a charcoal brazier, recently bought, was melted into several pieces and mixed with other material. The beam of a plow fifty meters from the hut was scorched, as were also some olive trees around the hut. It was simply an accident we were not in the hut. We would certainly have been killed."

The letters indicate that a violent windstorm, accompanied by a cloud of dust, struck the dwelling. The dust storm seems to have been of very short duration, and quite local. Apparently none of the neighbors noticed it. Also, the wind

came up suddenly and without warning on a clear day. The hut evidently collapsed. The burning charcoal, scattered from the brazier, kindled the dry grass of the thatch, and a hot fire resulted. Only the posts of the hut were left.

In attempting to explain this incident, let us say first that there evidently was no meteoric fall at that time. No one saw or heard the phenomena which usually attend the fall of a meteorite. The stone recovered was buried too deeply for a meteorite of that weight.

The first thought of the average American reading the account would probably be a small tornado. The tornado theory is, however, ruled out, by the clear day. There are, however, fair-weather whirlwinds of considerable violence. We have occasionally seen dust whirls which would undoubtedly cause much damage to a hut of grass or straw. These whirlwinds are related to tornadoes, and are occasionally quite violent. At sea, ships have been stripped of sails and masts by such whirls appearing suddenly in dry weather.

We suggest, therefore, that a dust whirl was responsible for the destruction of Mejias' hut. We have written to Professor D. Pedro Castro, Department of Natural History of the University of Seville, asking whether investigation confirms this. We have also requested from him a geologist's report on the stone recovered.

University of Iowa, April 17, 1934.

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