

No. 463

A Science Service Feature

Nov. 4

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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INDIAN SUMMER

Although without fixed place in the calendar, a period of calm, mild weather with hazy atmosphere is wont to occur sometime during the fall. This "Indian summer" weather sometimes follows a short cold spell known as "squaw winter". In his notes on meteorological conditions at Concord, Mass., during the ten years 1851-1860, Thoreau records the occurrence of Indian summer weather on dates all the way from Sept. 27 to Dec. 13.

The name "Indian Summer" is of unknown origin. It appears to have been used only since the latter part of the 18th century. While many associate the "Indian" in some way with the North American Indian, and perhaps justifiably in view of the "Squaw" winter sometimes connected with it, the term "Indian summer" is in rather common use for the fine winter weather of the northern portions of the Indian Ocean. In Europe, where also an "after-summer" is recognized, it has become associated with the names of particular saints in the calendar. In several countries it is connected with St. Martin's day, Nov. 15.

This sort of weather occurs usually with what meteorologists call a stagnant "high", or a considerable accumulation of air that moves rather slowly, a rather characteristic condition in autumn. The dryness of the air and the clearness of the skies allow frosts to occur at night, yet these same conditions give the days a comfortable warmth under the control of bright sunshine.

(Tomorrow: When It Clears in the Night)

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