

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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INDIA'S WET MONSOON

The climate of India is dominated by two seasonal winds; the northeast monsoon of winter and spring, and the southwest monsoon of summer and autumn. The latter normally brings the "rains" from mid-June to mid-September, and is of such vital importance to the country that when a writer on India refers to "the monsoon," without specifying which one he nearly always means the southwest monsoon, or the rainy season for which it is responsible.

Concerning the economic aspects of this moisture-bearing wind Mr. E. A. Chapman writes:

"The monsoon is to India what the annual overflow of the Nile is to Egypt. If it is favorable -- i.e., if the rainfall is plentiful and widely distributed -- a year of plenty is assured. If it fails a business depression is sure to follow, as crops will be short, and the large agricultural element, which it is estimated makes up from 80 to 90 per cent of the total population, restricts its purchases to bare necessities. In days gone by a failure of the monsoon meant famines, in which thousands and even millions died of hunger and pestilence.

"Every walk of Indian life is vitally affected by the monsoon. Every individual, whether farmer, banker, manufacturer, foreign trader, merchant, bazaar dealer or laborer, watches eagerly for the coming of the monsoon and discusses its progress with the greatest interest. The whole business community remains in a state of uncertainty until the success or failure of the rains is established.

"When the rains subside in October and it becomes generally known that they have been widespread and general, the community becomes light-hearted, the stock market becomes active, merchants commence placing orders and the buying public loosens its purse strings."

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