

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt  
but intended for use  
September 14, 1927

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed September 7, 1927

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The "equinoctial storm," otherwise known as the "line storm," is a myth. Statistics show that there is no maximum of storm frequency, either in this country or in Europe, close to the date of either equinox, when the sun crosses the "line" (i.e., the equator). Of course, in the long run many storms do occur about these dates, just as they occur at all other times of the year, but there is no scientific reason for supposing that their occurrence can be connected in any way with the sun's passage over what the schoolboy described as "a menagerie lion running around the earth."

In this country an "equinoctial" is looked for particularly in September, about the time of the autumnal equinox. On September 3, 1925, the naval airship "Shenandoah" was destroyed in a storm over Ohio. Some authorities believed this storm to be of the type known as a "line squall," which advances across the country with a linear front, so that a long narrow strip of country is affected at the same time by its passage. The storm was described under this name in the newspaper reports of the disaster.

Most American newspaper readers had never heard of a "line squall," but believed firmly in the recurrence each year of the "line storm," alias the "equinoctial". The curious result of all this was that the wreck of the "Shenandoah" was widely attributed to an "equinoctial storm".

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SCIENCE SERVICE,  
21st and B Sts.,  
Washington, D.C.