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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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INDIAN SUMMER

Indian summer is both a fact and a myth. Every inhabitant of the northern United States and southern Canada is familiar with the mild, calm, hazy state of the atmosphere that frequently occurs in the autumn, sometimes following a brief period of unseasonable cold known as "squaw winter." It is, however, one thing to recognize the existence of a certain type of weather as characteristic of our autumns and quite another to admit that one definite spell of such weather occurs more or less regularly from year to year.

One true summer, and only one, is an annual event and occupies an approximately fixed place in the calendar. Indian summer, on the contrary, has never been tied down to particular dates. In his notes on the 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 September 27 to December 13 -- a range of 77 days.

The belief in the definite occurrence year after year of what has sometimes been called the "after-summer" is not peculiar to America. It is also prevalent in Europe, where this supposed period of renewed warmth has been assigned to definite dates, owing partly to its association with the names of particular saints in the calendar. These dates vary widely, however, from one region to another, ranging from August 15 (Julian calendar), the beginning of the "young women's summer" of Russia, to November 15, St. Martin's day, a date popularly identified with after-summer in Germany, Holland, France, Italy and sometimes England. A common German name for the after-summer is "Altweibersommer", or "old wives' summer".

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