

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 30, 1927

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ANOTHER KIND OF WINTER

The rainy season in British India (June to September, inclusive) was once known as "winter" - a use of this word that has been strangely overlooked in the omniscient Oxford English Dictionary. Corresponding terms in French and Spanish - viz, "hivernage" and "invierno," respectively - are still so used in tropical countries:

Yule and Burnell's "Hobson-Jobson" suggests that this use may have originated in the fact that winter in many parts of the Mediterranean coast is frequently a season of rain, while rain is rare in summer. Hence the Arabic word "shita" is applied to both winter and rain.

In Purchas his Pilgrimes there is a description of a part of India which says: "The winter heere beginneth about the first of Iune and dureth till the twentieth of September." A similar use of the term is found in Hakluyt's Voyages and many other works of a few centuries ago.

While this usage is now quite obsolete, the corresponding term "Indian summer," applied to the season of fine weather in the Indian seas, survives in Board of Trade regulations regarding the load lines of British vessels. One of the lines of Plimsoll's mark, which shows how deeply a vessel may be loaded at different seasons, is lettered "IS". The regulations state that this mark is for "Indian summer - the maximum depth to which the vessel can be loaded for voyages during the fine season in the Indian seas between the limits of Suez and Singapore."

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