

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 15, 1928

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THE EQUINOCTIAL STORM

This year the autumnal equinox, the sun's crossing of the "line" on his southward journey, falls on September 23; in some years the date is the 22d; but the equinoctial storm, alias the line storm, allows itself a great deal more latitude in the time of its arrival. A spell of boisterous weather or a long steady downpour coming any time in the latter half of September is sure to be dubbed the "equinox" by a certain part of the public; particularly of the older generation. It is the elastic idea about the date of the storm that keeps up people's belief in its existence.

The notion that the equinoxes of both spring and fall are especially stormy seasons of the year is very old and is doubtless of astrological origin, like so much other popular weather lore. The first head of the British meteorological service, Admiral FitzRoy, who cherished several other fallacious ideas, believed in equinoctial storms and tried to explain them as an effect of atmospheric tides. His official successor, however, Dr. R. H. Scott, instead of accepting the old idea at its face value, made a careful analysis of weather records and found nothing to substantiate it, as applying to the region of the British Isles. A similar investigation was made some years later in the United States by H. A. Hazen, of the Signal Service, and led to the same result.

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