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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 23, 1927

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WHAT IS A BLIZZARD?

One of the earliest descriptions of what we now call a blizzard was written by Henry Ellis, who made a voyage to Hudson Bay in the year 1746, and wintered near York Factory. He speaks of the northwest wind as being exceedingly trying, not only on account of the intense cold but also owing to the air being filled with fine, hard particles of snow, which made it almost unbearable.

Ellis did not use the word "blizzard", and the history of this word is shrouded in obscurity. There have been many speculations about its origin. According to the meteorologist Ferrel, the word may have originated among the Germans of Dakota, who are said to have called such winds "blitzartig", meaning "lightning-like", from which "blizzard" arose as a corruption. Frank H. Vizetelly, the lexicographer, says it is an old English term, while some current encyclopedias state that, in the form "blesard," it is still current in the dialect of Lancashire. No mention of it occurs, however, in Wright's huge "English Dialect Dictionary". In this country the word, in its present sense, has been traced back only to the sixties of the last century.

The true blizzard is a combination of high wind, intense cold and an abundance of fine snow in the air. In recent years there has been a tendency to apply the word "blizzard" indiscriminately to any heavy snowstorm, accompanied by more or less wind. Of genuine blizzards the worst are undoubtedly those that prevail on the shores of Antarctica, as described in Sir Douglas Mawson's book, "The Home of the Blizzard".

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