

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE MISTRAL

The mistral -- the blustering northerly wind before which the airship "Graf Zeppelin" came so near the other day to being blown out over the Mediterranean -- is the most celebrated climatic feature of the Rhone valley and the neighboring districts of southern France. It has been known from classical antiquity, its modern name being from the Latin "magistralis" -- i.e., the "master wind". Blowing down from the bleak Alpine upland to the generally warm shores of the Mediterranean, it feels disagreeably cold, though actually warmed by compression during its descent.

The wind is violent enough at times to blow railway carriages from the track and make traffic dangerous in city streets, on account of falling chimneys, tiles and the like. Some years ago, at Marseilles, a cab containing an old lady was blown by the mistral into a canal and the lady was drowned. There is an old French proverb to the effect that "the Parliament, the mistral and the Durance are the three scourges of Provence." The first of this trio was a local law-making and tax-laying body that formerly held its sessions at Aix; the Durance is a capricious and flood-producing tributary of the Rhone. A striking effect of the wind in many places is the permanent bending of trees to the southward. Sometimes their trunks are almost horizontal. The mistral is twin brother to the bora of the Adriatic region, though not, on an average, so violent as the latter. Both are set up by barometric pressure gradients between the interior upland and the sea or coast to the south, but owe their violence mainly to the effects of slope.

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