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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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MONSOON, TYPHOON, SIMOOM

The monsoon, the typhoon and the simoom are three totally distinct kinds of wind, but because their names sound somewhat alike there is a tendency to confuse them.

The monsoon is a wind that reverses its direction with the season, blowing more or less steadily from the interior of a continent toward the sea in winter and in the opposite direction in the summer. The most familiar examples are the southwest and northeast monsoons of India. The southwest monsoon, which brings the rains on which the prosperity of the country depends, is so much the more important of the two that this wind (or sometimes the rainfall attending it) is commonly referred to in India as "the" monsoon. A monsoon is not a storm, though the southwest monsoon of India generally begins with stormy weather known as the "burst" of the monsoon.

"Typhoon" is the name applied in the Far East to a tropical cyclone. It is altogether similar in character to the cyclone of the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico. From a strictly scientific point of view typhoons, like other tropical cyclones, may be either gentle or stormy, but in common usage the term "typhoon" implies winds of hurricane force.

The simoom is an intensely hot and dry wind of the Asian and African deserts, often but not always attended by clouds of dust or sand. The final "m" in its name corresponds to the Arabic word, meaning "poison," in reference to the often deadly effects of the wind. The alternative English spelling "simoon" may be due to the spelling "simoun" in French.

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