A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 16,1933

WHERE IS THE "EQUINOCTIAL"?

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

The autumnal equinox has arrived, and so has the equinoctial storm -- somewhere. When popular notions about this storm originated, and long afterward, nobody realized that storms are always of limited geographical extent, and that stormy weather never prevails over more than a small fraction of the earth's total surface at any one time. The position of the sun at the equinox was supposed to cause stormy weather everywhere, and this idea is still common outside of scientific circles.

Nowadays you can easily learn the truth about equinoctial storms by consulting the files of daily weather maps. These maps show you that there are always storms at the equinoxes, both vernal and autumnal, in some parts of the world, but also that there are always other and more extensive portions of the world where no storms occur at these times. What is true, moreover, of the equinoxes is true of Christmas Day and Labor Day and every other day throughout the year. There are always storms somewhere and there is always calm weather somewhere, and the total area where storms prevail at any particular time is always a relatively small part of the globe. Lastly, there is no part of the globe where, in the long run, storms are more likely to occur at or near the equinoxes than at some other periods of the year.

The autumn equinoctial storm of which we hear in America and the equinoctial storms of spring and autumn of which people talk in the Old World are, therefore, myths; or, if you wish to put it another way, "equinoctial storm" is merely a name for any spell of stormy weather that may happen in any locality around the date of an equinox.

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21st and Constitution Ave
Washington, D.C.