

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
May 10, 1934

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 3, 1934

EARLY WIND-SCALES

Every sailor and many a landsman is familiar with the Beaufort Scale; a series of 13 degrees, ranging from calm to hurricane, in accordance with which the force of the wind may be estimated. It was introduced by Admiral Sir Francis Beaufort early in the nineteenth century and is now employed almost universally at sea and extensively on land. Not so well known is the fact that more or less similar scales were in use before Beaufort's day.

In Daniel Defoe's book "The Storm," published anonymously in 1704, the successive degrees of wind force are enumerated as follows: "Stark calm, calm weather, little wind, a fine breeze, a small gale, a fresh gale, a topsail gale, blows fresh, a hard gale of wind, a fret of wind, a storm, a tempest."

Traces of a still earlier scale are found in a book by Captain John Smith, "An Accidence, or the Pathway to Experience necessary for all young Seamen," published in 1626. The author gives the following list of the winds: "A calme, a breze, a fresh gaile, a pleasant gaile, a stiffe gaile, it ouerblows, a gust, a storme, a spoute, a loume gaile, an eddy wind, a flake of wind, a Turnado, a month-soune, a Herycano." Apparently the first eight of these are arranged in ascending order of strength. In old nautical usage, the wind was said to "overblow" when it was so strong that topsails could not be carried, while the term "gust" at one time generally meant wind of great violence but not necessarily of brief duration.

In the old logbooks of East Indiamen, now preserved at the India Office in London, the expression "pleasant gale" is frequently found, and it occurs in that best known of nautical songs, "Sailing." It seems to have denoted a wind of a certain strength.

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