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Dec. 26, 1934

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed Dec. 19, 1934

AN ILL-FOUNDED FORECAST

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Authority on Meteorology

The official long-range forecasts made in India as to the excess or deficiency of the rainfall that is to attend the blowing of the southwest monsoon are now based on a mathematical formula and accurate reports of meteorological conditions in several widely separated parts of the world. When they were first undertaken, over half a century ago, they were based upon nothing better than rather sketchy information concerning the snowfall of the preceding winter in the Himalayas; an excess of which had been noticed in several years to be followed by light rainfall in the monsoon months. The quality of the information^{obtained} may be judged from some reminiscences of a former Indian administrator, Sir Edward A. Gait, recorded in the Journal of the Royal Society of Arts. About fifty years ago, shortly after he had been posted to a sub-Himalayan subdivision, he received a letter asking him how much snow had fallen in the hills. The Tibetans who came down in the winter months had returned to the hills, and he had no means of getting accurate information. But he was too young to admit defeat, and so he made what inquiries he could from the local people, who were almost as ignorant as himself, and sent in his report to the Deputy Commissioner. The Deputy Commissioner adopted his report as his own; the local government did likewise, and the forecast regarding the probable course of the monsoon in Assam was thus based upon the report he had sent in!

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