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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"MALAYAN HEAD"

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman  
Authority on Meteorology

Staying long in the tropics is bad for the mind as well as the body. A mining geologist, Dr. W. R. Jones, who once lived in the hot, damp climate of the Straits Settlements, describes in a current British journal the experiences of a young man who spends three or four years in such a climate. At the end of that time, he says, "our young man is considerably less alert mentally, and is well on the way towards contracting what is popularly known as the 'Malayan head,' which means that he experiences difficulty in recalling names and events, forgets appointments made two or three days previously (perhaps an invitation to dine!) and finds mental concentration for a few hours to be an exhausting effort. This lethargic mental state is not confined to Malaya, as evidenced by allusions to the 'Burma head,' 'the Gold Coast head,' and to similar phrases in other parts of the tropics. It was my experience that I did not fully appreciate these mental effects until I again met my former colleagues. Their continued residence in a temperate climate enabled them to retain a freshness of mind that impressed me greatly."

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