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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 25, 1929

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology

THE SEVERITY OF WINTER WEATHER

We habitually speak of certain winters as "mild" and of others as "severe", but these terms do not convey very precise meanings. This fact becomes especially apparent when one attempts to answer the question "How mild?" or "How severe?" or to compare different winters with one another with respect to their mildness or severity.

Prof. A.J. Henry, of the United States Weather Bureau, has introduced a method of classifying winters on the basis of temperature. He starts with the departures of the mean temperatures for December, January and February from the normal values for the same months, adds them algebraically and divides the sum by three, thus getting a figure representing the temperature-departure for the winter as a whole. For example, at Washington during the winter of 1924-25 the departures from the normal for the three winter months, in Fahrenheit degrees, were: Dec., -0.2; Jan., -0.4; Feb., +7.2. The sum of these figures divided by three gives a departure for the winter of plus 2.4 degrees. Winters at Washington classified on this basis range from the very warm one of 1889-90, with a plus departure of 9.8, to the very cold one of 1909-10, with a minus departure of 5.5.

Dr. Gustav Hellmann has classified the winters at Berlin in a somewhat different way. The mean temperature in centigrade degrees for each day of the months November, December and January is taken. Of these the values below zero (i.e., below 32 degrees Fahr.) are added together. The result (the sum of the negative daily means) is the "character-number" for the winter.

Since wind has much to do with our sensations of heat and cold, a Swedish authority, Dr. Bodman, has worked out a formula for classifying weather and climate on the basis of temperature and wind combined. By means of this formula he has obtained a scale, the numbers of which have been used for comparing atmospheric conditions in different parts of the polar regions. The most "severe" weather in the world, according to this conception, is probably to be found in the border area of the Antarctic continent that Sir Douglas Mawson characterized as "the home of the blizzard".

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21st and B Sts.,  
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