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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"HEAVY" AIR

It is one of the curiosities of language that people commonly speak of the air as "heavy" when it is actually lighter than usual. This expression is applied to air of high relative humidity--muggy air--which is lighter, volume for volume, than dry air. Moreover, the air is, in general, most likely to be in this condition at times of low barometric pressure, which, in itself, is a cause of diminished atmospheric density.

The late Professor Cleveland Abbe once wrote: "It is a common idiom to speak of 'a heavy atmosphere' when smoke settles down to the ground, or when heavy clouds form low down and threaten to rain; so also we speak of 'dull and heavy weather' when we are conscious of a feeling of oppression. In this use of the word 'heavy' we attribute to the atmosphere something that really belongs to ourselves. When the smoke falls or the clouds drop rain it is not the air that is heavy, but the thing that falls. If we experience an oppressive feeling, it is our nervous system that is slightly deranged; the oppression is not a matter of weight but is a complex physiological phenomenon."

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