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December 7, 1926

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed November 30, 1926

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LOCAL VS MAP FORECASTING

The local weather sharp is justly proud of his ability to interpret signs of the sky and to warn his neighbors of impending storms. But when he gets into competition with a forecaster who has laid out before him not only his local weather with all its signs, but also a summary of the weather all over the United States, southern Canada, Alaska, and the western Atlantic - well, the local forecaster with restricted information is hardly up against fair competition. True, the local man knows his local weather in all its details under the general control of a high or low pressure area, and therefore has some advantage over the Government forecaster, who has to make his statements more generally applicable, and brief enough to stay within his telegraphic appropriation.

This local advantage, however, cannot offset the general forecaster's knowledge of the actual position and strength of storms and cold waves. A storm over the ocean may be reported to the weather office long before it brushes some part of our coast. Yet the local forecaster might get no inkling of it until its clouds came into sight or, if he were on the coast, until the sea began to heave.

The winter rainfall in the North is closely dependent on the temperature in the South. When great quantities of cold, dry air have overspread the South there is no available source from which even a strong low in the north can draw a big enough breath of moist air to make significant precipitation. Where is the local forecaster when he doesn't know the southern temperatures and therefore has no way of telling whether the south wind, falling barometer and cirrus clouds mean plenty of rain or snow or simply a shower or flurry?

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21st and B Sts.,
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