

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE EARLY DAYS OF WEATHER FORECASTING

Although the first system of telegraphic reports for keeping watch of the movement of storms was organized in France by the astronomer Leverrier, the pioneer in the making of daily weather forecasts based on similar reports was Admiral FitzRoy, in England. FitzRoy had charge of the Meteorological Department of the Board of Trade; a government service founded primarily for the purpose of collecting meteorological statistics of the oceans, similar to those previously collected by Lieutenant Maury in this country.

The British service began issuing storm warnings in 1861. Within a few months the daily prediction of ordinary weather changes was begun, though most scientific authorities of the time were strongly opposed to such an undertaking, which was thought to smack of charlatanism.

It is interesting to compare FitzRoy's methods of forecasting with those now in use. No maps were drawn. Each morning reports were received by telegraph from 16 stations in the United Kingdom and from four on the Continent. A list of the observations was made, and then by simple inspection of these returns forecasts were made for the different parts of the country.

These predictions were based on a set of 47 rules that had been drawn up for interpreting the readings of a barometer. The rules were entirely empirical, but, says Dr. G. C. Simpson, the present director of the British Meteorological Office, "they are wonderfully correct, and there is hardly a single one for which a scientific reason cannot now be given, though the reason was entirely unknown to FitzRoy."

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