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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE CAMPHOR "BAROMETER"

What has become of the so-called "camphor barometer", once offered for sale in most opticians' shops? A recent canvas of such shops in a large American city failed to locate a single specimen of this formerly familiar device.

The instrument in question is a "barometer" only by courtesy, as it does not measure the weight or pressure of the air. In its usual form it consists of a glass vial nearly filled with a solution of camphor in alcohol, to which is added crystals of saltpeter and sal ammoniac. The liquid is sometimes colored with a little aniline or logwood. Air fills the upper part of the vial, the mouth of which is hermetically sealed. The device is mounted vertically on a wooden frame.

The liquid is sometimes more or less flaky-looking, and at other times clear. Changes in its appearance are popularly supposed to prognosticate changes in the weather. It is really a crude form of thermoscope, its changes depending chiefly or wholly on changes of temperature. The instrument has a variety of names besides the one above mentioned. It is known as the "camphor-glass", "chemical weatherglass", "paroscope", and "storm-glass".

This device was in extensive use in the latter half of the eighteenth century, but the name of its inventor is unknown. Admiral Robert FitzRoy, the first head of the British meteorological service, devotes a chapter to it in his "Weather Book", published in 1863. FitzRoy, who was a somewhat crochety genius without much scientific training, ascribed various imaginary virtues to this popular contrivance.

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