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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ICE AGES

Little by little science is piecing out the story of the great changes of climate that have occurred on the earth in ages past.

Prior to the nineteenth century geologists were puzzled to account for the presence in many parts of the world of the rocks known as "boulders" or "erratics," which had evidently been transported long distances from their original beds. The Scotchman, Playfair, appears to have been the first person to suggest that they had been carried by prehistoric glaciers. Many years later Louis Agassiz and others revived this idea and also brought forward various other evidence to prove that vast areas of Europe and North America had once been buried under glaciers, implying a far colder climate than prevails today.

A generation ago geologists talked of "the Glacial Period." The records of the rocks have since disclosed the fact that there was not merely one of these frigid episodes in the earth's history, but that several have occurred. The latest coincided with the geological epoch known as the Pleistocene. An earlier and very severe ice age occurred in Carboniferous and Permian times, leaving its traces in regions that now have warm climates, including India, South Africa, Australia and South America. There is evidence of at least two still earlier major ice ages, besides some minor ones.

Though each of them lasted millions of years, the ice ages were probably relatively brief departures from a normal condition of warmer and more stable climate. Some authorities think we are now living in a transition period between the last ice age and a renewal of normal climatic conditions.

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