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October 31, 1927

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed October 24, 1927

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CHANGES OF CLIMATE

The net result of a vast amount of scientific investigation is that, on the whole, climate has been remarkably constant everywhere since the dawn of history. There is much evidence that, in certain regions, there have been alternate increases and decreases of temperature, rainfall, etc., but there is little evidence of any progressive change in one direction.

In contrast to the attitude of the scientific world on this subject is the confidence with which the average layman may be heard to assert that marked climatic changes have taken place within his own recollection. The popular idea that climate has changed perceptibly within a single human lifetime is a world-wide delusion and one that has, apparently, always flourished. In the United States we hear of the "old-fashioned winter," with its unlimited sleighing, and also of a decided increase or falling off of the rainfall in certain districts.

It is an interesting fact that a century or more ago Americans were indulging in the same sort of retrospections. In the year 1770 a paper was read before the American Philosophical Society, in Philadelphia, entitled, "An Attempt to Account for the Change in Climate Which Has Been Observed in the Middle Colonies of North America." Here we read of a "very observable change of climate", remarked by all old residents of Pennsylvania and the neighboring colonies. Thomas Jefferson, writing in 1781, says of Virginia winters: "Snows are less frequent and less deep. They do not often lie, below the mountains, more than one, two or three days, and very rarely a week. They are remembered to have been formerly frequent, deep and long continuance. The elderly inform me, the earth used to be covered with snow about three months in every winter." Samuel Williams published very similar statements about the climate of Vermont in 1794.

The universal belief in a changing climate is mainly due to the proneness of mankind to remember the exceptional and forget the ordinary. To some extent it may, perhaps, be a sort of "race memory" of the vast climatic changes that actually have occurred in the course of millions of years, and of which geology rather than history furnishes the record.

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