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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER † Mailed December 7, 1927

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

THE OLDEST WORK ON METEOROLOGY

The first formal treatise on meteorology was written by Aristotle in the fourth century B.C., and forms one of the series of works in which that immortal philosopher endeavored to assemble and set in order the whole sum of scientific and philosophical knowledge existing in his time. Aristotle's conception of what he termed "meteorologica" was considerably broader than our present understanding of what constitutes the science of meteorology. His treatise is in four books, The first three discuss, in addition to atmospheric phenomena, some things, such as comets, that we now know are outside the atmosphere, and also a number of phenomena that we now classify under physical geography, oceanography, seismology, etc. The fourth pertains chiefly to physics.

From the close of the twelfth century of our era until the rise of the modern inductive sciences, the works of Aristotle dominated education in Europe. They were used as textbooks in the universities and were, next to the Bible, the supreme authority on all branches of human knowledge. The fact that one of his works treated of meteorology gave to that subject a prestige and importance that it might not otherwise have enjoyed, but the spirit in which the treatise was studied was not such as to stimulate original research. As Dr. Gustav Hellmann has remarked, "It was Aristotle that was studied, not meteorology."

An English translation of Aristotle's Meteorology, by E. W. Webster, was published in 1923.

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