

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 25, 1928.

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CLIMATE AND RACIAL TRAITS

The idea that races of mankind owe some of their physical and mental characteristics to climate is very old. It is often found in mediaeval literature, as has been pointed out by Dr. J. K. Wright. Thus Gervase of Tilbury (13th Century) says that "according to the diversities of the air the Romans are grave, the Greeks fickle and unreliable, the Africans sly and crafty, the Gauls fierce, and the English and Teutons powerful and robust." The same writer explains that the violent mistral blowing in the Rhone valley generates in this region men who are windy, empty-headed, inconsistent and untrustworthy.

Another writer of the middle ages, Otto of Freising, suggests that the Lombards who settled in Italy lost their ferocity, partly on account of marrying Italian women, but also partly because of the nature of the country and the climate.

Concerning similar notions in the literature of more recent times Professor R. DeC. Ward says:

"Climate was believed to explain the overhanging eyebrows and partly-closed eyes of the negro; the small eyes and beardless faces of the Chinese; the (supposed) fact that more twins are born in Egypt than elsewhere, and so on. The broad generalizations of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Buffon, Hume, Buckle and others on this subject furnish interesting reading and contain much that is suggestive and instructive, but they usually carry us well beyond the range of reasonable probability."

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