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A Science Service Feature

! WHY THE WEATHER !

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Authority on Meteorology

SEVERE WINTERS IN EUROPE

The frigid weather lately reported from Europe makes it timely to call attention to a remarkable work published last year in Holland by Dr. C. Easton, in which the author presents a vast fund of information concerning the winters in western Europe from the year 396 B.C. down to the present time and endeavors to show the relative severity of the winters from the year 1205 onward, as well as of several between A.D. 51 and 1203. During the greater part of the time covered by this work there were, of course, no instrumental measurements of temperature, but Dr. Easton has devised a plausible method of comparing the winters with one another.

He first takes records made in modern times at selected stations and assigns to each winter of this recent period a figure indicating its severity on a scale of 0 to 100; low numbers signifying severe winters and high numbers mild winters. He next arranges the earlier winters in order of severity on the basis of contemporary descriptions; a process involving a good deal of uncertainty. Assuming that the climate of Europe has not changed since the middle ages and hence that a winter of any degree of severity occurred as often, on an average, in the past as it does nowadays, Dr. Easton utilizes his figures for recent winters as a means of assigning scale numbers to those of the earlier period. The most severe winters, all of which receive the number 4, were, according to this authority, those ending in the years 1408, 1435, 1565, 1608, 1709 and 1830. The worst of these is supposed to have been the winter of 1407-08, with that of 1607-08, "which lasted a year" as possible rival.

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