

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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EARLY DROUGHTS IN ENGLAND

In view of the severe drought from which England has lately been suffering it is of interest to recall the fact that the mediaeval chronicles of Britain abounds in records of similar visitations. The earliest one mentioned occurred in Wales in A. D. 298. In 676 began a series of great droughts, which recurred annually for six or seven years. The culminating point of this dry spell was marked by a picturesque incident, described in the Venerable Bede's "Ecclesiastical History of England". The scene is among the South Saxons and the year 681.

"But Bishop Wilfred," we read, "while preaching the gospel to the people, not only delivered them from the misery of eternal damnation, but also from a terrible calamity of temporal death. For no rain had fallen in that district for three years before his arrival in the province, whereupon a grievous famine fell upon the people and pitilessly destroyed them. . . . But on the very day on which the nation received the baptism of the faith, there fell a soft but plentiful rain, the earth revived, the fields grew green again, and the season was pleasant and fruitful." The assertion that no rain fell for three years is doubtless an exaggeration.

England was afflicted by a terrible drought in 1114, when grain fields and forests took fire and the Thames at London was at times so nearly dry that children waded across it. At that period, however, the river had not been embanked and the tide, not confined within narrow channels, did not run so deep as at present, nor scour the river bed. The years 1252 and 1253 were probably the driest consecutive two years in English history.

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