

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed April 12, 1930.

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CLIMATIC DATA AS FORECASTS

Statistics of climate are merely digests or summaries of past weather, but they owe their practical value almost entirely to the fact that they indicate, in a general way, the weather of the future. There is a common impression to the effect that conservative meteorologists do not engage in long-range/forecasting, except, perhaps in an experimental and academic way, without reference to any direct application of their forecasts to human affairs. This idea is hardly consistent with the fact that nearly every big meteorological establishment in the world compiles and issues climatic statistics, which are used as a means of anticipating the weather of the distant future and are intended chiefly for that purpose.

For example, the United States Department of Agriculture published a few years ago, as a section of the beautiful Atlas of American Agriculture, some elaborate charts showing the average dates of the last "killing" frost in spring and the first in autumn in all parts of the United States. These charts are not based on any sort of theoretical considerations but are merely a record of what has happened in past years. They are interesting as historical documents, but the great cost of compiling and publishing them would certainly not have been justified if they did not enable farmers and fruit-growers to know approximately when, in any locality, frosts are due in years to come.

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