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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 22, 1930.

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SCIENCE VERSUS SUPERSTITION

It is a common mistake to suppose that in classical antiquity the phenomena of weather were universally attributed to the interposition of the gods in human affairs. None of the Greek and Roman philosophers took seriously the myths on this subject that have been made familiar to us by classical poetry, though these myths were doubtless accepted at face value by the non-philosophical majority of mankind.

In the "Clouds" of Aristophanes there is an amusing scene in which Socrates is heard expounding meteorology for the enlightenment of Strepsiades. The latter has suggested that lightning is sent by the king of the gods to punish those who thwart his will, and this dialogue follows:

Socr. Good old-fashioned fool your theories date from
some pre-lunar age.
If Zeus really smites the sinners, how has Simon
shunned his rage,
And some others I might mention? They are sinners
every one.
But instead it's his own temple that he smites and
Sunion,
Athens' cape, or some great oak; and why, pray? Oaks
do nothing rash.

Str. I don't know; you may be right, but, please what is
the lightning-flash?

Socr. When the dry wind once gets caught inside the clouds
far up on high,

It inflates them like a bladder; then by its own
density
Rushes forth in angry whirlwind, breaking through
its cloudy frame,
And through stress of rush and whirlwind bursts in
fury into flame.

This non-superstitious explanation of lightning was not invented by the comic poet. It was propounded half a century before the date of the drama by Heraclitus and subsequently elaborated by Aristotle.

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