

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CLIMATE AND THE CALENDAR

Changes of climate within the span of human memory usually turn out, on investigation, to be either wholly illusory or examples of the tendency of weather to run through somewhat indefinite and irregular cycles. Popular belief in such changes is, however, well-nigh universal and various conjectures are put forth concerning their causes.

One of the most curious reasons suggested for a supposed change of climate was the reform of the calendar, which took place in Great Britain in 1752, following the example set much earlier by the Catholic countries of Europe. The second half of the eighteenth century appears to have been, on the whole, much rainier than the first half, and a book by John Williams published in London in 1806 says:

"It has been an opinion universally adopted of late years that the generality of our summers are more wet and, consequently, colder, and our winters less frosty and more mild than they formerly were. The greater part of the observers have attributed it to that outrageously impious act of our Legislature in the year 1752; for to change the style, with them, is to alter the seasons. To this has been attributed the cloudy and ungenial weather we have, more or less, experienced ever since and the years of scarcity we have so frequently felt."

Though Williams himself did not share this view his own attempt to explain the supposed change of climate was almost as wild. He believed it to be due to new methods of cultivating the soil and particularly to the widespread enclosure of fields with hawthorn hedges.

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