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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CLIMATIC CHANGES

A century or so^{ago} the occurrence of marked and permanent changes of climate within historic times was widely taken for granted among scientific men, on the basis of evidence supposed to be furnished by history itself. In the year 1820, for example, so eminent an authority as Dr. (later Sir) David Brewster wrote as follows in the Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh:

"There is no fact in the natural history of the earth better ascertained than that the climate of the west of Europe was much colder in ancient than in modern times. When we learn that the Tiber was often frozen, that snow lay at Rome for forty days, that grapes would not ripen to the north of the Cevennes, that the Euxine Sea was frozen over every winter in the time of Ovid, and that the ice of the Rhine and the Rhone sustained loaded wagons, we cannot ascribe the amelioration of such climates to the influence of agricultural operations."

The credulity on this subject prevailing in Brewster's day was succeeded by a period of violent controversy, from which emerged, a generation ago, a consensus of scientific opinion to the effect: that no real change of climate could be proved to have occurred anywhere in the world since remote geological ages.

Today a somewhat different view prevails. We now have much evidence, furnished by Nature herself, in the shape of "varves," tree-rings, peat-bed deposits and the like, supplemented for several decades past, by copious instrumental measurements of weather, to show that appreciable though not radical or permanent climatic variations have occurred even in modern times.

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