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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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GOETHE AS A METEOROLOGIST

In this hundredth year since the death of Goethe, meteorologists recall the fact that the great German's "wide and luminous view" included a keen interest in the science of weather. Some of his writings on this subject are much better known than others; especially his correspondence with the Englishman Luke Howard, the father of cloud classification, in whose honor Goethe wrote a poem that is often quoted. The German poet also wrote a series of short stanzas on the different types of cloud defined by Howard and a good deal of prose concerning his own cloud observations. Nine drawings that he himself made of clouds are reproduced in the book by W. von Wasielewski, "Goethes meteorologische Studien," published at Leipzig in 1910.

The fact is less familiar that Goethe organized a corps of weather observers and prepared a set of instructions for their guidance. These instructions call for three observations a day--at 8 a.m., 2 p.m. and 8 p.m.--to include readings of the barometer, thermometer, hygrometer, rain-gauge, etc., measurements of atmospheric electricity and of the intensity of the blue color of the sky, observations of the sizes, shapes and movements of clouds, and a variety of other data.

Goethe was much interested in the relations of weather to barometric pressure. He points out in one of his writings the misleading character of the weather descriptions often attached to the scales of barometers, but he himself espoused the fallacious idea that variations in barometric pressure are due to variations in the gravitational attraction of the earth.

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