

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
August 8, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed August 1, 1932

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CHANGES OF CLIMATE

The belief that appreciable changes of climate occur within the compass of human memory is at least ninety-nine per cent. illusion, explained chiefly by the fact that exceptional weather makes a more lasting impression on people's minds than does ordinary weather, so that after a lapse of years the exceptional seems to have been the usual. The other one per cent. of the idea may be based on facts, more or less.

Climates do, of course, change radically in the course of long periods of time. The coal seams found in the Arctic and the Antarctic are the remains of luxuriant vegetation that flourished in those now frigid regions when they had a relatively mild climate. The earth has passed through at least four great Ice Ages, and we are probably now living in the declining stage of the latest one. The climate changes implied in such events are, however, exceedingly slow, requiring long ages for their accomplishment, and have nothing to do with the abrupt changes that so many people claim to have observed within their own lifetimes.

On the other hand, many meteorologists believe that the weather shows a tendency to run through certain cycles -- to be persistently somewhat colder or warmer, drier or wetter than the average during comparatively brief intervals of time -- and that some of these cycles may be sufficiently pronounced to attract the attention of the layman and to help foster the popular belief in more extensive changes of climate.

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