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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AIR

One of the most curious things about air is that it is nearly always discussed, even in scientific literature, as if it were a simple, elementary substance, though it is actually a jumble of gases differing greatly from one another in their characteristics. Thus you find in reference books statistics concerning its density, viscosity, electric and thermal properties, optical and acoustic qualities, and so on, although air is not, like water, a definite chemical compound, but merely a mixture of unlike substances.

What substances enter into its composition? In various authoritative works you will find somewhat different answers to this question. The list always begins as with nitrogen and oxygen, but almost any gas may occur locally and occasionally in the atmosphere authorities differ as to how far the list of constituents should be extended. The following is comprehensive enough for most scientific purposes: Nitrogen, oxygen, water vapor, argon, carbon dioxide, helium, neon, krypton, xenon, radium emanation, ozone, hydrogen dioxide, ammonia and certain other compounds of nitrogen.

Most of the substances just named are confined to comparatively low levels of the atmosphere. Hence what little atmospheric gas exists scores or hundreds of miles overhead is quite different in composition from the air we breathe.

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