

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE "DOUBLE WINTER"

The winter of 1666-67 was known in Germany as the "double winter," because the rivers were frozen twice. January was cold, February was snowy, but the most severe cold occurred March 18-26, with northeasterly winds. The Zuider Zee was full of ice, and at Amsterdam people crossed the River Y on foot, while elsewhere in the Netherlands the frozen rivers could be crossed by wagons.

Nobody could remember such cold weather so late in the season. In England the winter was not severe, but the spring was intensely cold. On March 6 Pepys wrote: "The weather, too, being become most bitter cold, the King saying today it was the coldest day he ever knew in England"; and again on March 7: "This day was reckoned by all the people the coldest day that ever was remembered in England."

Evelyn recorded: "Great frosts, snow and winds prodigious at the vernal equinox; indeed it had been a year of prodigies in this nation; plague, war, fire, tempest and comet." On April 4 he wrote: "The cold so intense that there was hardly a leaf on a tree."

The world possessed a few crude thermometers at that period, and the keeping of regular instrumental weather records had begun about a decade before in Italy, but it is likely that the idea of temperature, as a thing susceptible of measurement, was unknown to both the famous diarists above mentioned.

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