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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHAT IS CLIMATE?

The word "climate" is one to which various meanings have been assigned in the past, and it is even now somewhat indefinite in its applications. It means literally "slope." The "climates" of the ancient Greek geographers were merely zones of latitude corresponding to successive increases of half an hour in the length of the longest day of the year, beginning at the equator, where the day is never more than 12 hours long.

The fact that these zones differed in their atmospheric conditions was recognized, but in ancient times and until quite recently conceptions of climate have been broad enough to include many things besides the state of the atmosphere. Old-fashioned medical works, for example, in describing the climate of a place, usually give information about the soil, the water and the prevalent diseases.

Nowadays scientific writers mean by the "climate" of a region its prevalent or characteristic weather, as known through several years' experience, with or without the aid of regular meteorological observations. They do not, as a rule, think of weather and climate as embracing all the activities of the atmosphere, but only those that have some known or supposed influence upon the phenomena of life. This conception excludes the ordinary variations of atmospheric pressure, as these are not believed to be of biological importance. On the other hand extremely high or low pressure and very rapid fluctuations of pressure probably do affect animal life. The status of atmospheric electricity in this connection is uncertain. At present there is a tendency to consider certain electrical states of the atmosphere as affecting both animals and plants in various ways and therefore to class them among the elements of weather and climate.

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