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August 14, 1933

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed August 7, 1933

TOO MUCH WEATHER OBSERVING?

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At thousands of weather stations throughout the world many millions of observations are, in the aggregate, taken every year, and in recent years the number of such observations has greatly increased. Aviation has led to the establishment of a host of new stations and also to an increase in the frequency of observations at any one station. Certain new methods of weather forecasting call for a denser network of observing stations than was formerly thought necessary for the information of forecasters. The methods of "microclimatology," applied especially to the relation of plants to climate, likewise demand a vast multiplication in the number of stations.

In view of this rapid growth in the business of observing weather, it is interesting to recall an astounding suggestion made at a meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1902 by Dr. (now Sir) Arthur Schuster. He said:

"Most earnestly do I believe that the subjects of meteorology and terrestrial magnetism, and possibly also of atmospheric electricity, could be most quickly advanced at the present moment if all observations were stopped for five years, and all the energy of all observers and computers concentrated on the discussion of the results obtained and the preparation of an improved scheme of observations for the future."

It is hard to believe that Schuster meant this suggestion to be taken seriously and literally. Perhaps he spoke with a Shavian tongue in his cheek, but he managed to stir up a hornet's nest among meteorologists. The proposal was, at any rate, wildly impracticable. For both scientific and practical reasons, the suggested interruption of observations would be calamitous in the extreme.

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