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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE HALCYON DAYS

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Authority on Meteorology.

If there were any truth in a belief that is the subject of many allusions in ancient and modern literature, now would be a fine time for anybody who is not a "good sailor" to start on a sea voyage. During the seven days before and the seven days after the winter solstice, the halcyon or kingfisher is traditionally supposed^{to} sit brooding on a floating nest, and the ocean is said to remain unruffled until her maternal task is accomplished. Sir Thomas Browne thus records the belief:

"For at that time, which happeneth about the brumal solstice, it hath been observed, even unto a proverb, that the sea is calm and the winds do cease till the young ones are excluded and forsake their nest, which floateth upon the sea, and by the roughness of the winds might otherwise be overwhelmed."

Sir Thomas offers some skeptical observations on the subject of this belief, but he could hardly have perceived the full measure of its absurdity. Not until men began charting daily weather by land and sea, in the early years of the nineteenth century, did anybody realize that both calm weather and stormy weather are always local in their occurrence. There is no such thing as universal calm or universal storm-- halcyon days on the one hand, or equinoctial storms on the other.

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