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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SUPPOSED CLIMATIC CHANGES

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It is easy to jump to erroneous conclusions concerning changes of climate. One of the commonest ways of doing it is to assume that such changes must have occurred in any region where a certain crop plant was once extensively cultivated but has now ceased to be. The late Prof. Ward told of two cases that he encountered in a visit to Brazil from which a climatic change might have been inferred by a careless observer. The crops in question were coffee and cotton. Said Prof. Ward:

"The traveler between Rio de Janeiro and the city of Sao Paulo may today see from the train miles and miles of abandoned coffee plantations on the hills, with the fazendas of fifty years ago falling to ruins in the midst of the old plantations. Whoever looks at these barren hillsides, especially in winter when they are dry and dusty, may easily be tempted to conclude that a change of climate has made coffee growing in this district impossible. Such is not the case. The fact is that coffee has been found to succeed so much better farther south in the State of Sao Paulo that it no longer pays to keep up most of these old plantations in the State of Rio de Janeiro.

"In the second case, that of the cotton, the writer was told that this staple used to be successfully grown along the line of the Sorocabana Railway during our civil war. Today the three or four cotton factories in and near Sorocabana find the local production of cotton insufficient for their own use, and import the raw material from the north, chiefly from Pernambuco. No change of climate has taken place here. The cultivation of cotton in the United States since 1865 has eliminated the American market. Cotton succeeds better and is produced more cheaply in the north of Brazil; and coffee has been found to yield larger returns than cotton in the State of Sao Paulo. These three reasons are more than sufficient to account for the abandonment of most of the cotton fields along the line of the Sorocabana Railway."

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