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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed March 5, 1934

WEATHER FORECASTS

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A fact about weather forecasts not widely recognized is that even those that are only moderately successful are of value to mankind. This statement applies to long-range forecasts as well as to the ordinary kind, and explains why in certain countries such predictions (in very general terms) are now issued by official meteorological institutions despite the fact that the percentage of verifications is not very high.

A weather forecast, whether of long or short range, is made for the practical purpose of enabling the public to adjust its affairs to coming weather. Forewarned is forearmed. Gardeners and fruit-growers take measures to protect tender plants against a predicted frost. The mariner alters his course or seeks shelter in port when apprized of a coming storm. A timely prediction of a drought would permit the farmer, in many cases, to escape disaster by planting crops adapted to dry weather, while the expectation of a wet season would dictate a quite different use of his land. And so on.

Suppose, now, only three predictions out of four, on an average, are verified. The public will often be misled. Much money will be lost through weather visitations that come unannounced as well as through preparations for those that fail to materialize as predicted. Thus in one case out of four the forecast will be detrimental to those who act on it. But in three cases out of four it will be profitable. Forecasts that are decidedly more often right than wrong are better than none, because in the long run the public benefits by them.

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