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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A CATERPILLAR BAROMETER

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

In his book "The Life of the Caterpillar," J.H. Fabre devotes a good-sized chapter to the supposed ability of the pine processionary caterpillar to foresee spells of bad weather. This creature is very active through the winter and comes forth at night to feed on the pine boughs. Fabre noticed, however, that on some nights the caterpillars remained in their nests and that in such cases the weather soon became stormy, with rain or snow and strong winds. Besides keeping a colony of caterpillars in outdoor nests, he had one in a greenhouse. The latter, like the outdoor colony, remained at home before the advent of stormy weather, although it could have ventured forth safely, as it was fully sheltered. Hence he concluded that the actions of both colonies were a response to changes in barometric pressure, and consultation of weather maps showed that when the caterpillars remained in their nests at night a barometric depression was always near. Fabre says that he and his household regulated their own excursions by those of the caterpillars, and that the oracle never failed.

After its second moult, in January, the pine processionary has a series of little protuberances along its back, each within a sort of mouth-like opening. These protuberances are extremely sensitive. When one of them is touched, it retreats inward and the mouth closes over it. Fabre believed these to be the organs through which the caterpillar perceives changes in the pressure of the atmosphere.

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