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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed July 25, 1934

PHAETON

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According to the ancient fable, there was a universal hot spell when Phaeton drove the solar chariot too near the earth. Today we conceive somewhat differently the results that would ensue from a celestial joy-ride such as mythology describes. The sun is three million miles nearer the earth at perihelion than at aphelion, but the effect of this difference on earthly temperatures is imperceptible to human senses because it is masked by the much greater effects of the changing seasons and the ordinary vicissitudes of weather. A much closer approach would not cause an immediate heating up of the whole globe.

There would be, first of all, an extensive shifting and strengthening of air currents, leading to a complex series of contrasted weather changes. There would be a widespread redistribution of clouds and rainfall over the globe. Paradoxically, while some regions would grow hotter, others would be chilled; partly because of increased cloudiness, but especially because of the intensification of cold winds blowing from polar latitudes.

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