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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AN OLD IDEA

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No recent development of weather science has attracted more attention than the attempts to explain weather changes as the result of the interaction along a "front" of strongly contrasted streams of warm and cold air, in accordance with the Polar Front hypothesis. The fundamental idea embodied in this hypothesis is far from new. It was put forth in the first half of the nineteenth century by the great German meteorologist Dove, and was for a long time generally accepted by students of weather. The idea figures prominently in the once well-known "Weather Book" of Admiral FitzRoy, published in 1863. It was developed with much scientific skill by the German-American Wilhelm Blasius, after he came to America in 1850.

The conception had dropped into oblivion a generation or more before it was revived by Norwegian meteorologists during the World War, but if you turn back to the scientific literature of the 'sixties and early 'seventies of the last century you will find that meteorologists then spoke as glibly of "polar" and "equatorial" air currents and their relations to weather as do the present-day exponents of the Polar Front theory.

There is, however, a vast difference between the old theory and the new one. The latter rests upon a copious fund of observations not available to our forefathers and the application of physical principles of which they had only a glimmering notion.

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