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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WINTER IN THE ARCTIC

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The exaggerated ideas that once prevailed concerning the rigors of Arctic climate are gradually giving way to more accurate notions. The widely circulated writings of Stefansson have been especially instructive in this connection. Dr. R.H. Rudmose Brown, in a presidential address before the geographical section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science a few years ago, pointed out how the dispelling of the old delusions has promoted exploration in high latitudes. He said:

"Men who know the polar regions are no longer frightened by the cold and darkness . . . The terror that the Arctic inspired was a legacy of medieval superstition; the outcome, like all superstitions, of ignorance. Before Europeans had ever experienced a polar night, they thought it must be fatal. The old whalers in Spitsbergen could conceive of no greater horror than to stay there during the winter. There is a tale that an attempt to found a winter settlement, to guard the whaling stores, failed because the settlers, who could be obtained only by releasing convicts, begged, on seeing Spitsbergen, to be allowed to return to jail and even execution rather than stay and endure the unknown horrors of an Arctic night.

"The legacy of fear is still part of Europe's regard for polar regions, but the explorer has conquered it and he knows well that it requires no particular courage to face the polar climate. Fifty years ago expeditions dug themselves into winter quarters and stagnated half the year. Nares considered it cruelty to ask his men to sledge before April, but now winter is regarded by the explorer, as by the Eskimo, as a useful period for sledging. The ice and snow have better surfaces and the temperatures are not uncomfortably high."

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