

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A LONG-RANGE FORECAST

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This is not a long-range forecast of weather. It is a long-range forecast concerning the future of long-range weather forecasting. Nobody can be sure that science will not be able some day to predict the weather months or years in advance with 100 per cent accuracy --- but the chances seem, at this writing, strongly against such a feat ever being achieved. We can, however, predict with much confidence that both short-range and long-range weather forecasting will gradually become less and less important desiderata than they are today, because mankind will become less and less vulnerable to the effects of weather.

Half a century ago a vast acreage in the tropics was devoted to growing indigo. The crop was sometimes damaged by drought. Accurate long-range forecasts of droughts might have made these events somewhat less harmful to the indigo-grower, though they would still have caused him serious trouble. Today drought has very little effect on the production of indigo because it is nearly all made in a factory from coal tar. Many other dyes, drugs, perfumes, leather substitutes, bone substitutes and so on are now similarly produced. Weather has no influence on their production.

Many more industries will be transferred from the field to the factory and thus made weather-proof. Transportation by land, sea and air will be made more and more independent of weather. The discomforts of weather have already been minimized by the artificial control of weather indoors, where most of us spend nine-tenths of our lives. Is it not evident that weather forecasting will steadily diminish in practical importance, however interesting it may continue to be from a purely scientific point of view?

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