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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ANTICIPATING A MODERN DISCOVERY

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The idea of predicting weather from a comparison of observations made simultaneously at many places did not take definite shape in the scientific world until about a century ago, and it could not be put into practical operation until after the introduction of telegraphy. There were, however, vague anticipations of this idea much earlier. One of these is found in a letter from Dr. Robert Plot, of Oxford, transmitting to Dr. Martin Lister, of the Royal Society, a daily record of barometer and wind and weather kept by the former during the year 1684. As to the utility of such records, Plot says:

"When once we have procured fit persons enough to make the same observations in many foreign and remote parts, how the winds stood in each, at the same time, we shall then be enabled with some grounds to examine, not only the coastings, breadth, and bounds of the winds themselves, but of the weather they bring with them; and probably in time thereby learn to be forewarned certainly of divers emergencies (such as heats, colds, dearths, plague, and other epidemical distempers) which are now unaccountable to us; and by their causes be instructed for prevention or remedies."

This is a remarkable forecast of weather forecasting, and Plot did not altogether overshoot the mark when he suggested that synoptical weather observations would enable mankind to predict "epidemical distempers." In the light of recent discoveries, the incidence of hay fever ties up rather closely with the weather map, and predictions of the prevalence of malaria in autumn in the Punjab have been made officially for some years on the basis of rainfall records of the previous summer.
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