A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 4, 1929.

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"EARTHQUAKE WEATHER"

Although marked inequalities of atmospheric pressure on different parts of the earth's surface are probably a frequent cause of earthquakes, and although pressure distribution has certain well-known relations to weather, meteorologists have found no evidence to support the popular belief that, for a day or more before a severe earthquake, the air is generally still, oppressive and sultry. This notion, often met with in California and elsewhere, is embodied in the following passage from Bret Harte's story, "The Mystery of the Hacienda":

"One night it was very warm; the usual trade winds had died away before sunset, leaving an unwonted hush in sky and plain. There was something so portentous in this sudden withdrawal of that rude stimulus to the otherwise monotonous level that a recurrence of such phenomena was always known as 'earthquake weather'. The wild cattle moved uneasily in the distance without feeding; herds of unbroken mustangs approached the confines of the hacienda in vague timorous squads. The silence and stagnation of the old house was oppressive."

The idea recurs in both ancient and modern literature. It is evidently connected with the belief of speculative Greek philosophers that earthquakes are caused by winds inside the earth. Thus Aristotle says that calm "must be most marked before the more violent earthquakes, for when the wind is not part outside the earth and part inside, but moves in a single body, its strength must be greater."

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