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SEASONS OF TORRID HEAT.

Records of Past Years—Both Europe and America Have Suffered—Laborers Who Fell in the Fields—The Great Heat of 1872—Streets of Cities Strewn With Dead and Dying Men and Beasts—The Visitation of 1877—The Summer of 1881—The Month of September—The "Dark Day"—The Months of June and July, 1882—August 1896—Summer of 1900—The Present Summer.

The remakable exhibition of solar energy witnessed in different parts of the United States during the summer of 1900 will place it on record as one of the hottest for the past thirty years. Yet, if we compare the record with the experiences of other years and other countries, we will see that the last was not truly excessive, though long continued. It is not an easy matter to get at the old records on the subject, but from what I have been able to compile it appears that the people of the old world have suffered more intense heat than we of the new.

In the years 1303-4 the Rhine, Loire and Seine rivers went dry. The heat in several of the French provinces during the summer of 1705 was equal to that of a glass of furnace. Meat could be prepared for the table by merely exposing it to the sun. Not a soul dare venture out of his house between noon and 4 P. M. In the year 1718 many shops had to close all over Europe. Not a drop of rain fell for four months. In 1773 the thermometer rose to 118 degrees. In 1778 the heat in Bologna was so intense that numbers of people were stifled. In July 1793, the heat again became intolerable. Vegetables were burned and fruit dried on trees. The furniture and woodwork in dwelling houses cracked and split and meat became tainted in an hour. The French Revolution was then at its height of its bloody carnival and many superstitious persons thought that the wave of heat following this mighty upheaval was the curse of God. In 1800 Spain was visited by a sweltering temperature. Madrid and other cities were deserted and the streets became silent. Laborers died in the fields.

Another disastrous hot wave swept over Europe in 1851. In the Champs de Mars, Paris, during the review soldiers by the score fell victims to sunstroke, and at Aldershot, England, men dropped dead while at drill, compelling the officers to suspend the exercises.

There are many living who recall the terrible experience of 1853 in New York and elsewhere. In that year New Orleans was desolated by yellow fever. In New York it appeared as if the city was on fire. The thermometer ranged from 95 to 98 degrees for seven days. In that summer was opened the Crystal Palace in Reservoir Square. On the day of the opening the mercury rose to 76 degrees and people fainted in the crowd and dead in the streets. During the week 214 persons died from sunstroke in New York.

The Great Heat of 1872.

The year 1872 was another fearful one in the metropolis, 155 cases of sunstroke occurring on July 4, of which 72 proved fatal. The principal thoroughfares were like fields of battle. Dumb beasts lay down by the wayside and panted their lives away. Sleep for two or three of the hottest nights was well nigh impossible, and in the tenement districts women and children were found dead on the roofs, to which they had clambered in the hope of getting a breath of cool air. The scenes in the morgue were appalling; dozens of bodies were on the stone slabs under the splashing water awaiting the recognition of friends; here a stalwart man who had been stricken suddenly; there a comely woman with her face turned toward the light; yonder the official photographer, doing his ghastly yet necessary work in preserving the pictures of the dead; eager-eyed relatives hunting among the corpses for some missing loved one; a horrible stench mingled with the oppressive heat and lamentations filled the air. Over 200 deaths were recorded in three or four days.

The next serious visitation took place in 1877, and about July 9th began to make its power felt throughout the Middle and Southern States as well as in New York. In Washington the heat was particularly oppressive. The car rails became so expanded by the action of the sun as to rise up in curved lines, drawing the bolts. In one instance the rails burst away from the bolts and left track entirely. The thermometer marked 104 degrees. The summer of 1879 will long be remembered for its torrid atmosphere. The situation will be better understood from the following record Norwich, Conn., June 2, 100 degrees; New York, June 28, 98; Charleston, July 11, 101; on the same date, St. Louis, 100; Knoxville, Tenn., July 13, 103; Charleston, July 14, 111 (16 deaths); Detroit, July 16, 102; New York, July 17, 101.

The Summer of 1881.

In 1881 it is said the heat throughout the United States was the greatest on record, the thermometer in many places registering 105 degrees in the shade. In England the mercury ranged from 90 to 101 degrees, and in Paris 93 degrees. July 21, 1881, is said to have been the hottest day ever known up to that time. Another torrid wave came in August of that year, and, with a brief intermission, continued until the middle of September. In Richmond the thermometer registered 105 degress; in Washington, 104; in Trenton, 104; in Baltimore, Wilmington, Philadelphia, Rochester and elsewhere, from 99 to 101; yet on September 7 snow fell in Deadwood, S. D., to the depth of five inches, and at Bald Mountain the snow was two feet deep.

The Month of September.

The month of September of this year was one of the hottest ever known in the history of this country, and the commencement of the summer had been viewed with dismal forebodings by many people, for the reason that a celebrated weather prophet had foretold that it would be unusually rainy, cold and wet.

As a consequence, it proved to be the dryest known in years. Days, weeks, and even months passed without a drop of rain falling from the brassy sky, and the fine powdery dust permeated everywhere. The weather prophet lost caste, but he persisted in announcing rain, knowing that he had only to stick to it long enough to hit it in the course of time.

As the autumn approached and the drought continued over a vast extent of territory, the forest fires raged in different parts of the country. All day and night immense volumes of smoke and vapor hung over the land, and the sun was so peculiar as to cause alarm on the part of those who were superstitious.

On the 6th and 7th the thermometer here in Maryland registered from 104 to 107 degrees. The writer, who was then a boy, together with his brother, cut off a piece of corn belonging to a gentleman on the northern outskirts of Pikesville on the same day. The heat was beyond description and the corn, stalk, blades and tassel stood as if carved out of marble, or like "a painted ship on a painted sea," not a breath of air to impart motion to even a feather. The writer, who had read the thrilling pages of Dante's Inferno, thought that the afternoon of September 6, 1881, between the hours of 2 and 5 o'clock, was a fair sample of the Plutonic regions.

The "Dark Day."

Then there came a "dark day," like that of the 19th of May, 1780 which overspread New England, and was most marked in Massachusetts. The Connecticut Legislature was in session, and the belief was so universal that the last awful day had come, that the motion was made to adjourn. Then as the graphic Quaker poet says:

"All eyes were turned to Abraham Davenpot,
He rose, slow cleaving with his steady voice
The intolerable hush. This well may be
The Day of Judgment which the world awaits
But be it so or not, I only know
My present duty, and my Lord's command
To occupy till He come. So at the post
Where He has set me in His providence,
I choose, for one, to meet Him face to face—
No faithless servant frightened from my task,
But ready when the Lord of the harvest call;
And, therefore, with all reverence, I would say,
Let God do His work, we will see to ours.
Bring in the candles. And they brought them in."

Tuesday, September 7, 1881, was a day very similar to the memorable one of a century ago. A strange, greenish-yellow pall overspread the heavens, and so darkened the light of the sun that lamps and gas were lighted, schools and factories closed and multitudes of the ignorant and superstitious believed that the Day of Judgment had come.

Everything looked charged and unnatural. The faces of the people on the streets were ghastly, the gas jets in the stores, instead of showing yellow, were as white and clear as the electric lights, and thousands of the sect known as Second Adventists gathered in their places of worship and confidently awaited the advent of the Lord.

The "dark day" was more wonderful in the country. The leaves and withering foliage assumed a most singular tint of green changing like that of the grass to a brownish hue; fowls went to roost, and the animal creation must have been greatly mystified by a phenomenon such as they had never witnessed before.

A curious feature of this luminous haze was that it cast no shadow. It was as light under the trees as away from them, the whole unnatural appearance of things most likely being due to the immense forest fires which were raging in many parts of the country.

June and July, 1882.

The months of June and July, 1882, were notably oppressive in their atmosphere. On the 13th of July 58 children in New York died from the effects of the heat. Car horses fell in their traces; drivers dropped from their seats on trucks and wagons. Broadway was like a great transparent flame of fire. Business was partially suspended and many workshops were closed. The crowded parts of New York on the east and west sides were filled with families mourning for their dead, and undertakers went their busy rounds as if an epidemic prevailed. The housetops were turned into a vast bedroom and the pitiful cries of sick children mingled with the clinking of glasses in the beer shops. Seven hundred and seventy-nine little ones died during this period from diseases superinduced by the heat.

Coming down to later years we all remember the terrible spell of August, 1896, when for a period of five days the thermometer over the entire country ranged from 93 to 103 degrees. Hundreds in the various cities died from sunstroke and the mortality among infants and young children was appalling.

The summer of 1900 passed into history as the hottest on record for a period of from thirty to forty years; and old residents of the county informed the writer that they had not witnessed such a continuation of high temperature as that of July and August of 1900 for nearly *forty years*. The thermometer for 3 days in May, 3 in June, 15 in July, 17 in August and 4 in September, a total of 42 days, averaged from 90 degrees upward a remarkable record.

The present summer up to date has also had an enviable record for heat and deaths from heat prostration. Droughts have prevailed in different parts of the country, more particularly in the west and the suffering from the want of rain and continued high temperature has been terrible in its character.

We believe that it is the general wish of humanity that the heat of the summers of 1900 and 1901, will not be repeated for a decade to come.

CHARLES L. SHIPLEY,
PIKESVILLE, MD., August, 1901.

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