

## Comment by the Editor

### WEATHER

As far as the weather goes we are all communists. It rains on the just and the unjust, and the sunshine has no favorites. And so, being the common possession of mankind, it is not surprising that it is the common topic of conversation, and that "good morning", "bon jour", "buenos dias", and the like furnish the customary greeting the world over. As a topic it has its good points. It has variety and is spiced with adventure and excitement in the form of cloudbursts, tornadoes, and blizzards. Its future is an unfailing subject for speculation; its present is a convenient and unresisting object for our curses, and its past is a prime field for reminiscence.

Mr. Williams' story of an early Iowa blizzard has raised in our mind a few questions we have often asked but never have had answered satisfactorily. Is the country changing its climate? Is there less snow and a milder temperature than in the good old days of sleigh-riding and Thanksgiving skating? Or does our mellowing memory recall only the high lights — the occasional drifting of snow over the fence tops and the dropping of the mercury into the bottom of the tube — until we think of these phenomena as the ordinary winter program?

To try to satisfy our curiosity we have spent a

little time burrowing among the early meteorological reports and the recent reports issued by the Iowa Weather and Crop Service. We have not emerged triumphant but here are a few facts: Professor T. S. Parvin published in the *Report of the Geological Survey of the State of Iowa* for 1870 a discussion of the climate of Iowa with tables based on careful records kept by him, first at Muscatine and later at Iowa City, for the years 1839 to 1869. With regard to temperature he states, "During a residence of more than thirty years in central eastern Iowa, I have never seen the mercury rise to 100 degrees nor fall below 30 degrees". The lowest temperature he records as  $-30^{\circ}$ , on January 18, 1857, during the same bitter winter in which Mr. Williams' blizzard occurred, and in which, two months later, terrible weather prevented Major William Williams and his relief expedition from immediately following up the band of Inkpaduta which had perpetrated the Spirit Lake Massacre.

Professor Parvin makes a tabulation of annual and monthly snowfall by inches for a period from 1848 to 1869 inclusive. The average annual snowfall for this period was 33.23 inches, the highest was 61.97 inches in 1868, the lowest 7.90 in 1850. The greatest monthly fall of snow in the period was in December, 1848, and amounted to 29.52 inches. Apparently this nearly exhausted the supply for in the two years immediately following (1849 and 1850) the totals for the entire years were only 9.41 and 7.90 respectively.

Turning now to more recent times, it appears that much lower temperatures are occasionally to be found. The Iowa Weather and Crop Service recorded in December, 1917, a temperature of 40 below zero, and in January, 1912, the thermometer at Washta in Cherokee County was reported as registering 47 below. This month of January, 1912, was commented upon by all observers. Professor A. J. Smith at Iowa City reported it to be the coldest month since observations began at that station in 1858, over a half century before. The average annual quantity of snowfall for the State in inches is reported by the Iowa Weather and Crop Service. For the ten years from 1909 to 1918 the average annual snowfall never was less than 23.4 inches nor more than 49 inches. The average for the ten years was 32.67 inches. And yet the Report for 1912 states that at Earlham in Madison County the station recorded a total amount of 77.2 inches for the year.

But these are only sample figures. To draw conclusions one must go deeper and wider. We recommend the subject as an interesting and useful one for study.

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