



"Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it" is just as true today as it ever was, but the weather doesn't affect most of us nearly as much as it used to, so it matters less.

It's still an inconvenience when a major snowstorm makes roads impassable; hurricanes, floods and tornadoes can cause millions of dollars in damage, but day-to-day, weather doesn't affect many of us in important ways.

One reason is improved weather forecasting. If you listen to the radio during any twenty-minute period of the day or night, you can pick up a weather broadcast.

If you're in need of immediate weather information, there's a number you can dial and get the very latest from the U.S. Weather Bureau.

With satellites zooming around the stratosphere, taking pictures of cloud and storm formation, rain, snow, showers and wind patterns are less of a guess-work proposition and more of a science than ever before.

All this lets us plan more accurately what to wear, what time to leave home to reach work on time, and whether to postpone a long trip until the highway crews have a chance to plow the roads.

While forecasting hasn't yet reached the pinnacle of perfection it's undoubtedly aiming for, we do find reports far more dependable than in pre-satellite days.

Something's been lost to us with the change. The certainty that predictions will nearly always be borne out by events has robbed us of what once was an important subject of conversation, speculation and controversy.

How have we been robbed? Because the element of doubt is now practically eliminated, some of the zest has gone, and we're one step further removed from our natural contact with our environment.

These steps away from nature's influence come one at a time, as slight changes, and are seen for the most part as "progress". They can be ticked off on our fingers, accomplishments achieved in the last century.

We're free from our dependence on animal power for transportation and to help us do our work. The Industrial Revolution's advantages, taken together, removed most of us from daily contact with horses, cows, pigs, sheep and chickens, except as food in ready-to-eat form.

Today there's a wide gulf between us and the natural sources of water, light and heat. Few of us grow any of our food, make any of our clothing from natural fibres (it's even difficult to buy clothes of natural fibres), and most of us think of water coming from taps, light from electric switches, and heat from radiators or ducts.

This isn't all bad, of course, but it does put people a great distance from the world of nature with which we were once, of necessity, on intimate terms.

When water came from ponds or streams, or even from wells and pumps, we were far more conscious of it's true source and what might affect its quality and potential dangers of pollution of water supplies.

When light came only from the sun, or even from flame-supporting fuels -- candles, wicks and oil, or gas jets -- we appreciated it more; in some stages of man's development, we worshipped it.

When we were warmed solely by the sun, we surely worshipped it; later, as bonfires gave way to fireplaces, and then to wood and coal-burning stoves, the fueling of heat sources was a demanding household chore.

The weather affected all these activities to an extent we no longer appreciate; people had to be as concerned about weather as we now seem to be about money. Good weather could mean survival; bad

weather could mean death.

No longer do we stop to think, as a spring snowstorm whitens the world beyond our windowpane, "Snow is the poor man's fertilizer." Nor do we muse when we waken to a dawn of white-frost, crystallized on every twig, leaf and blade of grass, "Ah, a sign of good weather and a warming trend."

As winter gives in reluctantly to spring and the tides ride high on the marshes, who recalls that each year the equinox brings the year's highest flood-tides to clean the debris from our salt-water wetlands and make room for the new growth of grasses soon to follow?

The wind direction is no longer of great interest and importance. The radio tells us a coming storm will last three days or will pass out to sea in a few short hours.

No longer do we study cloud formations for signs of tomorrow's weather. No longer do we watch the vane -- to see if it's a northeaster that's blowing or a southeast storm -- to judge the duration of a rainy spell.

Forecasting an early spring by the height of the ponds, the day the redwinged blackbirds return, the moment the first pair of Canadian geese return to their summer roosting place, is no longer practiced.

When pussy willows bloom, when the ribbons of green narcissus leaves poke through the ground, when snowdrops blossom -- these are no longer important signs. We have a national weather system to tell us winter is being shouldered aside by a vibrant young new springtime.

Does it make any difference, all these changes we see separating us from feeling close to Mother Earth? It seems it does make a difference... a big difference. We no longer relate to the fact of our dependence on the basic elements of life.

Instead of being concerned about the quality of rainfall or quality of water, we concern ourselves with weather only to the degree it may affect our social lives.

The crisis of energy resources and their depletion translates to the dollar-cost of heating our homes, lighting our rooms, cooking our food and driving our cars from place to place.

Problems of land use, solid waste disposal, air and water pollution boil down to inconveniences rather than to how we may be permanently damaging the world in which we must live and in which future generations must somehow try to survive.

If that were the extent of our change in attitude toward our physical surroundings, it'd be a story sad enough; but it goes deeper.

For the most part, people are out of touch with the world of nature and ignore the swinging pendulum of the seasons, the rhythm of the universe, the heart-beat of life on earth.

The miracle of loveliness of each season of the year -- but most particularly of spring -- no longer stirs men's souls in a personal way as it did when it was vital to their very lives.

Who among us rises to watch the glowing dawn? Who takes time to thrill to the flaming sunset? Who walks at night to witness the eternal tumbling of stars and planets against the sky's dark mantle? Who has enough free minutes to see the moon rise from the shimmering waters of Nantucket Sound?

Although our lives no longer seem to depend so completely upon environmental forces, it's only an illusion that we've conquered our dependencies. They are still the foundation of our existence.

The chain of life -- from minute bacteria to highest primate -- continues only so long as the links remain intact. Modern conveniences have robbed us, with our full cooperation, of an important knowledge we need to keep; we are but a few small steps removed from primitive existence and can slip back to it in a much shorter time than it took to gain present levels.

If we allow Mother Nature's ways to be forgotten, if we fail to work in harmony with her powers, mankind cannot long survive. We hold the earth in the palms of our hands only so long as we respect nature's laws and love her precious gifts.