STORMY WEATHER.

CHAPTER XXI.

REAR-ADMIRAL FITZROY AND WEATHER PROGNOSTICS.

A FAVOURITE subject of speculation is the laws which regulate the changes of the weather. In the old jest books, the Frenchman learning English is made to ask, "Did it rain to-morrow?" If we change the phrase to will it rain to-morrow? it is one of common occurrence—it is a dip into futurity in which we are all interested.

"In 1838," says Dr. Lardner, "the English public, who are especially excitable, were seized with a rage for weather prognostics, produced apparently by an unusually rigorous and long continued frost, which took place in the months of January and February. In one of the numerous weather almanacks which were then circulated, a fortuitous coincidence occurred by which it appeared that the coldest

day had been predicted by the author, an adroit Hibernian, named Patrick Murphy. The conductors of some of the leading journals, without waiting to obtain better information from any of the acknowledged scientific authorities, 'gravely descanted of the great advantages which would accrue to the farmer, the manufacturer, the navigator, and others, from the certain prediction of the weather from week to week, and from day to day;' and admitted that they looked forward to the period, not far distant, when a

> 'Careful observer might foretell the hour
> By sure prognostic when to dread a shower.'

So extreme was the public excitement of the moment on this subject, that the book in which the so-called weather table was published was actually purchased, though its price was high, by the hundred thousand. So urgent was the demand for it, and so ungovernable the public impatience, that the shop of the publisher, like that of a baker in a famine, was obliged to be protected by the police, who, to keep the thoroughfare unobstructed, marshalled the expectant purchasers in a *queue* which extended to an incredible length. Yet will it be believed that when this weather almanack was afterwards examined and compared with the actual change of the weather, its pretended predictions were found to fail in seventeen cases out of twenty-four."

To us it appears—supposing Murphy simply shot his bow at a venture—still more surprising that seven times in twenty-four he should have been right. There is no doubt that careful observation of the weather will enable any one to give a tolerably accurate notion as to its probable changes, and it has long been felt that could such observations be reduced to a system an immense advantage would be gained by all classes, and that many valuable cargoes, and still more valuable lives, might be saved from shipwreck.

Rear-Admiral Fitzroy, from his youth accustomed to blue water, and so early addicted to a studious observation of the weather, has given to England and to the world, one of the most valuable systems of weather prognostics

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