

conversion into either were not prevented, great temporary evil would necessarily ensue from our privation of it as a liquid.

It has been already mentioned that the atmosphere constantly holds in solution or suspension a great body of water, in a state of minute division: but the quantity that can be carried up into the atmosphere by the process of evaporation is limited in two ways; first, by the air's incapability of holding in suspension more than a certain proportion; and secondly, by the restraining effect of the pressure of the atmosphere. But the rapid evaporation of water is also prevented by the comparatively low temperature at which all its natural forms exist, even in tropical latitudes.

The prevention of the sudden conversion of water into ice depends on a peculiarity in its physical constitution, which is no less remarkable in a simply philosophical point of view, than beneficial in its result to the great bulk of mankind. Water, in common with all other forms of matter, is gradually contracted in its volume by a diminution of its temperature; and ultimately passes into a solid state. It does not however continue to be condensed to the moment of its congelation, but only to a certain degree of temperature; from whence it begins to expand; and continues to expand till it arrives at the point of congelation.