

A Science Service Feature

Released on receipt
but intended for use
June 13, 1927

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed June 8, 1927

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WEATHER VANES ---OLD AND NEW

The earliest weather vane of which we have any certain knowledge was that which surmounted the Tower of the Winds, at Athens, built about a century before the Christian era. It consisted of a brazen Triton, holding in his hand a wand. The eight winds recognized by the Athenians at that period were represented by a series of symbolical figures running around the upper part of the tower, and the one of these toward which the wand pointed showed which wind was blowing at the time. M. Terentius Varro, the erudite Roman, who died in B. C. 28, had on his farm a vane that could be read indoors by means of a dial. Undoubtedly the elaborate vanes we have just mentioned had cruder predecessors in earlier times, of which no record has been preserved.

The weather vane in the shape of a cock appeared in Europe at least as early as the ninth century of our era, and soon afterward became universal on church steeples. One of them is shown in the Bayeux Tapestry. In mediaeval France the banner-shaped vane was reserved for the use of the nobility. Such vanes were commonly adorned with their owner's coats-of-arms.

Gradually weather vanes assumed a great variety of shapes; symbolical, heraldic, ornamental and fantastic. St. Gaudens' "Diana", which disappeared from the New York sky-line when Madison Square Garden was torn down, was inspired by the "Giraldillo," an immense bronze figure of Faith, which crowns the summit of the Giralda of Seville.

The tails of scientific vanes are usually made with two diverging blades, which tend to hold the vane steady to the wind. A very recent improvement is a vane with a single small "stream-lined" tail-blade. The favorite vane among aeronauts is a conical sleeve of canvas through which the wind flows.

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