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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THOSE DYRENFORTH EXPERIMENTS

The ancient and apparently immortal delusion that rain can be produced by the use of explosives received much encouragement in 1891 and 1892, when experiments of this character were carried out by General R. G. Dyrenforth with the aid of a Congressional appropriation. These undertakings were partly the outcome of the publication in 1871 of a book called "War and the Weather," by Edward Powers, which gave great prominence to the notion that rainfall is a usual sequel of battles. This idea actually dates from ancient times, long before the invention of gunpowder. It is mentioned in Plutarch's "Lives."

Dyrenforth and his assistants, after some preliminary experiments in the suburbs of Washington, went to a ranch in Texas. Here, during a period of several weeks, many balloons containing a mixture of hydrogen and oxygen, as well as sticks of dynamite sent up attached to kites, were exploded in mid-air. Other explosives were fired on the ground. The following summer more money was secured from Congress and the firing was continued.

The experimenters thought that their explosions were responsible for a few showers that occurred in the vicinity of their headquarters, but most meteorologists were convinced that the showers were merely part of nature's program. The only tangible result of the undertaking was that it gave a great impetus to all sorts of wild schemes for regulating the weather.

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