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! WHY THE WEATHER ?

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FIRING CANNON AT WATERSPOUTS

Do sailors still fire cannon at waterspouts? The practice is mentioned in Camoens' "Lusiad" and other works of the sixteenth century, and it was not uncommon a generation or so ago.

The modern idea about this practice is that the vortex of the spout can be broken up, either by the passage of a projectile through it or by the atmospheric waves set up by the firing. In former times, however, no such notion was entertained. Cannonading was merely one of several methods employed for the purpose of frightening away what was believed to be a living monster of the deep. In ancient and medieval days waterspouts were thought to be dragons. Before the invention of gunpowder, several other noise-making procedures were in use among sailors to keep these creatures at a distance. The mariners who sighted a spout would shout, stamp on the deck, beat drums and gongs, or clash their swords. These practices were kept up long after cannon began to be used for the same purpose.

Thus firing cannon at waterspouts is based on ignorance and superstition. No waterspout was ever dispelled by this process, or by any other artificial process. It is just as futile as the process of bombarding the clouds to bring rain.

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