

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A RASH PROPHECY

One of the worst prophecies ever made by a man of science was uttered by Arago, director of the Observatory of Paris, in 1845. Like many other eminent astronomers before and since, this authority was much confounded in the public mind with astrologers, among whose foolish occupations from time immemorial had been the prediction of weather. Unscrupulous publishers had not hesitated to attach his name to prognostications for which he was in no way responsible.

Irritated at being thus misrepresented, Arago published in the "Annuaire" of the Bureau of Longitudes a memoir in which, to judge from the title, he intended merely to prove that the science of meteorology, as then constituted, was unequal to the task of making successful weather predictions. Apparently his feelings ran away with him and in the course of the memoir he made the following dogmatic statement:

"NEVER, no matter what may be the progress of science, will honest scientific men who have a regard for their reputations venture to predict the weather."

The word "never" ("jamais") was printed in capital letters! Just ten years after Arago uttered his "never" his successor in the directorship of the Paris Observatory, Leverrier, founded the European system of telegraphic weather reports that made scientific weather forecasting possible, and within the next few decades nearly all civilized countries in the temperate zones established official services for predicting the weather every day.

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