

A Science Service Feature

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! WHY THE WEATHER !

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RAIN-MAKING

Although efforts on the part of mere man to produce rain have often been made in good faith, and sometimes under scientific auspices, the commercial rainmaker is in nearly all cases a faker, pure and simple. His methods are, as a rule closely akin to those of the "rain doctors" who flourish among savages in many parts of the world subject to drought.

About a quarter of a century ago one Frank Melbourne, known as the "Australian rain-maker", traveled about the country and often figured as an attraction at county fairs. His procedure consisted of locking himself in a freight car or a barn and burning mysterious chemicals; a process strikingly similar to that of the Mandan medicine men of an earlier period, described by Catlin in his "Life Among the Indians" who, in time of drought, were wont to shut themselves in their lodges and burn sweet-smelling herbs, while praying to the Great Spirit. A successor of Melbourne, who has operated in recent years in the western United States and Canada, exposes chemicals in pans a few feet above the ground. He claims that he is thus able to bring rain over a radius of from 40 to 70 miles.

Such rain-making experiments as those of General Dyrenfurth, in 1891, and C.W. Post, in 1912, in which great quantities of explosives were set off, and a later official undertaking in Australia, when an elaborate system of electrical conductors was lifted by kites and balloons with the idea of altering the electrical state of the atmosphere, though certainly quite futile, were at least capable of being discussed in a serious spirit and in scientific language. The hocus-pocus of the typical professional rain-maker, on the other hand, is on a par with the nautical custom of scratching the mast to raise a wind. Science should not be called upon to discredit such childish exploits. They should be dealt with by the common sense of the community.

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