

Science Service Feature

Released on receipt  
but intended for use  
July 18, 1929.

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed July 11, 1929.

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BIG HAILSTONES

The fall of some exceptionally big hailstones at Potter, Nebraska, on July 6, 1928, has brought again to the fore the question: How big can hailstones be? One of the stones found at Potter was photographed, measured and weighed by a local druggist, J.J. Norcross. It was a smooth sphere, 17 inches in circumference, and weighed  $1\frac{1}{2}$  pounds. This is said to be the largest hailstone ever authentically reported from a North American hailstorm. Bigger stones have, however, fallen in other parts of the world.

In the year 1757 there was much excitement in Berlin over rumors of an impending war. In order to give the people something else to think about, King Frederick the Great caused a fanciful story to be published in the newspapers about a hailstorm at Potsdam, in which hailstones as big as pumpkins were said to have killed cattle. The story had the desired effect. The public was all agog over the new wonder; meteorology crowded belligerency out of the limelight; and a political crisis was successfully "weathered." (What a pity Frederick's latest successor did not think of a similar expedient in 1914!)

Just how far beyond the limits of possibility was this invented tale of the Prussian king? Probably it was not such a big "whopper" after all, for on August 10, 1925, a hailstone nearly 10 inches long and weighing  $4\frac{1}{2}$  pounds fell through the roof of a house in the hamlet of Heidgraben, not far from Hamberg, Germany.

As for cattle-killing hailstones there have been several cases in India in which cattle were killed by the hundreds by hail. Indian hailstorms have likewise claimed many human victims.

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21st and B Sts.  
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