

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A CONTRACT WITH THE RAIN-MAKER

In the United States and Canada a great deal of money has been paid by drought-stricken farmers to the charlatans who undertake to produce rain at a price. There are tricks in all trades. The favorite trick of the Indian rain-doctors is to prolong their magical ceremonies until the rain arrives and then claim that the magic brought it. The white man's trick is to enter into a one-sided contract with the farmers, according to which, if rain falls within a specified time, the "rain-maker" gets a few thousand dollars, while if rain does not fall he gets nothing but also loses nothing.

The United States Weather Bureau was recently consulted about the advisability of entering into a bargain with one of these worthies in California and suggested, in reply, the following procedure:

"1. Inquire of this office the normally expected amount of rain during the specified time at the place in question.

"2. If the amount promised is appreciably in excess of the normal amount for the given period and place, then require the rain-maker to deposit with your bank a suitable forfeit (roughly the amount promised him in case of success), to be paid to the farmers in case the promised rain does not occur. This is precisely the kind of contract we make with builders, for example, and a rain-maker would accept it if he could actually bring the rain."

Contracts in this form have sometimes been proposed to the rain-fakers but always declined.

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