

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 31, 1929.

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THE WATERSPOUT AS A SEA BEAST

The custom of firing cannon at waterspouts dates back, as has often been pointed out, to the old belief that these atmospheric vortices were living monsters of the deep. Here is what Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, wrote on the subject in the middle of the sixteenth century:

"The whirlpool or prister is of the kind of whales, two hundred cubits long, and is very cruel. For to the danger of seamen he will sometimes raise himself beyond the sail-yards, and casts such floods of waters above his head, which he had sucked in, that with a cloud of them he will often sink the strongest ships or expose the mariners to extreme danger. This beast hath also a long and large round mouth, like a lamprey, whereby he sucks in his meat or water, and by his weight cast upon the fore or hinder deck he sinks and drowns a ship. Sometimes, not content to do hurt by water only, as I said, he will cruelly overthrow the ship like any small vessel, striking it with his back or tail. He hath a thick black skin all his body over, long fins like to broad feet, and a forked tail, 15 or 20 foot broad, wherewith he forcibly binds any parts of the ship he twists it about.

"A trumpet of war is the fit remedy against him, by reason of the sharp noise, which he cannot endure; and by casting out huge/^{great}vessels that hinder this monster's passage, or for him to play withal; or with strong cannon and guns, with the sound whereof he is more frightened than with a stone or iron bullet, because this ball loseth its force, being hindered by his fat or by the water, or wounds but a little his most vast body, that hath a rampart of mighty fat to defend it."

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