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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SO-CALLED "BAROMETERS"

Most weather toys and other non-scientific weather instruments are really crude hygrosopes, which indicate whether or not the air is well supplied with invisible water vapor. Though a majority of these are popularly described as "barometers," they do not, like the true barometer, measure the pressure of the atmosphere, and whatever value they have as weather prognosticators depends upon the fact that in a general way an increase of atmospheric moisture points to a probability of rain, while a decrease indicates the likelihood of a dry spell.

In some of these hygrosopes, such as the familiar "weather house," variations of moisture cause certain parts of the device to move, but there are others in which the action is chemical rather than mechanical. In these the sensitive part consists of paper treated with substances that cause it to assume different colors according to the degree of humidity. In most cases the principal ingredient is chloride of cobalt, and the paper is blue when dry, gradually changing toward pink with an increase of moisture. These chemical hygrosopes are made in a number of fanciful designs, including flowers, landscapes and the like. One is a paper figure of a girl, whose skirt changes color with the state of the air.

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