

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HOW TO DEAL WITH RAIN-MAKERS

In America the enterprising gentleman who contracts with gullible farmers to make rain for a price is not required to pay a penalty in case the promised showers fail to materialize. In central Africa they manage these affairs better; or did, until the good old customs succumbed to Europeanization. John Roscoe, in his book about the Bakitara, a once powerful nation in what is now the Uganda Protectorate, describes the elaborate rain-making ceremonies that prevailed until recently among them. He proceeds:

"Should the rain-makers fail to bring rain when it was wanted, the king had a special punishment for them. Their chiefs had to come to the court, where the king ordered to be prepared for them a meal of liver, usually from a sheep or a goat, mixed with blood and fat and cooked with as much salt as possible. The men had to eat this and sit perspiring in the sun until they were tortured by thirst, but no man dared give them water. Sometimes they were kept like this for several days, fed at intervals with salted meat but allowed no water; and when they begged for a drink they were told they must get it as rain or die. Their sufferings often caused them to faint, and they have been known to die without any compassion being shown to them.

"In like manner, if there was an excessive downpour of rain, preventing the crops from ripening, and these men did not stop it in return for the offerings of the people or in answer to the king's commands, the king sent for the chief rain-makers and put them in the rain in an open place near the throne-room, with great pots of rain water before them, which they were compelled to drink. The amount they had to drink often made them ill, but 'Work harder and stop the rain' was the only comfort they were offered."

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