

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ALMANAC WEATHER PREDICTIONS

Government bureaus for foretelling the weather are a modern invention--the oldest were founded after the middle of the nineteenth century--but the almanac-makers have been at this job for centuries. Almanacs have always been among the "best sellers." They are cheap and they contain information that everybody wants. Some of this information, such as the data relating to the calendar, is usually accurate and reliable. On the other hand, the average almanac of the old-fashioned type--still too common--has always contained a good deal of nonsense masquerading as solemn truth. All the weather predictions in the almanac fall in this category.

Science has not yet discovered any method of predicting the weather accurately and definitely for more than a few days in advance. There are, to be sure, meteorologists of good scientific standing who believe that it is possible to form a general idea of the prevailing weather of future seasons in certain parts of the world on the basis of various terrestrial or cosmical phenomena, and in some cases--notably in India--long-range weather forecasts have been issued by official institutions in accordance with this idea; but in all such cases the predictions of distant weather are phrased in very general terms and have nothing in common with the day-to-day predictions of the almanacs.

Some almanac-makers doubtless follow a fanciful system of forecasting, which they themselves believe to be sound, but many or most of these long-range announcements are simply manufactured out of "whole cloth."

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