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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE WEATHERMAN'S KITE

The use of kites to explore the air overhead is an old story. Alexander Wilson flew kites for meteorological purposes in the neighborhood of Glasgow as early as 1749, and, as everybody knows, Benjamin Franklin investigated lightning by means of the same device in the year 1752.

It is a far cry, however, from the simple contrivance of those early days to the "box-kite" of modern meteorology. Science has perfected the kite almost beyond recognition. It has been shorn of that crucial feature of the schoolboy article, the tail. Even the kite "string" has become several miles of steel piano wire, wound around the drum of a power-driven winch, with attachments for indicating the force of the pull and the angles of azimuth and elevation. The kite carries up a set of feather-weight instruments for recording weather conditions aloft, and it has taken them as high as six miles above sea level, though in the great majority of cases it does not go half so high as that.

But the use of the weather kite is on the wane. The airplane tends to replace it, and in some European countries has already done so entirely. The "free-rising" captive balloon, devised in Germany and used to some extent in America since 1926, is an occasional substitute for the kite when only moderate altitudes need be attained. The radio sounding-balloon that, without human aid, broadcasts its weather observations is another possible substitute, but has hardly passed beyond the experimental stage.

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