

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
September 9, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed September 2, 1931

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METEOROLOGY IN ART

A paradox never yet explained is the fact that although painters generally study anatomy and take care not to do violence to its teachings in their pictures, they seldom study either astronomy or meteorology and often paint as if neither of those sciences existed. No artist but a deliberate caricaturist would dream of depicting a woman with two noses, yet a celebrated English landscapist, not many years ago, not only painted a rainbow with its colors inverted, but was indignant when asked to correct the mistake. He finally yielded to persuasion - and charged the purchaser of the painting twenty guineas extra for making the rainbow obey the laws of optics!

It is notorious that many artists make no bones about showing the moon in the wrong phase or the wrong position - while the astounding spectacle of a starry sky with part of the constellations backwards and the rest in normal attitude has been displayed for years on the ceiling of the Grand Central railway station in New York - but it is probable that scrambled meteorology is even more prevalent in paintings than scrambled astronomy. The liberties that painters - the "old masters" included - have taken with such things as clouds, lightning, sky colors and rainbows would make a ghastly catalogue.

The late Sir Norman Lockyer was in the habit of visiting the annual exhibitions of pictures at the Royal Academy, in London, and subsequently reporting in "Nature," of which he was editor, which paintings were good and which bad from the meteorological standpoint. His son Dr. W. J. S. Lockyer has done likewise in more recent years. Their criticisms, because founded on sound scientific knowledge, are more instructive than Ruskin's discussion of sky effects in "Modern Painters."

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21st and Constitution Ave.
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