

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 26, 1932

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WEATHER MYTHS WE CHERISH

On the third day of a certain February I discovered in a book of travel an account of some curious things the peasants of southern Italy believe about weather. Hail, the author tells us, is supposed by these benighted rustics to be made from mountain snow by devils. Lightning is thought to be the work of lost souls, and whirlwinds are said to arise on the spot where somebody has been murdered. Fishermen cut the air with a knife to dispel a waterspout. One did so without success, and his boat was capsized. Returning home, he found that his wife had a cut finger. He concluded that she was a witch, who had taken the form of a waterspout to plague him, and he so maltreated her that she died.

Still glowing with the proud consciousness of living in a land where nobody believes hail to be made by devils or waterspouts to be women in disguise, I took up the morning newspaper. On the first page I found a dispatch about the groundhog. On the previous day he had seen his shadow! At a certain zoo he had been caught in the act of doing it, and so the weather program was settled for the next six weeks. The dispatch said so. The news had been flashed all over these enlightened states. I hope it was cabled to Italy. Southern Italy, where the people cling to such quaint, superstitious notions about weather.'

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