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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SAILORS' WEATHER SUPERSTITIONS

Sailors, like other people, prognosticate winds and weather from the behavior of various birds and beasts, but they go a little further than the rest of mankind in ascribing actual control of the weather to these creatures. For example, they profess great confidence in the ability of cats to raise the wind, and have a saying that the cat "carries a gale in her tail."

The albatross is supposed to be a great wind-maker. This superstition has been made universally familiar through Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner." We are indebted to the seamen of antiquity for the belief that kingfishers cast a spell upon the deep, so that calm weather prevails during the "halcyon days," about the time of the winter solstice, when, according to the ancient myth, kingfishers are sitting on their eggs in nests floating on the sea.

Sailors still whistle for a wind. In Ireland and some other parts of the world you are told that this charm must be used with caution. In navigating dangerous waters, it is best to refrain from whistling, as too much wind is worse than too little. Scratching the mast is another wind-raising process. Still another is to let the end of the sheet trail overboard, or to stick a knife in the mainmast with the handle pointing in the direction from which you wish the wind to blow.

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