

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 7, 1932

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RAINBOW FOLKLORE

In different parts of southern Europe the rainbow is known as the "arch of St. Martin," the "crown of St. Bernard," the "bridge of the Holy Spirit," the "girdle of God," and the like, while, in contrast to these pious appellations, the Bretons call it the "barrel stave" and the "old bachelor's garters." In Sanskrit it is known as the "bow of Indra," the Annamites call it the "little window in the sky," and the Kabyles of northern Africa the "bride of the rain."

Of the many superstitions connected with the rainbow none is more widely met with among primitive races and classes than the belief that it sucks up water from the earth. In accordance with this belief it is generally supposed to be a serpent or dragon, which slakes its thirst at the lakes and streams. Among the Slovaks a man who imbibes too freely is said to "drink like a rainbow." The Indians of the southwestern United States, who suffer much from drought, hold the rainbow in abhorrence because it "drinks the rain," and represent it under various serpent-like forms.

Local tradition ascribes still other misdeeds to this harmless product of the sunbeams. It is said to blight crops that it touches and to bring bad luck to the inmates of a house over which it forms. According to one strange notion, a man who walks under it will be changed to a woman, and a woman to a man. (Incidentally, the walk in question would be as miraculous as the alleged consequences.) Pointing at a rainbow is said to bring dire results; your finger will be cut off, or you will be struck by lightning. In many European countries the children have various rhymes and charms for driving the bow away.

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