

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

HAIL-ROCKETS

For many years the favorite method in the Old World of bombarding hail-storms to "protect" crops and vineyards from their ravages has been to discharge a funnel-shaped mortar in the direction of the clouds. The mortar sends up a whirling ring of smoke but no projectile. Recently, however, a form of rocket carrying an explosive charge has become more popular in some parts of Europe, partly because it is less expensive and partly because it jostles the atmosphere at greater heights. Some of these rockets travel up three-quarters of a mile before they burst. They often penetrate the clouds, though it is not likely that they often attain the levels of active hail formation.

As in the case of the hail-cannon and other devices for a similar purpose, the merits of the rocket are attested by an impressive "cloud of witnesses." The usual story is that, after shooting begins, the hail quickly changes to rain.

Here we have a parallel to the hoary delusion that waterspouts can be broken up by firing at them. It is quite certain that they cannot; but as waterspouts are always short-lived, lasting on an average about fifteen minutes, it is easy to understand why the process often seems to "work." So with hail. It is always of brief duration at any one place, and it is usually succeeded by the longer-enduring rain of the thunderstorm. The change from hail to rain is merely the normal sequence of events.

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21st and Constitution Ave.
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