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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

NOISY WEATHER-MAKING

Firing mortars, bombs and rockets at the storm clouds to avert hail and discharging a cannon at a waterspout to break it up are customs that, whatever attempts may be made today to defend them on rational grounds, trace their origin to the old superstitious belief that the malevolent spirits of the air can be scared away by loud noises. This belief is not yet extinct. A writer on rural superstitions in Austria says:

"The crashing and pealing of church bells during a dangerous thunderstorm is as old as Christianity in Austria and Hungary; and as the ringers in the belfries were so frequently struck dead by lightning the Empress Maria Theresa, in 1750, issued a special decree prohibiting this altogether. The peasants were tenacious of their old customs, however, especially where the village possessed a 'thunder bell'; and so forty years later we find the Emperor Joseph II confirming his mother's decree. Yet in rural districts of Austria today you will hear the 'thunder bells' during a storm; or you will hear the huge 'weather horns' blown from the church tower on the hilltops of Styria, while the hordsmen set up a terrific howl, and the women rattle chains and beat together the lids of their milk-pails to scare away the destructive spirit of the storm.

"For centuries the Austrian peasants have also shot at destructive clouds, but the act had no scientific motive. Consecrated guns, powder and bullets were used, the last with a pious cross scratched upon them. In some districts horseshoe nails were fired from the guns; a different name being called out at each shot. If by chance it fitted the evil witch of the cloud, she fell dead -- though none saw her remains. To make still more noise, the peasants shot through empty barrels or used small mortars."

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