

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 30, 1932

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HERSCHEL NOT GUILTY

Many almanacs of today, like those of generations ago, publish a fantastic table for predicting the weather from the hour of the day at which the moon "changes," and falsely ascribe its authorship to Sir William Herschel, the great English astronomer. It is generally labeled "Herschel's Weather Table."

According to this table, if the moon changes her phase between noon and 2 p.m., the "resulting weather" (for how long is not stated) will be, in summer, "very rainy," and in winter will be characterized by "snow and rain." If the change of phase takes place between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m., the resulting weather will be "changeable" in summer and "fair and mild" in winter. And so on, for the rest of the 24 hours.

Of course the so-called "changes" of the moon are merely conventional stages in the gradual process of waxing and waning that goes on throughout the lunation and the times of day at which they occur can have no conceivable connection with the weather. The interesting thing about this weather table is not the fact that it is nonsensical - in which respect it has plenty of company in almanac literature - but that it should have been persistently attributed for more than a century to Sir William Herschel, who was in no way responsible for it, as both he and his son, Sir John Herschel, publicly declared on several occasions.

Some years ago an attempt was made to learn through "Notes and Queries" how Herschel's name came to be attached to the table, but the mystery remained unsolved.

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