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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HAIL-FIGHTING DEVICES

In the early years of the present century much was heard about two contrivances widely employed in Europe, especially by vine-growers, for the purpose of preventing the destructive effects of hail. One was the hail-rod; known in France as the "electric Niagara." This was merely an extra large and lofty lightning-rod. It was supposed to draw off electricity from the storm clouds and thereby -- though nobody ever explained why -- to prevent hail from falling in its vicinity, or to render it soft and harmless when it fell. Many hail-rods were erected in France under government auspices, but they now appear to be completely neglected and forgotten -- as they deserve to be. They were perfectly useless.

The other equally futile device was the hail-cannon; a special form of mortar, which discharged a whirling ring of smoke and gas but no solid projectile. Thousands of these cannon were used in Austria, Italy, France and elsewhere. They are now nearly obsolete, but they have been replaced in many regions by the hail-rocket, which bursts high in the air and hence is alleged (especially by its manufacturers!) to concentrate its effects where they will do the most good. The truth is, however, that the rocket bursts far below the level where hail is formed, and that, no matter where it burst, it could not conceivably affect the formation or the fall of hail.

Still another delusive contrivance is the hail-kite, invented in Russia. This is really an assemblage of box-kites, carrying sirens, which are operated electrically from the ground end of the kite wire. They emit a loud continuous note, and the resulting vibration of the air is supposed, in some miraculous way, to nip the hailstorm in the bud.

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