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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A FATAL KITE FLIGHT

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Sounding upper-air weather conditions by means of kites -- a scientific procedure now less common than formerly, because of the growing use of airplanes for the same purpose -- is not without its dangers. The steel wire by which the weatherman's kite is tethered to the ground offers an inviting path for a lightning discharge and in many cases the wire has been fused by lightning. A case in which the results were fatal occurred at the Ellendale, N.D., station of the United States Weather Bureau on August 28, 1919.

Charles H. Heckelsmiller, a laborer employed at the station, was assisting in a kite flight. The flight was nearly over, and of six kites flown in tandem, three had been landed. Such kites are spaced at intervals of 1,500 feet and upwards along the kite wire, and nearly a mile of the latter was still out, when it was struck and completely fused in the air. Heckelsmiller was standing near the wire and was instantly killed. Burns were found on his chest and wrist. Two other employees, who were in the reel-house, containing the electrically operated winch by which the kite wire is paid out and reeled in, reported that the building was filled with flame. A line of sparks resembling a skyrocket was seen to follow up the wire.

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