

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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DO LIGHTNING-RODS PAY?

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

H. S. Warren, of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company, is likely to become unpopular with the manufacturers of lightning rods on account of an assertion that he makes in the last number of the Bell Telephone Quarterly. He claims, in brief, that although lightning rods are effective they are not worth what they cost for installation and maintenance. He says:

"The fire loss from lightning in the United States averages about \$12,000,000 a year, practically all in rural areas. From a strictly economic standpoint, the property loss due to lightning is not large enough to justify rodding all farm buildings, even if it be assumed that such rods afford 100 per cent protection, as the annual charges for the rods would amount to many times the total annual property loss from lightning. Obviously, therefore, economic justification for lightning rods can be found only where some unusual condition exists, which warrants extraordinary precautions against damage, such as unusually severe exposure, or unusual importance or value of building or contents."

There appear to be at least two fallacies involved in this statement. First, lightning losses would be far greater than they now are if a large percentage of farm buildings (50 per cent or more in some states) were not already rodded. It is misleading to compare the expense of rods with the damage done under such conditions rather than with the total damage that would occur if no buildings were rodded. Secondly, Mr. Warren has probably not taken account of the fact that many fire insurance companies make a substantial reduction of premiums on account of the presence of lightning rods on insured buildings.

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