

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
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November 14, 1933

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed November 7, 1933

"SACRILEGIOUS" USE OF WIND

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In Sir Walter Scott's novel "Old Mortality" a tenant farmer complains that his son has been asked by the owner of the estate to use a winnowing machine, "thus impiously thwarting the will of Divine Providence, by raising wind for your leddy-ship's ain particular use by human art, instead of soliciting it by prayer, or waiting patiently for whatever dispensation of wind Providence was pleased to send."

Prof. E.S. McCartney, in a recent number of the Classical Weekly, cites this episode as an illustration of the religious objections formerly raised to the production of wind by mechanical means. These objections were analogous to those formerly opposed to the use of anesthetics. Writing in 1847 on the latter subject, Sir James Y. Simpson, the Scottish physician who was the first to use chloroform in medical practice, mentions this hostility to fanning machinery as follows;

"Some of the more rigid sect of Dissenters loudly declaimed against the employment of any such machinery. 'Winds,' they argued, 'were raised by God alone, and it was irreligious in man to attempt to raise wind for the aforesaid purpose for himself and by efforts of his own.' Mr. Gilfillan, the well-known Scottish poet, has furnished me with evidence of one clergyman debarring from the communion of the Lord's Supper those members of the flock who thus irreverently used the 'Devil's wind,' as it was termed. And such sentiments, I believe, were not uncommon within the memory of some aged members of the present generation."

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