

METEOROLOGY

Rainmakers Try Everything But Ol' Man Weather Keeps On

Civilized Men Make "Dumbest" Bargains With Weather Wizards; Savages Apt to Penalize Failure Heavily

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DO WHAT we may, the weather does as it pleases.

Yet there are people the world over, and always have been, who claim that they can and do make weather, according to specifications for a guaranteed liberal fee.

A certain sporting element desired dry weather for a week's horse racing, a few years ago. And so a weather wizard was employed to the tune, according to reports, of a thousand dollars a day to prop up the clouds. That happened in New York.

Almost immediately thereafter, this same weather maker undertook, for a consideration, to break a drought with just the right amount of rain to put forest and field in the proper condition for good fox hunting. This occurred, not among aborigines in a savage land, but among sportsmen literally in sight of the Washington Monument. There was a little sprinkle of rain, in response to conditions clearly shown on the weather map, but not enough to put the ground in condition to hold the scent of game. The rain maker explained that he had not been employed in time to get his contraptions working properly.

In "civilized" countries, a rain maker generally has a contract that reads, "Heads I win, tails you lose."

Of course, those are not the exact words. But however enveloped in formal verbiage, the meaning is, "Heads I win," that is, if what I promise happens, then I get a big bonus. If it does not happen, then, "tails you lose," for you will pay me for my time, and reimburse me for my expenses. In civilized countries there are lots of people who will and do sign just such a contract.

In uncivilized countries a weather wizard often has to be more careful. For in a region where every one believes that the medicine man can get, at any time, precisely the kind of weather desired, really bad weather is to him a dangerous thing. He may be hanged for stubbornness.

If such a man is old, it is certain that for many years he has been highly weather-wise and discreetly circumspect—like the New England preacher who refused to defy Providence by praying for rain while the wind was in the northwest.

One of the most widely practised ways of trying to control weather is to imitate some feature of the kind of weather desired, in the hope and expectation that nature will take the hint and do the same thing on a large scale.

For instance, not long ago in an old and highly civilized country of Europe, when a summer shower was needed for thirsting crops, three men climbed adjacent trees. From their perches, one man waved and shook a firebrand to imitate lightning. The second man mimicked thunder by beating on an empty kettle. The third man scattered water all around from a sprinkler.

All methods of trying to mould the weather with pantomime or other magic are obviously futile. Many schemes to the same end, scientific in the sense that

they depend on actual forces, have been tried, but none has ever succeeded. Nor is there any promise that they will.

One scheme for getting rain out of unwilling air, a scheme based on sound scientific principles, is to form a ring of airplanes, heads out like musk oxen on defense, tails up and propellers running at full speed. This operation, it is argued, will produce an ascending current of air, in which, owing to natural cooling by expansion, a cumulus cloud will form and abundant rain will fall.

The trouble is that this cannot be carried out on a scale big enough to be effective. Any one trying to get rain in this way would be like a souvenir hunter trying to walk off with the Washington Monument. His method would be qualitatively sound, but quantitatively altogether inadequate. He can't lift hard enough.

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ASTRONOMY

Tiny Near-By Planet is Christened Anteros

THE new tiny planetoid, one-third of a mile in diameter, known as the Delporte object (SNL, Feb. 29, '36) has been named Anteros by its discoverer, Prof. E. Delporte of Royal Belgian Observatory. Anteros is the mythological brother of Eros, which is the name of the little planet that once held the record for close approach to the earth.

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INDIAN PAINTS CUSTER'S FALL

Southwest Museum, Los Angeles, has received this vivid pictograph of the Little Bighorn Battle, in which General George Custer fell. The picture was painted in 1898 by sub-chief Kicking Bear, Sioux veteran of Indian wars and unreconciled to the white man's government until his death. He shows the long-haired Custer slain, figure 1. Kicking Bear himself, scalp in hand, is figure 2 in a row of important Indians. The space at figure six was intentionally blank, Chief Gall having joined Sioux who were reconciled to the government. Figure five is Sitting Bull. Irvin Cobb, who bought the picture in 1934, has lent it to the Museum.