



SEND HER DOWN, HUGHIE

A DROUGHT faces the farmer. The spring rains have been insufficient. The summer sun and blustering nor'westers have scorched the land. The farmer derives little sympathy from his town cousin. True, there are restrictions in the town on the use of hoses, but it is excellent weather for tennis, bowls, and swimming. The farmer drives home through the parched land, bemoaning the cruel fates that conspire against him. He resolves to think about irrigation. Why, he asks, cannot the scientists produce rain when it is required?

Well, why can't they? Or can anyone produce rain at will?

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Droughts are a special curse of several districts in New Zealand. North Otago is one of them. The district possesses excellent mixed farm-land—almost anything thrives on its rich, limestone soil. But—and it is a very big "but" to the North Otago farmer—droughts are much too common and prolonged.

In recent years, many a farmer in the district has considered irrigation—until the drought broke. Several have made good use of this artificial means of bringing the necessary moisture to the parched land. Many again have tried in the past other ways of overcoming the drought—by trying to make it rain. Many years ago, explosives were used in the district to induce the heavens to disgorge their valuable moisture—but it was in vain. During one bad drought, special church services were held and prayers for rain offered. But again the natural cycle of events had to take

place before rain came to break the drought. Nothing controlled the weather for the farmer. The seasons were either too dry, too wet, or wind, hail, or frost destroyed the crops. Byrd's expedition to the South Pole, the introduction of Summertime, and, more recently, the great battles of this war, have all come in for their share of blame. But Nature goes on in her own, sweet way.

From time immemorial man has tried to produce rain at will. So far, he has had no more success than the early experimenters in New Zealand. At first, he turned to magic to help him out. Even to-day, age-old practices are in vogue. In Estonia, for example, there is a recognised recipe, which consists of imitating lightning, thunder and rain. For this comedy, three men climb a tree. One strikes fire-brands together to simulate lightning; a second beats a drum or strikes a metal pot to resemble thunder; and the third merely sprinkles water on the ground, no doubt in the hope that the skies will take heed of the hint. Somehow the skies remain adamant to auto-suggestion.

This practice of sprinkling, splashing, or drenching as a charm for inducing rainfall is not confined to Estonia. Sumatra, Serbia, Macedonia, Russia and Africa know it, too. Usually, it consists of processions of women and girls around the village and at each house they are suitably sprinkled or drenched with water. As droughts usually take place in summer, this practice may have its uses—even if it does not produce rain.

There are some people, however, who prefer their own magic for making