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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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"CYCLONE" VS. "TORNADO"

The vocabulary of weather and climate is full of conflicting usages, according to Prof. C. F. Talman, librarian of the U.S. Weather Bureau, who has compiled a meteorological glossary of many thousand terms. One of the most commonly met conflicts is that between "cyclone" and "tornado". The term "cyclone" was invented by Piddington, about 80 years ago, to designate the tropical storms of the Indian Ocean, with their spirally inflowing system of winds. A few years later when it was found that large storms or well-defined low pressure areas outside the tropics were also characterized by spirally inflowing winds, the term was more widely applied, and lost some of its connotation of violence. Nevertheless, the violently inwhirling storms of small diameter also became popularly known as "cyclones". Perhaps this term sounded more active than the old term "land-spout", the counterpart of "water-spout", which is still in use both in popular and scientific literature. But since the meteorologists were already using "cyclone" for the larger storms, or "lows", a more or less successful fight was waged by them against the popular usage, and the word "tornado" substituted. Though "tornado" may be from the Spanish "tronado", meaning thunder, and is the name of the heavy, local thunderstorms of north and west tropical Africa, which are not characterized by whirls, it appears more likely to come from the Spanish (and Portugese) "tornado", meaning a return or turning about (applied apparently at one time by Spanish and Portugese sailors to a whirling wind at sea).

The term "cyclone", thus, should be confined to the more or less circular, tropical or extra-tropical, low pressure, spirally inflowing system of winds of considerable strength, the diameter measured usually in scores or hundreds of miles; while "tornado" is the violently excessively destructive storm of a few score to a few thousand yards diameter.

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(Tomorrow: Diverse Winds Meet)

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