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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE DIRECTION OF THE WIND

It is a universal custom to regard as the "direction of the wind" the direction from which, rather than toward which, it blows. Moreover, it is only the horizontal direction of the wind that is ordinarily observed and recorded, though winds may have a pronounced upward and downward slant, or, in scientific language, a vertical component, and there are special instruments for measuring this component.

The direction of the wind can be observed in several makeshift ways, such as by watching the drift of smoke from chimneys, or, sailor-fashion, by holding up a wet finger to the breeze. Instrumentally and scientifically it is observed with a special type of vane, much more reliable than the weather vanes and weather cocks of ornamental and symbolical architecture. These architectural devices, once set in motion, are likely to be carried too far by their own momentum, or even to spin completely around. In the scientific vane this tendency is restrained by means of a spread tail. The pressure of the wind on the diverging blades serves to hold the vane in the correct position.

At all important meteorological stations the vane is connected electrically with apparatus indoors that makes a record of the wind direction every minute throughout the day and night.

Nowadays wind direction is generally expressed by the use of compass-points, as, north, northeast, etc., though degrees of azimuth have been used to some extent in place of compass-points for scientific purposes. On the other hand, the Italians and the sailors of the Mediterranean have separate names for winds from various directions. The same custom prevailed in ancient times. Moreover, the ancient names designating winds from different directions varied from place to place, so that wind nomenclature was a very complex subject. A common plan was to name a wind after a place or country lying in the direction from which it blew.

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