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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE SNOW LINE ON MOUNTAINS

Accounts of the "snow-line" found in works on physical geography often ignore the fact that there are three distinct natural boundaries to which this name applies. These are the climatic snow-line, the orographic snow-line and the temporary snow-line.

The first is the lower limit of perpetual snow lying in continuous fields. The second is the line above which patches of perpetual snow are found in sheltered places. The third is the lower boundary of snow at any particular time, generally varying from day to day. Near the equator the height of the climatic snow-line above sea level is from 15,000 to 18,000 feet. In high latitudes the line lies, in general, much lower, but the relation between latitude and the height of the snow-line is extremely indefinite; far more so than might be inferred from some of the diagrams published in schoolbooks. Thus the mountains of central Asia, well outside the tropics, have a higher climatic snow-line than occurs anywhere near the equator.

On the northeast coast of Greenland the height of the line is more than 3,000 feet, while in Franz Josef Land, only a little farther north, it is less than 1,000 feet. In short, the ups and downs of the snow-line, when hunted over the earth, prove to be no less erratic than the distribution of the other features of climate.

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