

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 8, 1928

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ENGLISH CLOUD NAMES

The names used in the international system of cloud classification are Latin; at least in form. They are not Latin that would have been intelligible to an ancient Roman. The word "cirrus", for example, means in the classical language a curl or tuft of hair. Meteorologists apply this word to a feathery cloud. The word "cirro-cumulus", now applied to clouds in small round lumps or flakes, is not found in ancient Latin. It means literally a curly heap or a heap of curls. If the word had existed in antiquity it might have been the name of one of the elaborate wigs affected by Roman ladies.

This Latinized cloud nomenclature was devised, in part, by Luke Howard in the year 1803. Shortly after it was introduced, another meteorologist, Thomas Forster, invented English equivalents for Howard's terms. These were rather widely used in the first half of the nineteenth century and survive today in the dictionaries, but are no longer current in scientific literature.

The names coined by Forster and the corresponding terms in the standard vocabulary are: Curlcloud (cirrus), sondercloud (cirro-cumulus), wanecloud (cirro-stratus), stackencloud (cumulus), fallcloud (stratus), twaincloud (cumulo-nimbus; called "cumulo-stratus" by Howard).

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