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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CLOUD CLASSIFICATION

It is an open secret among meteorologists that the International Cloud Classification, used by all the official weather services of the world and incorporated in a host of reference books, schoolbooks, etc., is unsatisfactory in many ways. Far from being a finished product, reasonably free from ambiguity and otherwise well adapted to its purpose, it is only a makeshift, and much of it is vague and difficult to use. It is an expansion of a simpler classification, devised by Luke Howard, which dates from the beginning of the last century. Its chief advantage over Howard's system is that it recognizes the more or less definite relation existing between the forms of clouds and their altitudes. On the other hand, there are a number of inconsistencies in its definitions, and even between the versions of a single definition in different languages. Hardly a year passes that some meteorologist does not suggest alterations in this classification or an entirely new system to replace it. The root of the matter is that no wholly satisfactory system has yet been discovered. The problem is not like that of classifying such things as plants or insects. Clouds change their forms, often with great rapidity, and exhibit so many varieties that if you once begin to make a detailed classification there is no end to the process. Many elaborate classifications have, however, been published and more or less widely used.

This subject will probably come up for vehement discussion at the international meteorological conference to be held next September in Copenhagen.

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