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February 19, 1929

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 12, 1929

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AMATEUR METEOROLOGISTS

Probably no other branch of science is so dependent as meteorology upon the services of amateurs. In most civilized countries the vast majority of weather observers are amateurs in the fullest sense of the term; they do their meteorological work for the love of it and not for pay. In the United States, for example, about 4,500 unpaid "cooperative" observers take daily observations and report the results to the Weather Bureau. There is a similar corps of unpaid weather observers in Canada. In the British Isles there are about 5,000 unpaid observers of rainfall and there are several hundred unpaid observers who take more extensive observations for the Meteorological Office. Moreover, until a few years ago these observers were under the direction of private organizations -- viz, the British Rainfall Organization and the Royal Meteorological Society -- and thus their work was entirely unofficial.

The systematic study of upper-air conditions, now so valuable in connection with aeronautics, was started by amateurs in several countries; including Dines and Cave, in Great Britain, and Rotch in America. It was an amateur, Benjamin Franklin, who established the identity between the discharge from an electric machine and lightning by his famous kite experiment, and the same amateur made several other meteorological discoveries or partial discoveries. An amateur of today, Wilson A. Bentley, has made known to science more forms of ice and snow crystal than have all the professional meteorologists put together. Prof. J.S. Church, Jr., of the University of Nevada, is a teacher of Latin by profession, but his hobby is studying snow and problems connected therewith and he has won world-wide celebrity in this field.

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