A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 26, 1929

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NAMED CLOUDS

The more or less lens-shaped clouds that hang almost stationary over or near mountain peaks while the wind blows through them are classified as "lenticular clouds" by meteorologists, and in a good many cases the observer is likely to describe one of them, in Shakespearean language, as "very like a whale". The members of Captain Scott's Antarctic expedition called clouds of this type over Mount Erebus "whalebacks". In the Azores a lenticular cloud that often forms in the lee of Pico is known to the islanders as "la Baleia" (the whale).

In the lee of Mount Etna, in Sicily, generally resting over the Val del Bove, there is frequently formed a very striking lenticular cloud, which sometimes resembles a gigantic white turban with its crown merging into the clouds above it. This is known locally as the "Contessa di vento" (wind countess). A long serpentine cloud hanging along the southern base of the mountain, the formation of which is said to foretoken rain, is called "la Serpe" (the snake).

A standing cloud often seen over the crest of the Riesengebirge near Schreiberhau, Silesia, is sometimes called the "Wetterbaum" (weather tree), and also bears the curious name of "Moazagotls Wetterwolke" (Moazagotl's weather cloud). The history of the name "Moazagotl" is uncertain.

The "Tablecloth" that spreads over the flat top of Table Mountain, South Africa, when a moist wind blows in from the sea is probably the most celebrated cloud in the world. The "Helm and Bar" of Crossfell, in the English Lake District, are well known to meteorologists. The Helm forms over the mountain and the Bar to the leeward. A very similar pair of clouds may sometimes be seen at Waynesville, in the mountains of North Carolina.

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