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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE ATOLL CLOUD

In his monograph on "Easter Island", published some years ago by the Carnegie Institution of Washington, the late William Churchill called attention to the characteristic green clouds formed over the atolls of the Pacific. These "atoll clouds", as he named them, are useful to mariners, who, without the aid of these natural beacons, would have difficulty in locating the low-lying coral islands. The clouds are formed by the condensation of the column of moisture rising from the warm, shallow lagoons of the atolls. Their green hue is due to the reflection of the lagoons beneath them. Mr. Churchill wrote on this subject:

"My attention was first directed upon the phenomenon by Polynesian sailors, but as soon as the eye has once caught the appearance of the cloud in the sky it is thereafter as unmistakable as the loom of the land itself. I may describe it as a characteristic pale green tint upon a thin white (fleecy cumulus) cloud, the tint being nacreous, but not quite so pronounced as the shade of the California abalone shell."

The atoll cloud is generally easy to distinguish from the trade-wind cumuli of the same region both on account of its color and also because it forms at a lower altitude.

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