

Released on receipt
but intended for use
July 13, 1929.

▲ Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed July 6, 1929.

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

"POPULAR" NAMES OF CLOUDS

In the year 1803 Luke Howard introduced his famous system of cloud classification, which recognizes seven types of cloud, each bearing a Latin name. If these names had been as long and as difficult to pronounce as the scientific names of certain plants and animals--to say nothing of the prodigious terms used in organic chemistry--there might have been some justification for inventing "popular" equivalents suitable for everyday use. Such equivalents were quite unnecessary, but were nevertheless introduced in 1816 by an English meteorologist, Thomas Forster. He called cirrus "curlcloud", cirro-cumulus "sondercloud", cirro-stratus "waneccloud", cumulus "stackencloud", stratus "fallcloud", cumulo-stratus (the modern cumulo-nimbus) "twaincloud", and nimbus "raincloud".

The last of these was, of course, no novelty. The others, manufactured by Forster, have led a struggling existence down to the present day. One of the works that welcomed them was the Encyclopaedia Britannica--which, to be consistent, ought to have changed its name to "British Encyclopaedia". They likewise appeared in a good many other works of fifty years or more ago, but are now nearly forgotten, though they still linger in the unabridged dictionaries.

Of course there are in English, as in other languages, several popular names of clouds that originated spontaneously centuries ago and are still as familiar as ever. "Wool-pack", "mackerel sky" and "mare's-tails" are examples.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

SCIENCE SERVICE
21st and B Sts.
Washington, D.C.