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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE SCENERY OF THE CLOUDS

Tracing in the clouds resemblances to objects on earth is not exclusively  
the idle pastime described in Coleridge's lines---

"Oh, it is pleasant with a heart at ease,  
Just after sunset or by moonlight skies,  
To make the shining clouds be what you please,  
Or let the easily persuaded eyes  
Own each quaint likeness issuing from the mould  
Of a friend's fancy."

It was doubtless by means of such comparisons that men first described the more distinctive forms of cloud to one another, identified them and gave them names. There are many reminders of the custom in our modern vocabulary, which contains such cloud names as "mare's-tail", "cat's-tail", "mackerel sky", "woolpack", "salmon cloud", "udder cloud", "Wetterbaum" (weather tree, in German), etc. Even in some of the more elaborate scientific systems of cloud nomenclature we find such terms as "Cirrus equinus", "Cirrus vertebratus", and "Alto-cumulus castellatus".

In general literature probably the commonest similes and metaphors relating to clouds are those that describe the ranks of alto-cumulus, which wear

"The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest."

It was such clouds that Ruskin called "flocks of Admetus under Apollo's keeping."

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