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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

THE MAN WHO NAMED THE CLOUDS

It is a remarkable fact that the encyclopedias, with a single exception, contain no biographical information about Luke Howard, whose invention of the first generally accepted system of cloud nomenclature made him famous throughout the scientific world.

Howard came of a family of Quakers and was born in London in 1772. After attending a country school he was apprenticed to an apothecary at Stockport, and he subsequently went into business as a manufacturing chemist. His interest in meteorology began when he was a boy, being first stimulated by the atmospheric peculiarities of the year 1783, remarkable especially for its long-continued "dry fog".

Howard's epoch-making paper, "On the Modifications of Clouds", was read before the small and obscure Askesian Society during the winter of 1802-03. It was first published in Tilloch's Philosophical Magazine in 1803. In this paper he reduced all cloud forms to a few simple types, to which he gave the Latin names cirrus, cumulus, stratus, etc. The International Cloud Nomenclature, now used by all meteorologists, is essentially an amplification of Howard's system.

Howard was the author of several other meteorological works besides his classic paper on clouds, the most important being "The Climate of London", published in 1818-20 and reissued in an enlarged edition in 1833. He died at Tottenham March 21, 1864.

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