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A Science Service Tribute

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

CHILDREN'S CLOUD FANCIES

An interesting inquiry concerning children's ideas about clouds was carried out many years ago under the direction of Messrs. G. Stanley Hall and J.E. W. Wallin, who published the results in the Pedagogical Seminary for December, 1902. One of the questions asked of numerous children of various ages was how far away they supposed the clouds to be. The answers indicate a general belief that the clouds are near at hand, so that "with mechanical hindrances obviated, they might be speedily reached; a feat often contemplated with intense longing."

One child thought the clouds could be reached if two large houses nearby could be superposed. Another, on seeing large white clouds near the horizon, thought that by jumping from roof to roof she could finally touch them with her hands. Another had, until seven or eight years old, supposed that distant clouds actually touched the earth, or rested on tall trees when these were in the way. One child "believed she could get some snow of which the clouds were composed from the top of a high building."

As to the composition of clouds, while many children realized that they were made of some kind of moisture, others believed the material to be smoke, cotton, feathers, dust, soapsuds, etc.

"Of 601 separate mentions of forms, shapes, pictures, objects and beings made out, formed, thought, suggested, imagined or seen, 375 belong to what may be roughly termed animate nature, and 226 to inanimate nature. Of the former, 158 are quadrupeds, 131 persons, 25 angels, 20 plants, 11 winged animals, 4 aquatic and the rest miscellaneous. Of the latter, more than one-half, or 142, pertain to what may be loosely designated geographical fancies, of which 121 are purely land and 21 water phenomena."

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