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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

A PEEP-SHOW OF THE SKY

The anonymous author of an essay entitled "A Rhapsody of the Clouds," published in 1886 in the Atlantic Monthly, comments on the fact that of two landscapes always visible to men -- earth and sky -- the upper and finer seems reserved for the birds and poets, or for an occasional forlorn face that turns from earth to sky for fairer hope or justice. Persons are, to be sure, sometimes found watching the night skies; but who gazes at the clouds by day?

This indifference, he says, should be overcome. By using an appropriate camera obscura -- a lens in a box with dark curtains -- or the Claude Lorraine glass -- a slightly convex mirror of black or colored glass, used for viewing the landscape -- the vast picture is brought to a convenient focus, mellowed and softened. A simpler adjunct of cloud-gazing is a piece of glass slightly smoked to protect the eye from the intense glare of the noonday sky.

The clouds present spectacles of endlessly varied charm. "There are wonderful mountains among them, with sheer precipices and shadowy caves and Alpine crags; dark towers, such as Childe Roland blew his blast before; minarets and domes, with mysterious arabesques of oriental tracery; serene ocean shores, where the gray sand glimmers through a shoaling blue, and the round-breasted galleons sail smoothly over."

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