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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

OBSERVING THE CLOUDS

Until a generation or so ago the chief practical incentive to the observation of clouds was the hope of gaining from their various aspects a knowledge of coming weather. Many popular maxims on this subject were current in the world long before meteorology became a science.

A new era in cloud study was inaugurated in the period known as the "International Cloud Year"~~1896-97~~ when systematic measurements of cloud heights and movements were made by uniform methods at selected stations throughout the world. The chief purpose of this undertaking was to gather information concerning the circulation of the atmosphere at levels above the earth's surface. Clouds are still observed for this purpose, though nowadays more detailed information of the upper air currents is obtained from observing the drift of pilot-balloons.

A third stage in the observation of clouds dates from the coming of air travel and transport. At a host of weather stations the clouds are now observed several times a day, not primarily for the sake of getting a line on future weather changes nor as a means of learning how the winds blow aloft, but in order that aviators may be advised of the presence and height of clouds occurring at flying levels; particularly the low clouds, which constitute the flier's "ceiling."

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21st and B Sts.,
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