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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 29, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

A STUBBORN DELUSION

The authentic weather forecaster conducts his operations in a bustling office, where he scans a map or a series of maps, prepared at high speed from a multitude of telegraphic reports, and then dictates his prognostications to a typist. The forecaster as imagined by Jessica Nelson North, whose delusions are embodied in a poem entitled "The Weather Man," published in the Nation of April 3, 1929, performs his job in an edifice that we recognize as an astronomical observatory, even though we have never personally encountered one in which the turret revolves along with its dome. Here is the way the poetess and the editor of the Nation suppose weather to be predicted:

"The tower haunting heaven compass-wise  
Turns softly, and the man within it turns  
Softly, and turns his slow prophetic eyes,  
And an old lamp burns."

The rest of the poem serves merely to demonstrate the fact that speech, as Talleyrand asserted, was given to man to conceal his thoughts, but the stanza quoted provides a text for what we have to say, which is this:

Meteorology, the science of the atmosphere, is entirely distinct from astronomy, the science of the heavenly bodies. They are as far apart as botany is from zoology, or even farther. The weather forecaster is not, as a rule, an astronomer, and he does not draw his inspiration from the stars. Often -- too often -- he doesn't know one star from another.

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