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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed May 9, 1932

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

"CYCLONE"

The public is still much inclined to call tornadoes "cyclones," and a tornado cellar is probably called a "cyclone cellar" nine times out of ten, but the newspapers of the United States nowadays generally give the tornado its correct name. Meteorologists had a long struggle to educate the press on this subject. I am reminded of the fact by coming across the following remarks by Prof. W.H. Brewer, of the Sheffield Scientific School, published in the year 1884:

"Most people have the idea that the word 'cyclone' expresses something much more terrible in the way of a wind storm than either 'whirlwind' or 'tornado', whereas the reverse is the case. A cyclone extends over a wide circuit and need not be violent enough to cause any damage. The windstorms that are of such common occurrence in the West, and sometimes visit this section, doing so much damage to property and life, are not cyclones at all, though usually part of one. The tornado has a narrow path, the cyclone a wide one. The old English word is 'whirlwind.' Some forty years ago meteorologists in the United States adopted the Spanish word 'tornado' as a synonym for it. 'Tornado' soon found its way into American dictionaries but has never yet appeared in the English dictionaries. Lately the word 'cyclone' has come to be applied to these violent and destructive storms, and, owing to its acceptance by the newspapers, has been popularized, but it is, nevertheless, an improper word and should therefore be discouraged by the press."

Today, of course, "tornado" is found in all British dictionaries and is familiar throughout the English-speaking world.

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