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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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JELLYFISH OF THE SKY

More people than Hamlet have ascribed zoological shapes to the clouds. Celestial flocks of sheep are a sight familiar to everybody. Goats' hair and mares' tails have warned all of us (not always reliably) of windy weather. The pattern of the mackerel's back is a common motif of sky decoration. In fact, the animal kingdom is extensively represented in heavenly scenery.

Among the rarer cloud creatures is the jellyfish. This is a roundish fleecy cloud, of the variety classed by science as alto-cumulus, from which dangle hair-like streamers, called in the new International Cloud Classification "virga" (plural of "virgum"). The resemblance of such a cloud to a jellyfish is so striking that one meteorologist some years ago urged that the cloud be named "Aurelia," after the zoological designation of a well-known genus of these aquatic creatures.

Such clouds doubtless owe their shape to the fact that the upper and lower parts of the cloud lie in air currents having different speeds or directions. Conflicting winds adequately explain the combing away of the fleecy vapor, though some authorities have described the pendant streamers as showers or snowstorms in midair.

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