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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE MAN WHO NAMED THE CLOUDS

A biographical sketch conspicuous by its absence from the Encyclopaedia Britannica is that of Luke Howard, the Englishman whose invention of the first generally accepted system of cloud nomenclature made him famous throughout the scientific world.

Howard came of a family of Quakers and was born at London in 1772. After attending a country school he was apprenticed to an apothecary at Stockport, and he subsequently went into business as a manufacturing chemist. His interest in meteorology began when he was a boy and was first stimulated by the atmospheric peculiarities of the year 1783, famous especially for its long-continued "dry fog." His epoch-making paper, "On the Modifications of Clouds," was read before the small and obscure Akesian Society during the winter of 1802-03. It was first published in Tilloch's Philosophical Magazine in 1803. In this paper he classified all cloud forms under a few simple types, for which he introduced the names cirrus, cumulus, stratus, etc. The International Cloud Nomenclature now in universal use is an enlargement and adaptation of Howard's.

In later years Howard had an interesting correspondence with Goethe on the subject of his cloud classification, which appears in Goethe's collected works, together with a poem written by Goethe in Howard's honor and little poems describing each of Howard's cloud types.

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