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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed December 6, 1932

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"WEATHER VANE" AND "WEATHERCOCK"

Instruments for showing the direction of the wind were used, though not extensively, by the Greeks and Romans before the beginning of the Christian era, yet, strange to say, no generic name for them has come down to us from the classical period. In mediaeval Latin they were called "ventilogia" (Wind-oracles?); or, in the case of the cocks on steeples, which date from about the ninth century, simply "galli" ("cocks"). In modern French they are called "girouettes" ("turners").

The English names "weather vane" and "weathercock" describe the two principal forms of wind-indicators in use in pre-scientific days; viz., the metal banner, once peculiar to aristocratic mansions and castles, and the vigilant bird of the steeple. (The word "weather," by the way, originally meant wind - especially a stormy wind - as it still commonly does in nautical parlance.)

A corresponding terminology prevails in German, where we have "Wetterfahne" and "Wetterhahn." These names are not especially appropriate for generic use. A "vane" is merely a flag; while "weathercock" ignores the varied zoology of vanes, which centuries ago had about exhausted the catalogue of birds, beasts, insects and mythical monsters.

Scientific vanes are usually called "wind vanes," and occasionally "anemoscopes."

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