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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHAT IS METEOROLOGY?

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Meteorology is the science of the atmosphere and its phenomena, including weather. Nowadays, when we speak of a "meteor", we generally mean a shooting star; but formerly this term was applied (and it still often is by scientific writers and also by non-scientific writers who are fond of old-fashioned phraseology) to a great variety of phenomena and appearances in the atmosphere, including clouds, rain, snow, rainbow and so forth; these being sometimes classified as hydrometeors (phenomena of atmospheric moisture), photometeors (phenomena of atmospheric optics), electrical meteors (phenomena of atmospheric electricity), etc. That is how the science of the atmosphere came to have its present name.

Meteorology is not a branch of astronomy. These two sciences are as different from each other as zoology is from botany. They are both founded on physics, and they "overlap" each other to some extent, just as every science does certain others; but if you want information about the atmosphere, weather and climate, an astronomical observatory is not the place to seek it; while if you wish to make inquiries about comets, sunspots, eclipses, standard time or the date on which Easter fell in a certain year, do not apply to a meteorological institution.

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