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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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IMPOSSIBLE CLOUDS

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology

Dr. C. F. Brooks, director of the Blue Hill Observatory, calls attention in a recent book to the fact that misguided artists often depict cumulus clouds --- the big "woolpack" clouds of fair weather --- with roundish bulges at their bases as well as their tops, and that it is also common to see them, in pictures, floating at widely different levels above the earth. This, he says, is nature-faking, and he adds: "All respectable, ordinary cumulus clouds, or fair weather convection clouds, although they have billowy rounded tops, have flat bases, and, moreover, these bases are all at about the same level. In spring, the bases will be rather low, perhaps half a mile high. On sunny spring mornings, moving currents of moist, warm air soon become cooled enough through expansion to cause condensation of their water vapor. At this level the cloud base forms. The damper the air to start with, the lower the base will be. If the current of rising air is strong, the cloud will grow upward, its rounded, towering head marking the top of the rising column. But no meteorologist, or artist either, ever saw a real cumulus cloud bulging both up and down like a fat feather bed in the sky."

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