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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Dr. Charles F. Brooks,
Secretary, American Meteorological Society,
describes:

THE PARTING BOLT OF LIGHTNING

On rare occasions, sometimes after a thunderstorm has passed and the rain has ceased, a lightning bolt descends without warning. Usually it is a bolt of extreme severity, a blinding flash even when in the bright sunlight, as sometimes happens, accompanied by a deafening crash. Such a bolt occasionally demolishes a large tree and kills persons under it.

The cloud from which this lightning comes is the rear portion of the far-flung spreading top of a storm of great intensity, the center of which may be miles away. It is characteristic of heavy thunderclouds that they mushroom out like a vast-spreading umbrella. When their electrical charges are powerful they may let loose a bolt which will reach the earth, though it must jump a gap of four or five miles. Such a bolt is, of necessity, of particularly destructive force, for the difference in potential between cloud and earth must be enormous, even when compared with that of the usual jump of a mile. The thunder may be heard 20 miles away.

(Tomorrow: Balloon Racing and the Weather)

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