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A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A SUDDEN THUNDERSTORM

Accustomed as we are to hearing a grumble of thunder before a storm is upon us, we forget that every thunderstorm has to start somewhere and that the first flash of lightning must take place without audible warning. When we happen to be startled by the beginning of a thunderstorm we wonder where it came from and why it was so sudden. The processes making the storm were not sudden. We may have noticed some cumulus clouds earlier in the day. And only an hour before the storm began we may have seen some of these clouds developing some rather high projections. Then before we knew it one of these clouds had grown to a size sufficient to harbor a thunderstorm, with a brief shower of large drops - the kind that wet.

A growing cumulus cloud that is shortly to develop into a thunderstorm is commonly taller than it is wide. It seems to have a considerable exuberance of growth and the upper portion appears to bulge upward and expand very rapidly. At about the time when the cloud reaches a vertical thickness of two or three miles the conditions in it may favor the occurrence of lightning and the first fall of rain. Now also the top usually begins to flatten out and to give the appearance of a snowy anvil.

(Pick up one column mat 7-27.)

(Tomorrow: Hail, Then Cooler)

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