

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOW STARTING DOWN

A cloud of snow usually looks hazy and ill-defined compared with the sharper outlines of a cloud formed of water droplets exclusively. In cold weather the appearance of clouds may thus be used as an indicator of the coming of snow. On generally fair days when a cold wind is blowing, the white, round-topped cumulus clouds may at times be seen to disintegrate into hazy clouds of falling snow. The biggest and darkest of these clouds commonly is attended by some snow flurries down to the ground, for the flakes when very numerous cannot all evaporate before reaching us. Snows of this type, however, are rarely of consequence.

Different are the snows from the general sheet of clouds. A widespread, ill-defined, mottled, gray cloud may become darker and darker till finally its lower surface reaches the ground and we say it has begun to snow. The absence of sharp features and the density of the cloud marked it as a snow-bringer. Sometimes the coming of the snow is more dramatic, for a lower sheet of water-droplet cloud may cut off the view of the snow cloud. So long as the features of the lower sheet remain sharply defined one may be sure that snow is not yet falling through it. Suddenly, however, the markings of such a cloud may become blurred and soon entirely obscured by snow. In from half an hour to two hours this snow sheet will strike the ground. Rain or sleet are not only more transparent, thus obscuring a cloud less than does snow, but also fall so much faster that their masking of detail can give but few minutes' warning of the beginning of rain.

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