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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LIGHTNING EXPLOSIONS

It is disconcerting to be awakened by a great explosion that is showering you with earth, chips of wood and flying glass. But there is no retribution when you discover it is the result of a particularly heavy lightning flash. This was the experience of two families on the occasion of two strokes of lightning in a recent thunderstorm at Holden, Mass. Both bolts struck trees only a few yards from each house. Both cut strips off the trees, entered the ground and so heated the roots as to produce steam explosions sufficient to blast deep trenches, pulverize sod, and bombard the houses up to their second stories. This bombardment, however, did little of the damage.

The concussions of the explosions produced by the sudden heating of air, trees, and ground by the great flow of electricity were evidently responsible for breaking the windows on the lightning side of both houses, and for shattering even the windows sashes on one of the houses. The windows on first, second and third floors on the entire side of the house, and some around the corner, were stove in. The explosion was so sudden that the breaking of the glass could not relieve the pressure fast enough to save the sashes.

These occurrences constitute an impressive demonstration of the fact that thunder starts as an outward explosion wave from the heated path taken by the lightning. Lightning, fortunately, is rarely so violent as in these instances.

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