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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOW CRYSTAL STUDIES

"Late philosophers," wrote Cotton Mather more than two centuries ago "by the help of the microscope, have observed the wonderful wisdom of God in the figure of the snow; each flake is usually of a stellate form and of six angles of exact equal length from the center. It is a little star. A great man speaks of it with admiration that, in a body so familiar as the snow is, no philosopher should for many ages take notice of a thing so obvious as the figure of it. The learned Kepler, who lived in this last age, is acknowledged to be the first man that acquainted the world with the sixangular figure of the snow."

While Kepler, as stated, was the first person to call attention to the six-angled form of snow crystals, the fact that these crystals are sometimes star-shaped was noted by Albertus Magnus in the thirteenth century. The first known drawings of snow crystals appear in a work by Olaus Magnus, Archbishop of Upsala, published at Rome in 1555. Either Olaus or the Roman engraver who reproduced his drawings made free use of imagination, so that we find in the collection such impossible things as crescents, crowns, figures like a human hand, etc.

More nearly accurate pictures of snow crystals were published by Descartes in 1637 and by Erasmus Bartholinus in 1660. So far as known, the earliest collection of such pictures drawn with the aid of the microscope appears in Robert Hooke's famous work "Micrographia", which shows more than a hundred different forms.

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