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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE COMING OF A TORNADO

The appearance of the western sky that heralds an impending tornado is so striking and so sinister that it seldom fails to arrest attention. The clouds are strangely colored; jet black, greenish or purple where dark, but often mingled with steam-like grays and whites. The characteristic that especially distinguishes them from the familiar clouds of an approaching thunderstorm is the wild turmoil into which they are thrown. Many observers tell of seeing two cloud masses approach and meet; one moving from the southwest and the other from the northwest. On coming together they break up into smaller portions, which dash pell-mell over one another and in every direction; now darting towards the earth, now rushing upward, until in their midst appears the advancing column of the tornado itself.

There are many variants of this picture. Indeed the tornado in all its stages has been described in such diversity of language by different eyewitnesses that a mosaic of their narratives would eclipse Southey's rhyme about the cataract of Lodore. Reference is often made to rolling masses of black cloud resembling soft-coal smoke. Luminous appearances of various kinds have been reported. Some are evidently the glows of lightning, but others remain unexplained.

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