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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed June 5, 1930.

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THUNDER AT SEA

The assertion is often made that thunder is never heard on the high seas, far from land, even during brilliant displays of lightning. There is plenty of evidence in ships' log-books to disprove this statement, but there are three facts that tend to foster the idea: First, thunderstorms are, in general, much less common over the oceans than over the land; second, lightning from thunderstorms too far away for the thunder to be heard is often observed at sea on account of the unobstructed horizon; and third, thunder that would otherwise be audible is frequently drowned by the noise of wind and waves, the rattle of rigging, etc.

Benjamin Franklin, in one of his earliest letters to Peter Collinson, refers to the infrequency of thunderstorms at sea, but does not state that thunder never occurs there. Baron von Humboldt is sometimes cited as the authority for this erroneous statement, and Arago expresses doubts as to whether thunder is ever heard beyond a certain distance from shore, though he makes no dogmatic assertions on this point.

Some years ago this question was discussed by the Astronomical Society of France, and as a result of the discussion a series of observations was made on board the magnetic survey yacht "Carnegie" during a long voyage in the Pacific in the year 1915. Of 22 displays of lightning observed by the "Carnegie" far from land, six were accompanied by audible thunder.

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