

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE WORD "CLOUDBURST"

Webster's Dictionary defines a cloudburst as "a sudden copious rainfall, as if the whole cloud had been precipitated at one time." As a matter of fact, if a cloud of the largest size were, by a miracle, precipitated at one time, coming down at the maximum speed of falling raindrops, it would not cause a torrential shower, such as is commonly described as a cloudburst; but of course the comparatively small amount of water in the clouds was not realized by our ancestors, who believed that clouds sometimes actually burst and discharge their entire watery load at once upon the earth. This idea is learnedly set forth in a quaint little German work by Christian Weise, rector of the gymnasium at Zittau, published in 1701, as well as in many later works.

Incidentally, the term "Wolkenbruch," the exact German equivalent of "cloudburst," is used in the title and text of Weise's book, though the New English Dictionary marks the latter word "U.S.," and cites illustrative quotations entirely from American sources. The word has, however, long been familiar to Englishmen and is defined in the official Glossary of the British Meteorological Office.

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