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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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BALL LIGHTNING

Though ball lightning is still a mystery, its habits and characteristics are becoming well known through the numerous circumstantial descriptions of its occurrence published from year to year in the scientific journals. A case that occurred last summer has just been described by Prof. R. W. Wood, of Johns Hopkins University.

A house at the seashore was struck twice by lightning within fifteen minutes. The second discharge melted the telephone wire just outside the house, followed the wires into the cellar under the kitchen, and was followed by the appearance of a luminous ball in the kitchen about three feet above the floor. The cook was facing the place where the ball appeared and was near enough to touch it, though she prudently refrained from doing so. She told Prof. Wood that it was yellow, like a flame, about five inches in diameter, and was spinning like a top. She was unable to state whether the ball exploded or disappeared silently, as she made a hasty retreat by way of the cellar stairs. On returning, she found the kitchen full of a smoky haze and noticed a strong smell, which she described as "acid-like." This description, says Prof. Wood, suggests an oxide of nitrogen.

No marks of the lightning could be found in the kitchen, but there had evidently been a heavy electrical disturbance below the floor.

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