

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
August 10, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed August 3, 1931

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"MESSENGERS"

In the picturesque dialects of rural England, which are so rich in terms relating to the atmosphere, the term "messenger" is applied to two distinct meteorological phenomena. First, it means a sunbeam. In this sense it is, according to one authority, applied to "a sunbeam coming through a long crack into a rather dark barn or loft," while another says that messengers are "sunbeams which pour down slantwise to the earth from a rift in a large cloud" --- in other words, the appearance better known as "the sun drawing water." According to still another account, "a sunbeam reaching down to the horizon from behind a cloud is sometimes said to be the sun 'sending out a messenger.'"

Secondly, messengers are defined in Wright's English Dialect Dictionary as "small detached clouds betokening rain." Apparently in some districts, including the Lake country, the term is applied to small clouds seen above a mass of cumulus, but the Hastings fishermen give this name to large ragged patches of fracto-nimbus scurrying before a wind.

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