

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed August 18, 1931

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NEW ENGLAND BALL LIGHTNING

Now that steps have been taken to collect reports of the occurrence of ball lightning in America, it has become evident that the phenomenon is just as common and just as interesting in its manifestations on this side of the Atlantic as it is in Europe, where its anecdotal history has been much more fully written up. Among the scores of cases lately reported to Dr. Humphreys, of the Weather Bureau, two observed in Massachusetts were contributed by Mrs. Ida Curtiss. The first occurred at Old Deerfield in the summer of 1926. During a thunderstorm Mrs. Curtiss saw a fiery ball, about the size of a golf ball or a little larger and having a fuzzy appearance, emerge from the tap in the kitchen, to which water was piped from a spring. The color was blue-white, "like a diamond," and the ball made a faint crackling sound. It moved jerkily through the air for half a minute and "burst with a sizzling snap," leaving an acid smell in the room.

The second case was observed at Greenfield in August, 1930. A thunderstorm, with vivid lightning, broke about 3 p.m. Mrs. Curtiss was in a second story room, in which the electric lights had been turned on, when she saw playing about the casing of a window "a brass-colored ball, the size of a baseball; clear, no fuzz." She ran to turn off the electric light, but just before she touched the switch the ball entered the room and burst about 12 feet from the window. "No cannon," she writes, "could have made a louder noise. The room was filled with smoke, so that I could not see two yards in front of me. It blew the fuses in the cellar, did very little damage to the radio, and burned a small place in the curtain. There was an odor of sulphur."

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