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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 13, 1931

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WEATHER LIGHTS

What are "weather lights"? The expression is apparently unknown in Great Britain, as it is found neither in the New English Dictionary nor in Wright's English Dialect Dictionary. The New International Dictionary defines it as heat lightning; the Century Supplement as (1) the aurora, or (2) heat lightning. The German equivalent, "Wetterlichter," is sometimes applied to heat lightning; sometimes to St. Elmo's fire. What phenomenon is described under this name in the following note by a Prof. Cuthbert P. Conrad (otherwise unknown to fame), of Fayetteville, Arkansas, published year ago in a scientific journal, I am unable to state:

"On the evening of February 26, 1884, a phenomenon known locally as 'weather lights' was the precursor of a violent snowstorm. I have watched these 'weather lights' in this locality for four years, and while I have lived in five states east of the Alleghenies have never witnessed similar phenomena elsewhere. The appearance is that of a rosy red to white light appearing above the horizon 5, 10 and even 30 degrees, and all the way from northeast around to the southwest; sometimes only in the northwest (the most frequent quarter); sometimes first in the northeast, fading out and appearing in the northwest, west or southwest. These lights invariably precede a change in the weather -- either rain or snow (i.e., a change invariably follows), but I have not been able to fix upon any definite interval of time."

(In a region where "lows" frequently pass, as they do in Arkansas, they could hardly fail to "precede a change in the weather".)

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