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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE TORNADO CLOUD

The so-called funnel cloud of the tornado actually assumes a great variety of forms. "Sometimes," says S.D. Flora, a Weather Bureau man whose hobbies are tornadoes and hailstorms, "this cloud is really funnel-shaped, but more commonly it is described as resembling an elephant's trunk or a gigantic snake, as it writhes and sways back and forth in its progress. Other observers have stated that it reminded them of a rope swinging back and forth from the clouds. Usually in the case of a slender cloud the color is a milky white, except that near the ground it is dark from flying dust and debris. Clouds of larger diameter are generally of much darker shade."

In a few cases no definite pendulous cloud was distinguishable during the passage of a tornado, though occurring in the daytime. Thus C.J. Root, of the Weather Bureau, writing of the so-called Mattoon tornado of May 26, 1917, the path of which, extending 293 miles across Illinois and three-fourths of Indiana, was perhaps the longest ever reported, says:

"Across the state from the Mississippi River almost to Mattoon all eyewitnesses agreed that this storm had the typical funnel-shaped tornado cloud with swinging tail, and east of Charleston the same type of cloud was reported, but the writer who visited Mattoon and Charleston, failed to find anyone in those cities who saw a funnel-shaped cloud. Eyewitnesses who had an unobstructed view agreed that the approaching storm appeared as a low, boiling mass of clouds, one part a little to the north and the other a little to the south. The parts seemed to roll toward one another, coming together and downward like the meshing of a pair of cog-wheels. In the official report it was suggested that the cloud was so low that there was no room for the usual pendant portion. The path of serious damage was generally about one-fourth mile in width."

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