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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 4, 1934

A FAKE THUNDERBOLT

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The biggest fake hailstone on record came from a water-cooler in a Hartford (Conn.) office building, in August, 1929. During a severe hailstorm in that city a practical joker dropped this icy missile from an upper-story window into the street below, but somehow failed to start a story for Ripley. An earlier exploit in faking a weather manifestation was more successful.

On June 30, 1866, there was a violent thunderstorm in London. At that period the belief that material thunderbolts fall from the sky with lightning was more prevalent than it is today. Hence when, at the height of the storm, a solid object struck the street and exploded, people believed that it had come down from the clouds. A lurid account of the event was published in a London newspaper, and several objects supposed to be fragments of the thunderbolt were collected and sold.

The truth was brought to light by an eminent meteorologist, G. J. Symons. He found that a young chemical student had filled a capsule with explosive materials and tossed it into the street while the storm was raging and genuine lightning was flashing overhead.

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