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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHAT IS A WATERSPOUT?

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A curious confusion of language has always prevailed in the discussion of waterspouts. A writer will tell you that a waterspout is a columnar cloud formed over a body of water, and then, almost in the same breath, he will state that it is similar in character to a tornado -- which, of course, is a wind and not a cloud -- or he will describe it as doing things that a wind can do but a cloud cannot.

The dictionaries have almost universally described the waterspout as a member of the cloud family rather than as a member of the wind family, but at last, in the recent revised edition of the New International, we find recognition of the fact that it is both. The definition reads: "A slender funnel-shaped or tubular column of rapidly rotating cloud-filled wind usually extending from the under side of an ordinary cumulus or cumulo-nimbus cloud down to a cloud of spray torn up by the whirling wind from the surface of an ocean or lake."

This definition embodies approximately the conception of the waterspout prevailing among people who are aware that the thing in question is neither, as superstitious sailors once believed, a living monster, nor, as a goodly percentage of humanity perhaps still believes, a continuous column of water sucked up from the deep.

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