

1877

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NOTES ON A HAIL STORM, OCCURRING AUGUST
18TH, 1858.

BY NATHAN BUTLER.

On the afternoon of the 18th day of August, 1858, I was travelling over the prairie in the western part of Meeker county, in this State, some three or four miles south of the present station of Swede Grove, on the main line of the St. Paul & Pacific Railroad. The weather was quite warm, and the sky generally clear, with a light breeze from the W. N. W. Light fleecy clouds were in the air overhead, scarcely heavy enough to be called clouds. A flash of lightning was perceptible, followed by a sharp, but not heavy, report of thunder. Nearly ahead of me, about forty feet distant, I saw something fall into a pond, which raised the water three or four feet. Presently I heard something drop, and looking to one side I saw a white object bound up from the ground two or three feet, and make a leap of twenty or thirty feet toward me. I had not time to determine what it was before I heard another and another, and became conscious that they were falling from overhead, and that their number was increasing.

There was an oak tree within twenty rods of me, and I instinctively sought shelter beneath its branches, where I could more safely make observations on the phenomenon around me. It was evidently a fall of hail, of a size to me then unheard of, though where hail of any size could come from, with an almost cloudless sky, was a matter of wonder.

Hail stones continued to fall for perhaps a minute—perhaps two or three. To me it seemed longer. They fell at an angle of about twenty degrees from a perpendicular line.

When they were done falling they lay on the ground some fifteen feet apart, and about the size of a man's two fists. In falling they would bury themselves about half their size into the sod of the prairie and bound off. In shape they were spherical on one end, made up of hexagonal crystals, like crystals of quartz. The other end was conical, made up of white ice. They were quite solid, and did not break in falling.

A gentleman in the neighborhood weighed two of them, that weighed two pounds—one pound each.

I heard of no one being seriously injured by their fall, though one man was struck a glancing blow on the back of the neck, and knocked down. Horses and cattle on the prairie were so badly frightened as to be unmanageable. But little damage was done by them, because they were so few in number, and there was so little wind.

About an hour after this fall, a heavy shower of hail, about the size of pigeon's eggs, passed over the same territory, driven by a strong wind from the south, breaking glass, splitting shingles, cutting down corn, grain and other vegetation, and stripping trees of their leaves. This last hail came out of a heavy black cloud, and was followed by some rain. Altogether it was a showery day, with rain, hail, wind, lightning and thunder.