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July Thunderstorms

Our July thunderstorms are with us once again, after several weeks of hot weather. I have always enjoyed the drama of thunder and lightning, and I can vividly remember a night many years ago when the storm went on from evening until dawn. Brilliant flashes of forked lightning filled the sky all around for hour after hour, with the thunderclaps following on almost immediately. It was impossible to sleep, but I did enjoy the spectacle, even though it sounded as if the sky was breaking up and falling on my house. It seemed as if the storm was stationary over us, instead of moving along over the country. After the last rumbles in the hours before dawn, I finally got to sleep and no doubt the same was happening with deafened but tired heads on pillows throughout all of South London. My sense of adventure only extended to opening the window to get the fresh air but shutting it rather quickly when the downpour started, with the satisfying click of the catch letting me know that I had a safe haven.

This was before the days of the digital camera with its easy and virtually cost-free photo snapping and storage. I am sure I would have ended up with some great pictures and movies of lightning streaks and illuminated clouds on that night. Nowadays I would feel really hard done by if I did not have the camera handy to capture it all. It is an ingrained habit to start counting when I see lightning, marking the four seconds for every mile of distance between us and the storm. This is really no longer of interest now, as we have the convenience of being able to consult the British Meteorological Office website for the latest satellite images of our area.

I think overall I prefer to know what is coming, so that I can make extra efforts to go out in the warm sunny weather, instead of wishing that I had made the most of it before it clouded over and the rain started. Instead of looking at the sky to wonder what the weather will be, it is now more likely to be a quick check towards the west to see for real what the website weather map has already shown us in diagram form. Our comments are also less vague than they used to be. Rather than saying, "Grey clouds, looks like rain," we now tend to say, "Here it comes, the low pressure system off the Atlantic Ocean, just like they said, bringing a band of changeable conditions and precipitation from the west!" (436 words)