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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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ST. ELMO'S FIRE

Under stormy conditions, a small electrical brush discharge sometimes takes place from points connected with the earth into the air, the mariner's St. Elmo's fire. Not being very brilliant, it is most commonly observed at night, when the appearance of luminous spots and jets of flame on mast heads and rigging gives a weird and spectral effect. On high mountains such discharges are particularly well developed, especially in snowstorms. Sometimes the hissing sound of the discharge may be heard, even when the "fire" is invisible. On the mountain top, the head of an observer or a stick held aloft may become luminous, playing the part of the usual ship's mast. As the amount of electricity involved is very small, perhaps one ampere per square meter of surface, there is no danger in experiencing the dreaded St. Elmo's fire, though a discharge taking place from the body causes a slight tingling sensation.

Some extreme instances of such discharges are occasionally reported from the Great Plains. During some dust storms the discharges from ponies' ears and riders' heads become fearsome. Cowboys on such occasions have even thrown their revolvers to the ground to avoid possible discharge.

(Tomorrow: Mountain Sickness)

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