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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman
Authority on Meteorology

AURORAL DISPLAYS MISTAKEN FOR FIRES

As, in connection with the maximum phase of the eleven-year sunspot cycle, there is a good chance that brilliant displays of aurora borealis will be seen before long in the United States, it is timely to recall the fact that natural exhibitions of this character have sometimes been mistaken for distant conflagrations.

Describing the aurora in his Quaestiones Naturales, Seneca says: "The blaze of it is occasionally so high as to mount to the very stars; occasionally it is so low as to present the appearance of a distant fire. In the reign of Tiberius Caesar the fire brigade hurried off to the relief of the colony at Ostia, supposing it to be in flames. During the greater part of the night there had been a dull glow in the sky, which appeared to proceed from a thick smoky fire." (Clarke's translation.)

"The mistake mentioned by Seneca," says Professor Angot, "is so natural that it has often occurred since. At Copenhagen, in 1709, during a large and brilliant aurora, several military detachments turned out under arms with beating drums."

In March, 1926, the whole fire brigade of Salzburg, Austria, was called out to quench what was supposed to be a large and widespread fire but proved to be an auroral display. Alarms were turned in from all parts of the town and a veritable panic prevailed.

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