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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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LIGHTNING AND "FAIRY RINGS"

The familiar legend concerning "fairy rings", seen in lawns and meadows, is that they are made by the footprints of fairies dancing in a circle. In the sixteenth century attempts to substitute a scientific explanation for this superstitious one led to the equally erroneous notion that the rings are produced by thunderbolts. It was asserted that the diameter of the ring represented that of the bolt, and that only where the latter came in contact with the air, or along its surface, did combustion occur, burning in the grass a ring of the same diameter.

William Fulke, in his "Goodly Gallerye" (1563), rejects the popular explanation of the rings and declares lightning to be the true cause of "those round circles that ignorant people affirme to be the rings of the Fairies' dances". This hypothesis held its ground for more than two centuries. Thus Erasmus Darwin, grandfather of the immortal Charles, wrote in the year 1791:

"So from dark clouds the playful lightning springs,
Rives the firm oak or prints the fairy rings."

The circles are now, of course, known to be due to the growth of certain kinds of fungi.

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