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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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CELLINI'S HALO

Perhaps you have observed a fringe of light surrounding the shadow of your head cast upon a lawn, stubble-field or other rough surface in the early morning or late afternoon. It is brightest when the surface is bedewed, and is more readily seen when you move than when you stand still, but neither of these conditions is essential to its visibility. Balloonists and aviators see the same border around the shadow of their craft falling on a broad expanse of treetops or a field of grain. The phenomenon depends upon the fact that, in looking down into the innumerable spaces between leaves, stalks and the like, you see a greater portion of illuminated surface when your gaze follows the direction of the rays of sunlight than when you look at an angle thereto.

This phenomenon usually bears, in scientific descriptions, the German name "Heiligenschein", but it has also been called "Cellini's halo", and thereby hangs a tale.

"The discoverer of this easily seen but little known phenomenon," writes Prof. H. N. Russell, "was Benvenuto Cellini, the great artist. Being one day taken to task by a friend for one of his numerous escapades, he replied that he was something of a saint, and claimed that the halo about his head, though not directly visible, appeared about its shadow and not around the shadow of other men's heads. They were walking in the fields as they talked and the artist pointed to his shadow for proof. The friend turned, saw no halo around Benvenuto's shadow, but discovered one about his own. As, however, the great artist was likewise a noteworthy swordsman, his companion deemed it prudent to refrain from making any claims of superiority, and so the matter rested. But later the story became known, and the bright spot about the shadow still bears the name of 'the halo of Benvenuto Cellini'."

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