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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE HEILIGENSCHIEIN

Among the many optical phenomena of the atmosphere, one to which few people have ever given attention is known to science under the German name of "Heiligenschein." It is a fringe of colorless light around the shadow of the observer's head cast upon a lawn, stubble-field or other rough surface, especially when the sun is low. It is brightest when the surface is bedewed, and is seen more readily when you move than when you stand still, but neither of these conditions is essential. Balloonists and aviators see the same bright 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 proportion of illuminated surface in looking along the direction of the rays of sunlight than in looking at any angle thereto.

A person sees this luminous fringe about the shadow of his own head but not about that of the head of anybody else. Benvenuto Cellini, as we learn from his autobiography, having discovered the Heiligenschein attached to his shadow, regarded it as a special mark of divine favor. He called the attention of some of his friends to it, and he tells us that they all saw it. They would never have dared to say they didn't; Cellini was an expert swordsman and notorious for using his weapon on slight provocation.

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