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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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STRANGE LIGHTS

From time to time luminous appearances are reported in the atmosphere for which meteorologists are unable to give conclusive explanations.

At Ringstead Bay, near Weymouth, England, during a sultry August afternoon in 1876, a number of globes of light the size of billiard balls were seen hovering over the ground above the cliffs at heights ranging from a few inches to seven or eight feet. They slowly rose and fell, sometimes within a few inches of the observers but always eluding their grasp. The number of these objects is said to have varied from 20 to "thousands." There was no thunderstorm in progress at the time, such as is generally or always the case when ball lightning is seen, though one occurred at 10 o'clock that night. Perhaps it was will-o'-the-wisp? but what is will-o'-the wisp? Nobody knows.

For more than a century there have been reports of a phantom "fire ship" on Bay Chaleur, Canada, said to make its appearance before a storm. Much information about this curious phenomenon was collected twenty-odd years ago by Prof. W.F. Ganong, who believed it to be a case of St. Elmo's fire; but no explanation has ever been offered of its frequent occurrence at this particular place, or of the shape that it assumes--like that of a large burning ship.

A similar appearance of a burning ship has been reported from the shore of Block Island. It is referred to by Whittier, who connects it with the legend of the specter ship "Palatine." There are also tales of flames seen issuing from old wrecks on Sable Island; "the surface of the sea," according to one writer, "being covered with them, some being twenty feet in altitude."

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