

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
March 24, 1931

A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed March 17, 1931

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

A NEGLECTED MYSTERY

Of all phenomena of the atmosphere the one most conspicuously neglected by science is ignis fatuus or will-o'-the-wisp. For ages this phenomenon has aroused the curiosity of mankind. Presumably it has been seen by hundreds of thousands of human beings. Some circumstantial observations have been reported in recent years by perfectly trustworthy witnesses. One case was observed by Dr. Matthew Luckiesh, the well known authority on illumination, who encountered the mysterious lights in great numbers while passing some temporary pools of <sup>shallow</sup> water in a Nevada desert. Another case was described by Prof. L. A. Hausman, the zoologist, who saw a fine display on the evening of April 7, 1921, while traversing a road leading through a boggy woodland near Cayutaville, N. Y. He observed five separate flames or globules of bluish light about the size of half-dollar pieces, waveringly suspended, apparently in midair, among reeds and bushes about a foot above the ground and some fifteen feet from the roadway.

When, in the seventeenth century, the Royal Society of London drew up a set of instructions for taking meteorological observations, ignis fatuus was mentioned along with clouds, rain, lightning and other atmospheric manifestations that were to be recorded in the daily register of weather. Today no meteorological organization or institution in the world collects observations of this phenomenon and there is hardly a textbook published within the last fifty years that even mentions it!

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

-----  
SCIENCE SERVICE  
21st and Constitution Ave.  
Washington, D.C.