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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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AMERICAN BALL LIGHTNING

The anecdotal history of ball lightning in Europe has been recorded by several writers. Corresponding information for North America has not been assembled to any extent, but a search of American newspapers and magazines would doubtless disclose as rich a fund of interesting stories as is now available for the Old World.

On April 1 of this year a train of the Reading Railroad was standing in the Atlantic City station when, about 7 o'clock in the morning, a fiery ball about as big as a baseball entered the open rear door of the rear coach, occupied by six passengers. Its appearance was accompanied by a loud report that shook the train. The ball remained visible only a fraction of a minute.

One night in April, 1924, during a violent thunderstorm, Harriet Allyn, a student at Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill., saw a fiery ball, "the size of a large grapefruit," enter her bedroom through an open window. It traveled swiftly around the room at an elevation of four or five feet above the floor, and left by the same window. No effects were visible in the room, but a tree not far from the window was struck by lightning during the night.

Dr. L. B. Tuckerman, of the U. S. Bureau of Standards, tells a story that he often heard as a boy in rural Ohio of a pig that "monkeyed" with ball lightning. Some men, who had taken shelter in a barn during a thundershower, were looking across the barnyard toward an orchard where pigs were allowed to run, when they saw a ball of fire fall from aloft and roll slowly over the ground. One of the pigs trotted up to the ball and began nosing it. A moment later the ball exploded and the inquisitive pig fell over as if dead. The men walked across the yard to examine the supposedly lifeless pig, but before they reached him he staggered up and ran off full tilt, squealing at the top of his lungs.

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