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December 15, 1931

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed December 8, 1931

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TWO AIR MYSTERIES

A poem of Whittier's helps keep alive the memory of a mysterious light formerly reputed to haunt the shores of Block Island. Here is an extract:

Nor looks nor tones a doubt betray,
"It is known to us all," they quietly say;
"We too have seen it in our day."

For still on many a moonless night,
From Kingston Head and from Montauk Light,
The specter kindles and burns in sight.

Now low and dim, now clear and higher,
Leaps up the terrible ghost of fire;
Then slowly sinking the flames expire.

And the wise Sound skippers, though skies be fine,
Reef their sails when they see the sign
Of the blazing wreck of the Palatine.

The Rev. S. T. Livermore, in his book "Block Island," publishes a long description of this light written in 1811 by Dr. A. C. Willey, a physician then living in the island. It was, he says, perfectly familiar to the islanders; appearing at all seasons and mostly in calm weather, though supposed to be a sign of a coming storm. It was seen from half a mile to several miles from shore, sometimes resembling a large blazing ship, sometimes being a mere glow or luminous point. According to legend, the light was the ghost of a ship named the "Palatine," which had been burned by wreckers off this shore.

These tales bear a striking resemblance to those told of the "fire ship" of Bay Chaleur, Canada, reports of which have, however, extended over a longer period and come down to recent times. Is there any real phenomenon of nature, atmospheric or otherwise, back of these stories?

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