

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed September 1, 1932

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BRONTIDES

The mystery of what Francis Bacon described three centuries ago as "an extraordinary noise in the sky when there is no thunder" has not yet been solved, despite many speculations on the subject. Muffled detonations, resembling distant cannonading or peals of thunder, are heard from time to time in many parts of the world when there is no obvious reason for such sounds. They are especially frequent in certain localities and are known under a bewildering variety of local names (about 40 names are current in Italy alone), but the generic name "brontide," coined by Prof. Tito Alippi in 1904, is now usually applied to them in scientific literature. Brontides are most often reported over lakes and along seacoasts, but they are also sometimes heard far from any body of water.

The investigation of brontides has been carried on by a number of well-known seismologists, as well as by meteorologists, and there is ample evidence that many of the sounds reported are of seismic origin. Occasionally a supposed brontide may be due to the explosion of an unseen meteor. A certain proportion of these sounds, if not merely distant thunder, may be such noises as cannonading, blasting and the like, made audible at unusual distances by the abnormal refraction of sound waves. A sufficient element of mystery, however, remains in connection with brontides to justify a more thorough investigation than they have hitherto received.

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