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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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WHEN THE FIRE "TREADS SNOW"

"When," writes Dr. W.J. Humphreys, "a big wood fire, one of the finest pleasures of a winter in the country, is well burned down and there is a great bed of glowing coals in the ashes, we often hear a muffled popping, pth, pth, somewhere in the fire, but exactly where we cannot be sure. On such occasions our granddads used to say, 'It is going to snow,' and very often they were right, because on so raw a day as that which usually precedes a snow one is apt to have a good big fire. These faint but fascinating sounds are apparently due to little explosions of combustible gases coming up from hot bits of wood, charcoal and glowing embers more or less buried in the ashes."

I have heard the sounds proceeding from the old-fashioned base-burner coal stove as well as from wood fires. As they bear some resemblance to those made by somebody walking in crunchy snow, the fire is commonly said to "tread snow" when it emits these noises.

The expression "treading snow," used in this connection, is said in the Supplement of the Century Dictionary to be a Virginia colloquialism, but it is familiar in many other states of the Union, both north and south, and I believe also in Canada. Inwards, the English author of "Weather Lore," mentions this expression, so it is probably used in England, though it is not recorded in Wright's great "English Dialect Dictionary."

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