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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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SNOWSTORM PYROTECHNICS

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Authority on Meteorology

Some of the most brilliant displays of St. Elmo's fire seen by night on mountains occur when the air is filled with dry snow, driven by high winds. At the observatory on the summit of Mount Washington, New Hampshire, a fine exhibition of this electrical phenomenon was observed during the evening of March 23 of this year and is described in a letter from A. A. McKenzie, of the observatory staff.

The anemometer (the same instrument that measured the world's highest recorded wind velocity in April, 1934) was ringed with fire, as it whirled in a wind of 55 miles an hour. With multitudinous blue and purplish filaments of flame extending outward, it was, says the letter, a lovely sight. Discharges were also in progress from many other metallic objects.

Mr. McKenzie climbed to the top of the water tank, which crowns the very summit of the mountain. "I removed my gauntlet," he writes, "and held my fingers up into the wind. They, too, acquired filaments which radiated from the tips in a fan shape. There was no sensation at any time, either in my fingers or in any other part of my body. Any sensation may have been obscured by the slightly uncomfortable feeling engendered by the high wind in such an exposed place. When my fingers became numb, I clenched my fist to warm the tips. At that time, the hairs on the back of my hand, slightly dampened by the fog, became illumined. The hairs of the fur about the hood of my windproof parka had similarly been dampened by the fog and, when I was facing into the wind, glowed slightly.

Although I can not be entirely sure, I believe that a few individual pieces of rime which I knocked from the vane glowed briefly as they fell. Noting the effect of the parka fur, I decided that Java, our cat, might possibly be made to glow. She was held, back to the wind on the trestle but probably was not damp enough to glow. Her protestations were too great to be ignored, so the experiment was discontinued."

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