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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A THUNDERSTORM MYSTERY

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Authority on Meteorology

A few years ago Miss E. Mabel Clark, writing to me from Normandy Park, Morristown, N. J., described a weird experience that befell her one night in the summer of 1917. With a chauffeur and some friends she motored over a mountain road between Morristown and Montclair, N. J. A violet thunderstorm was in progress, with rain that at first was torrential.

"As we emerged from the woods," she says, "and reached some meadows, the air suddenly became vibrant with flames, about the size of a woman's hand, with extended fingers, which were describing half arcs. That is, they would appear, move swiftly for a second or two, about five or six feet, before disappearing. There must have been hundreds of them, on all sides of us, and as high up as we could see, and their bluish flames illuminated the fog. During the lightning flashes they could not of course be seen, and during the display the rain was less violent, almost ceasing before the phenomenon had entirely ceased. We must have driven a mile or more under these conditions. The road, during this experience, led through uncultivated meadowlands, which are not in normal conditions boggy or marshy, as far as one can observe through a small stream meanders through them. On reaching a slight hill, and a little settlement where the fields were under cultivation the phenomenon ceased. The road at this date was a dirt road, and the rain had transformed it into a veritable morass."

Our great-grandfathers would not have hesitated to class this phenomenon as will-o'-the-wisp --- but what is will-o'-the-wisp? The fact that it occurred during a severe thunderstorm suggests that it was an electrical phenomenon of some sort. Some luminous phenomena of the atmosphere are still puzzling and defy classification.

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