LIGHTNING A MYSTERY

This Phenomenon of Nature Is a Puzzle to Science.

THE THEORY OF THUNDER.

In a General Way It Is Understood; but, as a Matter of Fact, the Bolt From the Storm In Its Erratic Tendencies Defies the Investigator.

In a general way we understand the theory of thunderstorms. As a matter of fact, there is no phenomenon of nature, but excepting even earthquakes, of which we know so little.

Man-made lightning—that is, electricity of the highest power, which we can artificially produce—will act according to certain known laws. It will, for instance, travel along a conductor of metal.

But a flash of lightning will frequent leap from a well defined metal path and launch itself through the air to some adjacent object which is an infinitely poorer conductor.

This may be due to the almost inconceivable force of a flash of lightning, says a writer in Pearson's Weekly. It is estimated that a flash of lightning a mile long represents a pressure of discharge equal to 3,000,000,000 volts.

As such a flash lasts only about the thousandth part of a second the energy dissipated by the discharge is equal to 300,000 horsepower. Put in other words, if we could find some means of saving and using lightning we should be the richer by a good round sum for every flash.

Lightning is, as we know, usually accompanied by a peal of thunder, which is louder the nearer the hearer is to the point of the discharge, but this is not an invariable rule. There are cases on record of most destructive lightning flashes which were unaccompanied by sound.

Such a phenomenon occurred at Bradford some years ago. What is described as "a silent thunderbolt" fell in a graveyard, destroying one monument and smashing to atoms nearly seventy glass cases containing wreaths and flowers.

In the same summer Swanscombe, in Kent, was terrified by a freak of lightning. All of a sudden "a great mass of blue fire" swept along the street, and next moment it was seen that the fine old parish church, built nearly 700 years ago, had been struck. The building, with all its fine old carved oak, was soon a roaring furnace, and only a part of the chancel was saved.

Scientists are still hopelessly at sea as to the cause of that peculiar phenomenon known as globe lightning. At Coventry some years ago during a violent thunderstorm it passed along a street like a soap bubble built of blue fire and drifted into a shed, where it exploded, blowing the roof off the place.

At Rheims, in France, a similar fire ball came into a cobbler's shop through the open window. The solitary occupant of the place sat perfectly still, paralyzed with terror, while the fearful visitant hovered for several seconds overhead. Then it moved toward the fireplace and presently passed up the chimney.

Next moment there was an explosion like a shell bursting, and the upper part of the chimney came crashing down.

Not long ago Count G. Hamilton made a record of a similar freak of electricity. He was sitting at dinner in a house on Lake Wener, in Sweden, when just after a vivid flash of lightning a brilliant white ball appeared over the table and after hanging poised there for some seconds went off with with a loud bang.

Fortunately it did no harm to any one, although it was quite close to several people. Those who saw it suggested it was like a ball of cold lightning.

In November, 1902, Sydney, Australia, was visited by a terrific dust storm, in the midst of which a perfect rain of electric fire balls began to fall. These set fire to a number of houses, and a most appalling panic set in. A cry was raised that the end of the world was at hand, and people rushed out of their houses into the ink black, dust deep streets.

The most amazing and terrifying displays of the power of lightning are seen on mountains. In 1890 a party was on the top of a mountain in the Caucasus when a huge violet ball, surrounded by vivid rays, struck a rock near by and, exploding like a bomb, burst into atoms. One of the party was badly hurt.

Stilton Cheese.

The secret of making Stilton cheese was for some time confined to the family of the original inventors, who were under an engagement to sell all they could make to the famous Cooper Thornhill of Stilton. Being thus to be obtained of him alone, it received the appellation of Stilton cheese, but it would have been more appropriately named Wichcote cheese, being first made in that village, on the eastern side of Leicestershire, about thirty miles from Stilton.—London Standard.

Helping Him.

Mr. Backward—Well—er—yes, since you ask me, I was thinking of consulting a fortune teller. Miss Coy—To find out whom you will marry, eh? Mr. Backward—Why—er—yes. I— Miss Coy—Why not ask me and save the fortune teller's fee toward the price of the ring?

The thicker the grass the easier to mow—Alaric.

A CHINESE STRATAGEM.

Legend of How a Projected Invasion Was Averted.

Rajah Suran, who was one of the earliest rulers of India, overran the entire east with the exception of China, killed innumerable sultans with his own hand and married all their daughters. It is said that when the Chinese heard of his triumphant progress and learned that he had reached their frontier they became much alarmed. The emperor called a council of his generals and mandarins, and upon the advice of a crafty old mandarin the following strategem was carried out:

A large ship was loaded with rusty nails, trees were planted on the deck, the vessel was manned by a numerous crew of old men and dispatched to the rajah's capital. When it arrived—the most wonderful part of the story is that it did arrive—the rajah sent an officer to ask how long it had taken the vessel to make the trip from China. The Chinamen answered that they had all been young men when they set sail and that on the voyage they had planted the seeds from which the great trees had grown. In corroboration of their story they pointed to the rusty nails which, they said, had been stout iron bars as thick as a man's arm when they started. "You can see," they concluded, "that China must be a very long distance away."

The rajah was so much impressed by these plausible arguments that he concluded he would not live long enough to reach China and abandoned his projected invasion.

SNEEZING.

It Must Have Been a Violent Operation Before Jacob's Time.

We frequently hear the expression "God bless you!" uttered after some one has sneezed. The expression, if we can believe Clodd in his "Childhood of the World," dates back to the time of Jacob. We are told in Jewish literature that previous to his time men sneezed but once in a lifetime and that was the end of them, for the shock slew them. Jacob prevailed in prayer and had the fatality set aside on the condition that among all the nations a sneeze should be hallowed by the words "God bless you!" In the "Jataka," one of the books of the Buddhist Scriptures, we read that the expression was, "May the blessed Lord allow you to live!"

Buddha on one occasion while preaching to his disciples happened to sneeze. The priests gave vent to the exclamation, and Buddha lectured them for interrupting his discourse.

"If when a person sneezes," he asked, "and you say, 'May he live,' will he live the longer?"

"Certainly not!" cried the priests.

"And if you do not say it will he die any the sooner?"

"Certainly not!" was the reply.

"Then," said Buddha, "from this time forth if any one sneeze and a priest says 'May you live' he shall be guilty of a transgression."—London Spectator.

The Kind Caddie.

"Once in a game," said the golfer, "I had the good fortune to be six holes up on my opponent by the time the eigth hole was reached. At the eighth green something went wrong with our reckoning of the strokes, and I claimed that I had won that hole, too, while my opponent claimed that it was halved. After a mild dispute I yielded.

"But as I moved on with my caddie I couldn't help grumbling:

"'Well, you know, Joseph, I gave in. But I still think I won that hole after all.'

"The boy, with a frown, turned shocked and reproving eyes on me. Disgusted with my greed for holes, he whispered hurriedly, so that my opponent should not overhear:

"'Shut up, can't you? Do ye want to break the man's heart?'" — Exchange.

Laughter.

Overindulgence in laughter is reprobated by Emerson. Explosions of it, he says, should be under strict control, and he quotes approvingly the saying of Lord Chesterfield, "I am sure that since I had the use of my reason no human being has ever heard me laugh." But Emerson is not altogether consistent in this matter, for, whereas in one passage he refers to laughter as a "contemptible squeal of joy," in another it becomes a "pleasant spasm," and he gratefully acknowledges "the rest and refreshment we get from the shaking of the sides." Moreover, he admits that "to see a man in a high wind run after his hat is always droll." Presumably if the man is bald and the road is muddy even Chesterfield might be led to emit a contemptible squeal.—London Chronicle.

Invisible Dogs.

The coat of a red setter normally stands out fairly clear against heather of the ordinary hue. When, however, it gets soaked with rain it darkens very much and blends very closely with the heather. The Gordon setters are perhaps the worst in this regard of assimilating with the color of heather and so being liable to get a charge of shot.—Country Life.

His Practical Mind.

Sculptor (to his friend)—Well, what do you think of my bust? Fine piece of marble, isn't it? Friend—Magnificent! What a pity to make a bust of it! It would have made a lovely washstand.

A Comeback.

"Why do so many otherwise clever women write silly letters to men?"

"They're probably making collections of the answers they get."—Cleveland Leader.

HIS HAPPY THOUGHT.

It Let the New Train Dispatcher Off Without an Accident.

An operator for a western railroad who had served his company long and well was called into the office one day and asked if he thought he could hold down the job of night dispatcher. He promptly replied that he could and was told to report for duty that night, and his chief instructed him in what he was to do. Just after the chief left the office it began to blow and snow, and the trains commenced to run late. The new night dispatcher soon had developed a bad case of "rattles" and almost cried. He did not want an accident, and he could not handle the trains. So a happy thought struck him. As fast as a report came in he replied, directing the conductor to take a siding and wait for orders, and it was not a great while until he had every train on the division sidetracked. Then he took a book, lighted his pipe and sat down to wait for daylight. In the morning the chief appeared, with anxiety written all over his face.

"Any accidents, Johnny?" asked the chief.

"Not an accident. I've got 'em all on the sidetrack, snowed in and waiting for orders, and you will have to get 'em out. I am going to blow this job. It took the chief and his force nearly all day to get the trains straightened out and traffic resumed on the road.

CAT AND FOX MEET.

And Reynard Retires the Worse For the Meeting.

In a recent number of a German sporting paper a forester describes a scene which he witnessed in a clearing in the forest.

He came one afternoon upon a big black cat occupied apparently in the pursuit of mice, and from the shelter of a tree he watched its movements through a fieldglass. After a few minutes an old fox made its appearance. Slinking slowly forward toward the cat, it lay down within a few steps of it, ready to spring.

The cat had observed its enemy, but beyond keeping a sharp lookout on its movements it made no sign. Shortly a young fox joined the old one and almost immediately bounded at the cat, which sprang aside and struck its assailant so efficaciously across its face with its sharp claws that it retired as quickly as it came. After an interval the old fox, advancing slowly and carefully, made its attack, but the result was the same. The cat, spitting and hissing, struck out hard, and the fox retired discomfited.

A minute afterward it again sprang forward, but this time the cat got much the best of it and was left in peace.—London Globe.

Trotter and Thoroughbred.

"The trotting horse is infinitely more practical and useful, speaking on broad lines, than the thoroughbred," said a well known horse breeder, to a Washington Herald reporter. "A thoroughbred has the speed for burst of time, but when it comes to do hard work every day, day after day and all the year around, it cannot compete with the trotting horse. The thoroughbred is rattle brained, has no sense, is beyond all control. It doesn't know when to stop or what to do in a race; it simply runs until it cannot run any longer, whereas the trotting horse is under the control of its driver from start to finish and obeys orders at any time. The thoroughbred naturally exceeds the trotter in a burst of speed, but in the long run it cannot compete. As a general proposition, it is accepted among horsemen that the trotting horse is superior to the thoroughbred for general purposes."

Artful Legal Tactics.

Lord Chancellor Erskine, with all his arts and all his intrepidity in the face of judge or jury, was easily upset by anything which touched his amour propre. Vanity was his foible, and he had all the susceptibility which attaches to it. One artful attorney, knowing this, used to plant a man in court in full view of Erskine to yawn hideously at his most eloquent appeals or to titter at his most tragic tones.

Once when Garrow, the well known counsel, lost in thought, had fixed his eyes vacantly upon him Erskine was so put out that he stooped down and hissed in his ear, "Who the devil do you think can get on with that wet blanket of a face of yours before him?" The same sensitiveness of criticism followed him into the house of commons.—Law Times.

St. Elmo's Fire.

St. Elmo's fire is a name popularly given to a luminous appearance sometimes seen on dark and stormy nights at the masthead and yardarms of vessels and also on land at the top of church spires and trees and even on horses' manes and about human heads. It is due to the presence of electricity, generally at elevated points, where it accumulates more rapidly than it can be discharged and is named after St. Elmo, the patron saint of sailors.

Two Faced Babies.

"Not that deceit is a born instinct, but some babies must be two faced in the cradle."

"Oh, that's not possible."

"I don't know. I know a child that looks like its rich aunt when she comes on a visit and is the exact image of its rich uncle when he happens to be there."

And Mother Officiates.

Eddie—Do you have morning prayers at your house? Freddie—We have some kind of a service when father gets in.—New York Press.

He that always complains is never pitied.—German Proverb.

ROUSSEAU'S SHYNESS.

An Experience the Composer Had In a Country Inn.

On one occasion Rousseau composed an opera, which was performed before King Louis XV. and met with the royal approval. The king sent for him, and if he had put in an appearance he would probably have obtained a pension. He was, however, of a retiring disposition and could not bring himself to face the court. To his friends he gave as a reason his republican opinions, but his real reason was his shyness.

Accordingly he fled from the court and sought the privacy of a country inn. While he was there a man came in who began telling the company that he was the celebrated Rousseau and proceeded to give an account of the opera, which, he said, had been performed before the king with great success.

Most men in Rousseau's position would have felt nothing but contempt for the impostor, but this extraordinary man felt only pity and shame. "I trembled and blushed so," he tells us in his "Confessions," "for fear the man should be found out that it might have been thought that I was the impostor." He was afraid that somebody might come in who knew him and expose the pretender. At last he could bear it no longer and slipped out unobserved.

Very few people would treat an impostor like that.—Westminster Gazette.

PENGUINS.

The Comical Way These Queer Birds of the Antarctic Act.

"The resemblance of penguins to human beings is always noticed," says Lieutenant E. H. Shackleton in his book, "The Heart of the Antarctic." "This is partly due to the habit of walking erect. But there are truly a great many human traits about them. They are the civilized natives of these regions, and their civilization, if much simpler than ours, is in some respects higher and more worthy of the name." Of two of the photographs that appear in the book the following remarks are made:

"An emperor penguin, meeting an emperor or men or dogs, bows gravely till his beak is almost touching his breast. Keeping his head bowed, he makes a long speech in a muttering manner, short sounds following in groups of four or five. Having finished the speech, the head is kept bowed a few seconds for politeness sake. Then it is raised, and he describes with his bill as large a circle as the points of his neck will allow. If you have not comprehended he tries again. Meantime his followers are apt to get impatient. They are sure he is acting incorrectly. Then another male will waddle forward, elbow the first aside and repeat the ceremony. Both emperors and adelies move, when the surface is suitable, by tobogganing."

Wild British Cattle.

The wild cattle of Great Britain have become one of the curiosites of the bovine race in England. There are very few herds of them remaining, and most of these are diminishing from a very natural cause. Of course they are confined in parks and are jealously guarded from any admixture of alien blood. They are as wild as buffaloes and are treated in the same way as deer. In color they are white, with red ears, and historians assert that they had a large share in the evolution of the Shorthorn as it is known today. It is certain that the color mentioned very often crops up quite unexpectedly in our pedigree herds. They will probably become extinct in a few years owing to the extreme difficulty of procuring sires unrelated to the herds and yet of the same breed.—Farm and Home.

The Scented Court.

The rage for perfumes reached its height during the reign of Louis XV. Throughout the continent his court was known as the "scented court." It was then the custom when giving a large entertainment for the hostess to inform her guests what particular odor she would use for perfuming her rooms, and each guest would use that odor in making her toilet. At court a different perfume was used for each day of the week. Much more attention was paid to the use of the perfume than to soap and water, and cleanliness was not numbered among the virtues of that age.

How She Escaped.

Pauline, who had been attending school for almost two weeks, was telling of the misbehavior of some of her little classmates. At her mother's question as to whether it had ever been necessary for the teacher to speak to her Pauline answered quickly, "Oh, no, mamma." Then, "She had to speak to all the class but me this afternoon." "Why, what did she say?" "Oh, she said, 'Now, children, we'll all wait until Pauline is in order.'"—Delineator.

Lost Opportunity.

"And you didn't hear of it?" inquired Mrs. Gabble.

"Not one word."

"Why, I've known it for a week, so I supposed everybody heard of it."

Even Up.

She (sternly)—I heard a noise very late. He (facetiously)—Was it the night falling? She—No, it wasn't. It was the day breaking.—Baltimore American.

Cautious.

Thompson—Suppose a man should call you a liar. What would you do? Jones (hesitatingly)—What sized man?—Jewish Ledger.

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