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Observations of Ignis Fatui in the Philippines.

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The name of Ignis Fatuus is given to a flame-like meteor floating in the atmosphere at a short distance above the ground. Being a natural phenomenon, that takes place in the atmosphere, its observations find an appropriate place in a meteorological paper. The purpose of the present note is to collect several observations of Ignis Fatui taken in the Philippine Islands, paying special attention to the frequency and form of the meteor and noting carefully the regions where it is observed and even the tales with which it is connected in the mind of the people. These observations may lead to a better understanding of the nature of Ignis Fatuus and to a wider extension of our knowledge of scientific Filipino folklore. Whenever necessary, as in the title, the plural form of Ignis Fatuus will be used. With the exception of a few instances in the late period of the American regime, all the accounts and observations of Ignis Fatui were made by Spanish speaking observers and were written in Spanish. Unquestionably the correct Spanish name for Ignis Fatuus is Fuego Fatuo: by analogy and inaccurately it is called by some Fuego de San Telmo.⁽¹⁾ In Spanish the meaning of the word is clear: in English however Ignis Fatuus has been given the names of Jack-o-lantern or Will-o-the wisp, which require a short explanation.

Jack-o-lantern stands for Jack in a Lanthorn or a foolish fire, which occurs, according to Benjamin Martin, in his Philosophical Grammar, published in 1758, when "a fat unctuous vapour is knidled and wafted about by the motions of the air, near the surface of the earth like a Light in a Lanthorn".⁽²⁾ The qualification of fatuity or imbecillity alludes to the unwise action taken by those persons who instead of being guided by the shining light of reason follow blindly the hazy doctrines of unscrupulous