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THE PHYSICS OF FOUNTAINS

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ONE can readily imagine what thrills of uncanny uneasiness must have traversed the spine of Thales of Miletus when, over twenty-five centuries ago, he first observed the wonderful property of a briskly rubbed piece of amber—the power, namely, of attracting to itself from a distance small and light bodies such as bits of straw, leaves, etc.

But, striking as was this experiment—the first direct evidence of that most wonderful of the forces of nature, electricity—one cannot help speculating what the illustrious geometer would have thought had he gone one step further. Suppose that as he eagerly approached every small object in sight with his now wonderfully endowed piece of amber he had held it near to the bottom of one of the slender fountains that no doubt adorned the inner garden of his Milesian home. He would have noticed a wonderful effect. The widely spreading fountain would suddenly have gathered itself together into a narrow stream; the falling spray with its myriads of minute drops would have been replaced by comparatively large globules of water, falling heavily to earth; in fine, the merry fountain