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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE DARK DAY OF 1780

Among the many cases of daytime darkness recorded in different parts of the United States none is more celebrated than the one that occurred in New England on Friday, May 19, 1780. From about the first of the month great forest fires had prevailed along Lake Champlain. Smoke from these fires, combined with the heavy clouds of a widespread thunderstorm area, caused darkness like that of night to prevail for some hours. All but the most necessary business was suspended, schools were dismissed, and a large part of the population flocked to church to prepare for the end of the world, believed to be at hand.

"The effect on the animal kingdom," says Sidney Perley, "was the same that the approach of night produces. Fowls retired to their roosts, mounted them, and tucked their heads under their wings, going to sleep as quietly and assuredly as if it had been sunset rather than noon. Frogs peeped as they were accustomed to do as soon as the sun went down. The day birds sang their evening songs and then retired to their recesses, their places being taken by the night birds. The whippoorwills appeared and sang their songs. Bats came out of their hiding places and flew about."

The council of Connecticut was in session at Hartford. Some of the members exclaimed, "It is the Lord's great day." There was a motion to adjourn, but Col. Abraham Davenport, a member from Stamford, objected to this proposal, saying: "Either the day of judgment is at hand or it is not. If it is not, there is no cause for adjournment. If it is, I wish to be found in the line of my duty. I wish candles to be brought."

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