A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

ANTICREPUSCULAR RAYS

After sunset, in clear weather, it is not uncommon to see long shadows and sunbeams spreading fanwise upward from the western horizon. The shadows are those of distant clouds or mountains and the sunbeams are merely illuminated portions of a more or less hazy atmosphere. As the source of light responsible for these effects is millions of miles away, the beams and shadows are all substantially parallel. They appear to diverge on account of perspective, just as do the rails of a railroad track extending from a distant point to the position of the observer. These spoke-like strips of light and shade are called "crepuscular rays." In the morning they are over the eastern horizon instead of the western.

You have often seen them; but have you ever seen the "anticrepuscular rays"? These seem to radiate from a point diametrically opposite the sun. Hence they are in the eastern sky in the evening and the western in the morning. They are merely the prolongations of the crepuscular rays, though sometimes they are visible when the latter are not. They are neither very common nor very rare. A real rarity is the joining of crepuscular and anticrepuscular rays to form arches extending entirely across the sky from the position of sunrise or sunset to the oppostie side of the horizon.

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SCIENCE SERVICE,
21st and B Sts.,
Washington, D.C.