

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed October 30, 1930.

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THE GREEN FLASH

Just at the instant when the upper edge of the sun is about to sink below a distant sharply defined horizon, such as that of the ocean, its color often changes to a brilliant green, sometimes blending into blue. The same color is frequently seen when the edge of the solar disk appears above the eastern horizon in the morning. This transient phenomenon is known as the "green flash." It furnished Jules Verne with the subject and title of one of his novels, "Le Rayon Vert." and has figured in other novels, besides being the theme of a dozen or more articles in scientific journals every year for many years past.

The ancient Egyptians are said to have been familiar with this appearance, and hence to have assigned the colors green and blue to their semicircular symbol of the rising and setting sun. It is explained as an effect of "dispersion"; i.e., the separation of the prismatic colors by different degrees of refraction. The greens and blues in the solar light are bent a little farther downward than the reds and yellows; thus they disappear last at sunset and appear first at sunrise. When more than a slender rim of the sun is visible, rays coming from different parts of the disk blend in such a way that no separation of colors is noticeable.

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