

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
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March 7, 1931.

? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed February 28, 1931

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Authority on Meteorology.

AN ATMOSPHERIC MYSTERY

The files of scientific journals contain a great many records of curious and unexplained luminous phenomena of the atmosphere. Here is one reported by H. S. Eaton, a fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society:

At Ringstead Bay, on the Dorset coast of England, on the afternoon of August 17, 1876, two ladies, Mrs. and Miss Warry, were walking at the crest of a cliff overlooking the sea. The weather was calm, hot and sultry, and occasional silent sheet lightning had been seen through the day. Surrounding them on all sides and extending from a few inches to two or three feet above the ground they observed numerous globes of light, the size of billiard balls, which were moving independently and vertically up and down, sometimes within a few inches of the observers, but always eluding the grasp.

"The balls were all aglow," says the report, "but not dazzling; with a soft, superb iridescence, rich and warm of hue. Their numbers were continually fluctuating; at one time thousands of them apparently enveloped the observers, and a few minutes afterwards the numbers would dwindle to perhaps as few as twenty, but soon they would be swarming again as numerous as ever. Not the slightest noise accompanied this display."

The ladies viewed these strange objects for more than an hour before going home. A severe thunderstorm occurred in the locality at 10 p.m.

Perhaps will-o'-the-wisp. But what is will-o'-the-wisp?

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Washington, D. C.