

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,
Authority on Meteorology.

LUMINOUS WATERSPOUTS

In his book "Living Lights," published in 1887, Charles F. Holder writes of luminous waterspouts and presents a drawing of one, in which the white column is seen against the background of a black cloud, while a ship is sailing nearby. After describing a waterspout of the ordinary non-luminous variety that he saw off Florida, the author says:

"Imagine such a column at night coursing over the ocean; its entire shape outlined against the darkness in phosphorescent light, and an idea may be gained of the magnificent spectacles which, on rare occasions, are produced by some of the simplest of plants.... The southern oceans, in certain places, often swarm with these minute light-givers, and when borne aloft in the spout they tend to produce one of the most remarkable and striking scenes possible to imagine."

Mr. Holder mentions no specific reports of this phenomenon, and apparently none are found in meteorological or oceanographic literature, but there seems to be no reason to doubt that in waters teeming with luminescent organisms the lower part of a waterspout, composed mainly of water churned up from the sea, might be seen aglow with them. The luminosity would not, however, extend to the upper part of the column, which is a mere cloud, condensed directly from the air; hence Mr. Holder is wrong in supposing that its "entire shape" would be outlined in light.

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