

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt  
but intended for use  
January 30, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed January 23, 1932

By Charles Fitzhugh Talman,  
Authority on Meteorology.

THE ROPES OF MAUI

The frontispiece of Ralph Abercromby's fascinating book "Seas and Skies in Many Latitudes," published in 1888, is a photograph of "the sun drawing water" over the ocean. The author took this picture near Teneriffe, but the title underneath it, "The Ropes of Maui," refers to a legend of the South Seas. Abercromby quotes the legend from W.W. Gill's "Myths and Songs of the South Pacific." Because the sun god, Ra, traveled too fast across the sky for the convenience of mortals, Maui, the hero demigod of Polynesia, plaited six ropes of coconut fiber, which he placed as snares at intervals along the sun's path. Five snares in succession were broken, but the sun was caught by the sixth, and Maui would not let him proceed until he promised to travel more slowly and regularly thereafter. "These ropes," we are told, "may still be seen hanging from the sun at dawn and when he descends into the ocean at night. By the assistance of the ropes he is gently let down into Avaiki and in the morning raised up out of the shades; while the islanders still say when they see rays of light diverging from the sun, 'Tena te taura a Maui' -- 'behold the ropes of Maui.'"

The legend in this form is current in the Cook Islands or Hervey Archipelago, but there are variants elsewhere in Polynesia, some of which are given in J.C. Andersen's recent book "Myths and Legends of the Polynesians." According to one version the snares were burnt asunder by the sun's heat until Maui made one of green flax. According to another, the hero was unsuccessful until he plaited ropes from the tresses of his sister, Ina.

(All rights reserved by Science Service, Inc.)

-----  
SCIENCE SERVICE  
21st and Constitution Ave.  
Washington, D.C.