

A Science Service Feature

Released upon receipt
but intended for use
August 10, 1932

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

Mailed August 3, 1932

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SKY GLOWS FROM VOLCANIC DUST

Fine dust from the great eruption of Krakatoa, in August, 1883, which spread over a large part of the globe, probably at heights of between thirty and forty miles, and which did not completely settle down to the earth for more than two years, was the cause of magnificent sunrise and sunset glows, as well as other unusual optical phenomena. Similar though less striking effects have been observed after several other explosive volcanic eruptions in which dust was spouted up to great heights, and they were therefore expected after the outbreaks of volcanoes in the Andes last April, which caused vast dustfalls in South America.

This expectation was realized at various places in the southern hemisphere. Beautiful sunset afterglows and other conspicuous optical manifestations attributable to dust began in New Zealand and in South Africa early in May. A letter from Johannesburg dated May 3, quoted in the English journal Nature, says:

"We are having very wonderful sunrises and sunsets, as a result of the volcanic dust from South America. The sky glows red long after the sun is visible, while there are no clouds at all to catch the light, as far as one can see. It is a pleasant change to have prolonged light in this latitude where darkness falls so quickly."

A letter of May 4 from Germiston, Transvaal, says: "At sunset the colors are magnificent, but it is about an hour later when they are best. Normally at that time it is pitch dark, but now the western sky is lit a flaming red light to the zenith, as though there were a huge volcano belching out volumes of fiery smoke. The red light is so powerful that everything catches a reflected tint, yet you can see the stars shining through, even to the west. What clouds there are, are etched in flame, and, toward the zenith, the red shades through purple to the ink blue of night."

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