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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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HEIGHTS OF "NIGHT-SHINING" CLOUDS

Noctilucent ("night-shining") clouds seen from time to time throughout summer nights have been a subject of discussion among meteorologists ever since the eighties of the last century. Such clouds were first systematically studied by O. Jesse, of Steglitz, Germany, with the cooperation of many observers, during several summers following 1885. From a comparison of simultaneous measurements made at different places Jesse computed their heights above the earth to average about 51 miles. At such a height they would reflect sunlight all night in summer, in the latitudes where they were observed, and they were generally believed to consist of fine volcanic or cosmical dust.

Similar clouds have often been reported in more recent times. Last summer some measurements of their altitudes were made by accurate photographic methods in Norway under the direction of Prof. Stoermer, the well-known authority on the aurora. The average height obtained from these measurements agrees almost exactly with that found by Jesse. In one case the horizontal movement of the clouds was measured and found to be about 50 meters per second, or upwards of 110 miles an hour.

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