

A Science Service Feature

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? WHY THE WEATHER ? Mailed January 14, 1935

UNUSUAL LIGHTNING

A flash of lightning that lasted -- and apparently stood still -- for 15 or 20 seconds was observed at Bulawayo, Matabeleland, Dec. 2, 1895, by three Englishmen, Messrs. Godlonton, Honey and Bertram. The time was about half-past seven in the evening. Their letter, published in Nature, says

"The undersigned were seated round a table in a room in Fife Street, and only one of us had his eyes turned in the direction of the door, which was open. Suddenly he exclaimed, 'Good heavens! just look at that lightning; it's standing still!'

"All of us promptly went to the door, whence we witnessed a truly extraordinary sight in the shape of three ribbons of a greenish white lightning, which hung in the sky, motionless, for what must have been fifteen to twenty seconds. It seemed to be a long way off (in a northwesterly direction), as we heard no report of thunder whatever."

Probably these streaks were multiple flashes, consisting of a great number of successive discharges along common paths. Such flashes usually have a flickering appearance and seldom last more than half a second. The fact that no flickering is mentioned in this report is perhaps explained by the great distance of the flashes from the observers rather than by exceptional frequency of the component discharges, but the number of the latter must have been quite extraordinary to have a total duration as great as reported.

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