



Sutton Mandeville

A SOLAR PHENOMENON

Major R. D. Gibney writes from Falmouth, under Thursday's date :- "It may interest some of your readers that this evening, some time after sunset, at 6.25 p.m., a very brilliant but narrow sun pillar appeared, extending from a bank of clouds hanging over the horizon to about 35°, and gradually diminishing in brilliancy from the horizon until lost in twilight higher up. The width of this zodiacal light (I presume) was about 5° and perfectly cylindrical. I should be glad to hear that this rare phenomenon has been observed by others."

Another letter, from the Rev. Guy J. Bridges, F.R. Met.Soc., rector of Sutton Mandeville, Salisbury gives a fuller description of this beautiful appearance in the sky:- "A few minutes after a cloudless sunset a clear finger of light shot up, distinguishable to the zenith, deep crimson on the horizon, and dissolving to the sky colour through orange as it ascended. This appearance was nearly stationary and perpendicular to the horizon, and what slight movement could be detected was with the sun, but the column remained perfectly upright. This remarkable light faded down rapidly in about 18 minutes from the time when it began to decrease, though it had more the appearance of being withdrawn below the horizon than fading, for the colour did not decrease in intensity in the same proportion that the finger decreased in size. The sunset afterglow was brilliant and characteristic enough to remind one of the famous "Java glow" and Krakatoa sunsets" of years ago, and this phenomenon has appeared on an evening following one on which there was a vivid display of zodiacal light and Eastern night glow, with which, very probably, it has a close connexion. It is almost needless to point out that this finger of light would not have remained stationary had it been caused by a cloud throwing back light, for if the cloud was stationary the apparent course of the sun would prevent the light from being so unless the cloud should be moving at a certain speed in the same direction, and the state of the atmosphere was not favourable to the formation of the only cloud which could have in any way tended to produce such a phenomenon (cumulus), and the light ground mist was the only vapour until the later afterglow revealed a few extremely high stratus. A similar phenomenon was observed one night last summer after a gorgeous sunset and afterglow over the estuaries of the Thames and Medway."

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