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A Science Service Feature

? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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A HURRICANE

A single storm that killed some 200 people and destroyed about 10 million dollars of property whirled out of the tropical Atlantic, lashed some of the northeastern Antilles, devastated the Bahamas, washed away some Florida real estate and improvements, inundated part of the south Atlantic coast, and, with diminishing intensity, passed inland over northeastern Florida and Georgia. This was during the closing week in July. The Weather Bureau once again performed a service far exceeding its annual appropriation in value. The slowly moving storm was heralded well in advance and people in exposed places moved to safety. Ships stayed in port, small craft were taken up into the rivers, whole towns battened themselves down in anticipation of wind and rain that came as forecast.

This tropical cyclone, or West Indian hurricane, though first reported on this side of the Atlantic, may have come from near the other side. Tracing back the life histories of storms of this sort, Forecaster Mitchell has found that those appearing in the eastern Caribbean usually come from the vicinity of the Cape Verde Islands, off the African coast. A tropical low forming there in the fitful calms is set into rotary motion between the northeast trade winds and the southwest monsoon. As it reaches out and gathers in its life-giving muggy air the storm becomes a violent whirl, and is full grown on reaching the West Indies. Continuing to find sustenance and not weakened appreciably by friction of its winds on the islands, it approaches our coast mercilessly. But the mainland proves more than a match for it; less vapor and more friction weaken the whirl and it passes on northward and perhaps northeastward as a windy rainstorm rather than a devastating deluge.

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